
Unpicking Stitches: the lived experience of students commencing technology enhanced learning

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Abstract

This research has been undertaken in response to an average 50% attrition rate from a technology enhanced distance-learning course in applied art and design. It studies the participants' lived experience over a 12-week period from enrolment to the end of the first of twelve modules. The commercial provider recruited 23 mature, female participants from 8 different countries for this City & Guilds certificated course. Data was collected utilizing Interpretive Phenomenological Research methodology (IPA) via two open-ended telephone interviews with participants. The twin roles of the study author as researcher and director of the educational provider were reviewed and a methodology for disaggregation proposed. ATLAS.ti software was used to aid data coding and retrieval. Four key themes emerged from the data; Confidence, Persistence, Support and Timing, which were each subsequently divided into 3 sub categories. Literature searches moved from education to psychology as the study progressed. Implications for further discussion encompass pre-course testing, provider conflict of interest, innovative methods of support and increased legislation. Findings centre around the commencement process and the need for provider instigated advice at the beginning of the course experience, as well as the limitation of design content during the first module and the accuracy of pre-course information and the participant's engagements and understanding of it. The study also found a lack of correlation between early tutor/student support and retention and several planning activities undertaken by a sub-section of the participants, which appeared to be successful. This study has also contributed to the literature on retention, highlighting the participant's personal experiences rather than the quantitative retention data more usually associated with retention studies and has demonstrated that interventions intended to decrease course attrition levels may be required at an earlier stage than previously thought and also across a wider subject range than previously recognised.

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1 Introduction

This thesis, which employs an IPA methodological approach, seeks to illustrate the lived experience of students commencing the first module of a technology enhanced learning (TEL) course. The concern surrounding attrition levels in distance education has long been debated and studied with attrition rates varying vastly between provider and subject area (Tinto, 1975, Martinez, 2001, Rovai, 2003), however the majority of researchers have employed a quantitative methodology which, whilst alluding to the actuality of the phenomena, does little to illuminate the rationale behind its well documented occurrence or allow the students involved to tell their own stories. This study seeks to develop greater insight into attrition, usually 50% in DesignEd (this study's pseudonym for the course provider) courses, by giving voice to the lived experiences of the students studying on them. This will be achieved by undertaking two telephone interviews with participants during their first course module.

There is general agreement that the distance education community would benefit from a greater in-depth understanding of attrition, as it appears to be the 'skeleton in the cupboard' of distance learning provision; acknowledged by providers, albeit reluctantly, but without any nationally publicised statistics to allude to the scale of the problem, it is generally accepted as an unfortunate side effect of the fast growing distance learning market. Simpson (2004:1), in discussing the UK distance learning sector in particular, calls attention to the paucity of research in this area; "recent issues of various distance education journals will find few articles directly aimed at retention and there is no specialist journal dedicated to the topic".

The current debate regarding attrition rates includes an interesting contribution from the foremost supplier of distance education in the UK; one of the few providers whose dropout rates are in the public domain, the UKOU's (UK Open University) completion rates vacillate from 95% to 22% depending on course, demographic, level and other factors (Simpson, 2010a). The attrition rates and pattern of Simpson's data correlate closely with historical data provided by DesignEd, with the majority of dropout occurring post course material delivery but prior to any assignments being submitted for assessment at the end of the initial 12-week module. It was therefore decided that this would also form an appropriate research timeframe upon which this study could be based. The Scoping Study for the Pedagogy strand of JISC e-Learning advise that there is a paucity of studies expressing learner voice, especially those in which the learners' own experience expressions remain central to the study (Sharpe et al., 2005). They also recommend that

future studies concentrate on post sixteen education, which is considered to have been consistently under researched, and that subsequent enquiries address the holistic experience of students as well as elicit learner intentions and beliefs (Sharpe *ibid*). In his report Paul Martinez (2001) suggests that attrition in post-compulsory education is an under-researched area, highlighting the particular paucity of mature student data. Majority of research in this area concentrates on learner ability, access and other basic issues (Welsh et al., 2003). However, there is still scarcity of research around less easily quantifiable areas; lack of confidence, time management, family commitments, health problems and self-doubt can all contribute to non-completion, but are traditionally viewed as 'personal matters' and therefore fall outside the influence of course providers.

It is the intent of this study to contribute towards the knowledge gap that exists when asking; what is the lived experience of students embarking on a distance-learning course? The findings of the study will have implications for course providers and the academic community in general. The course provider viewpoint has been specifically documented during the research process, thus opening a window onto business and educational considerations throughout the study process. The researcher's role is also combined with that of Director of DesignEd (the course provider within this study). This role duality will be further explored and discussed in [The Researcher](#) and [Ethical Considerations](#) sections. The relevance of this study to UK course providers involved in TEL is pertinent as state-funded FE (Further Education) in the UK has its funding cut by central government, allowing private educational providers to fill the gap created. Developing a more complete understanding into student course experience and attrition may contribute to the development of a range of delivery and support methods that can better address student need and provider capability.

This study's findings are significant because of the niche student demographic, the technically based subject matter and also the recent proliferation of TEL delivery. The dual roles of the study author as researcher and director of the educational provider are also reviewed and a methodology for disaggregation proposed.

1.1 Specific Focus

The specific focus for this research centred on a City & Guilds Level 3 TEL course delivered by a private provider, DesignEd, which had an average attrition rate of 50%. A more complete understanding of student course experience, with the intention of utilizing the forthcoming data to formulate interventions or re-design, if indicated, was sought. Attrition was at its highest in the time between enrolment and assessment, a period of approximately 12 weeks in duration, which accords with Simpson's (2006) findings which

indicate attrition occurs within a similar timeframe within the UKOU. The focus of this research is the first module only (a full course contains 12 modules), which becomes the phenomenon around which the data was collected. A City & Guilds of London Patchwork and Quilting certificate is achievable upon successful completion of eleven further non-elective modules. DesignEd Ltd is an independent distance-learning provider serving a niche market in City & Guilds certificated technical qualifications within the textile field. As tertiary education funding has been reduced by government, this area of provision has increased due to the difficulty potential students have in sourcing locally attended courses.

DesignEd's existing student demographic is 50 years of age and 100% female. Internet usage is 80%, however only 48% of prospects considered themselves to be sufficiently IT literate to complete effectively all of the processes required to return a module to their assessor digitally without extra support. Processes involved in their module completion include downloading, printing, email, opening attachments, online discussions, photography and the compilation of a digital presentation. As students are enrolled worldwide, there is no course requirement to visit DesignEd or meet Face-to-Face (FTF) with their tutor; so all instruction is delivered electronically and includes course materials, email, phone and video elements. Student dropout rates at DesignEd, calculated over all courses, was between 50% and 70%, dependent on the method used to calculate them. Specifically, the City & Guilds Patchwork Level 3 course, on which this study is based, historically had a 50% completion for module 1 with an average time frame on module 1 of 9.75 weeks from enrolment to return of work. These figures represent the six months immediately preceding the study.

Participants were all given the same course materials; however, 12 were also required to participate in a closed Facebook (FB) discussion group by posting 3 small, completed tasks to their FB group during the first 4 weeks of the 12-week study. This was to ensure that the group had exposure to an online interaction network during the study. The remainder were given the address of the open-to-all FB group allied to DesignEd and encouraged to join in the chat and postings on a voluntary basis.

The stated aims for this study, which will be used to identify the efficacy of the completed study, are listed below:

1.1.1 Three specific aims to the study:

- Compilation of data into individual learner voice to provide individual learner experience stories.
- Data coded, extrapolated into individual and recurrent group themes and examined against current literature.

- Examination of what the data may mean for student experience and retention

1.2 Approach

Having decided upon IPA as being the most appropriate approach for the study, the rationale for which is discussed in depth in the [Methodology](#) chapter, it was important to firmly define the study data collection boundaries, thus the decision was taken that the only data included in the study would be the 2 researcher's phone interview transcripts. This was in order to comply with the interpretative approach of the study and also so there should be no perceived intermingling of the study research activities and the existing course phenomena. However, as the study progressed it was considered significant to also include the contents of the participant's response to the introductory tutor email, as this gave a window onto participants' first impressions of their course and provided contrast for subsequent data collection. A conceptual framework for the study is available in appendix 11. The researcher resisted the introduction of any naturally occurring or corroborative data for triangulation purposes, instead choosing to rely on credibility generated not by sample size, but by the richness of gathered information, in tandem with the researcher's own analytical abilities (Patton, 1990). This decision required that another method of triangulating study data be instigated. Furlong and Oancea (2005) have developed a framework for judging research quality, dependent upon the type of research being undertaken and its applications, which appears valuable across a variety of research areas. Yin (1989) suggests construction of an independent audit trail so that the data is stored in such a way that another researcher could follow the chain of evidence. Another common triangulation method in qualitative research is to triangulate data directly via participants by requesting they validate the raw data prior to coding and again after findings have been drafted, to ensure nothing has been omitted, misunderstood or misquoted (Stake, 1995). Elements from all these validation approaches have been utilized and methods such as memo-ing, peer debriefing and third person narrative have been employed in order to clearly document the data trail of collection, handling and collation methods utilized within this study. Alongside this, an on-going positional examination of the researcher in order to ensure that her dual roles as researcher and director of DesignEd remain as transparent as possible is also discussed in detail in the [Methodology](#) chapter.

In addition, IPA was selected as the methodology for this study because it was anticipated that it would allow for the formulation of a group level analysis, in order to emphasise any recurrent themes of shared experiences between the participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA has become an increasingly popular technique with educational researchers; developing in its present form from Smith et al's (1996) paper, which

recommended it as an appropriate approach for the capture of experiential and qualitative data within the field of psychology.

The researcher's initial speculation was that a 'pick and mix' combination of course design, course materials, support systems, student perception, lack of confidence and personal circumstances could be to blame for high course attrition levels at DesignEd. Furthermore, she hypothesised that the attrition levels may also be linked to student course experience. The working assumption on commencement of this study process, therefore, was that the emergent data may be some combination of these factors or alternately something completely unforeseen, so the employment of a methodology that allowed for freestyle data collection was vital to the study design. IPA methodology is drawn from the interpretive paradigm, so that preconceptions are not formed prior to study commencement. This indicates that the researcher's working assumption regarding data content should be 'bracketed' or put to one side as suggested by Husserl (1917) during the data collection and analysis phase of the study. It is supposed that each participant will experience the phenomena of the course differently, however it is also presumed that there will be some areas of overlap between cases. This overlap is of particular interest to educational researchers and course providers, as areas of concurrence between participants make any indicative interventions easier to comprehend and undertake (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Simpson has compiled numerous sets of research into Open University (UKOU) students in the UK. These were of particular interest to the researcher, as the OU demographic is similar to that of DesignEd's (Simpson, 2002, 2004, 2008a, Johnson and Simpson, 2006). 73% of UKOU students are aged between 25 and 54 and 61% are female with the majority possessing existing qualifications equivalent to one A level or less upon enrolment (Open University, n.d.). DesignEd's students have an average age of 50 and are all female, possessing qualifications equivalent to 1 A-level or less. Whilst this is not a perfect correlation, it is one of the closest currently available.

This study aims to extend the seminal work Simpson has already undertaken in attrition during his 2003 UKOU study by applying the same tutor contact phone call at the beginning of the course in order to "explore the student's feelings and issues about study and offer reassurance and support" (Simpson, 2004a). For the purposes of this study, a subsequent tutor phone call during the eighth week of the study is also employed. These two study actions were later followed by data gathering phone interviews conducted by the researcher in order to document the participant's course experience and study the resulting data utilizing IPA methodology. Simpson's work identifies an early danger period for dropout occurrence, formulates cost comparison data for retention methods and

contributes valuable data in support of the Proactive Motivational Support Models (PaMS) which were employed by the UKOU to aid student retention and documented by Simpson in several cited studies. The PaMS model front loads tutor contact in order to support students through the initial weeks of their course assignment, which Simpson (2004, 2010a) tells us is when around 38% of attrition occurs from UKOU courses. Simpson's data also provides a benchmark figure for the impact these interventions may have on attrition rates: typically between 4% and 5% (Simpson, 2008b). However, it should be stressed that this study differs from Simpson's in a number of vital areas; his studies were quantitative in nature and delivered a strong, statistical case for the early support of distance students. This study is qualitative and interested in discovering the student voice and lived experience that lies behind the early dropout statistics.

1.3 The Researcher

In her own voice;

As a director of and occasional tutor for DesignEd, a private provider of distance education for textile students, I have a professional interest in understanding more about student experience in order to positively impact student attrition rates at DesignEd and perhaps improve student experience of our course offerings. My concern is that myself and other assessors could become complaisant in our assumption of what students require and may benefit from. Whilst still needing to fulfil our role as City & Guilds providers and maintain standards on the courses, can we also positively impact student retention and experience?

Pragmatically, staff, including myself, have become accustomed to viewing students from a somewhat objective, detached standpoint, perhaps taking the view that many will simply not succeed because of a lack of motivation, commitment and perseverance on their own behalf and that there is little, if anything, we as providers can do to influence that outcome. We may have come to view our role from a somewhat behaviourist standpoint, as the producers of good course materials, whilst arguably neglecting the more individual and subjective aspects involved in undertaking a course from the learner's perspective. Whilst to an extent there may be some justification in that thought process (it is certainly a popular one in FE) it became clear from a series of exploratory conversations I undertook with students at the very beginning of this study process that our long-held assumptions were often inaccurate or, more likely, too simplistic. Looking for the 'truth' in this situation is far too one-dimensional and the reliance on our own distant memories of what the course experience was like from a student's perspective was clearly unsatisfactory. Whilst many of my colleagues had not undertaken any form of TEL or distance study during their

own training, I had studied and completed a City & Guilds course at the same level as the study participants in this way some 20 years previously. My outstanding memory of it was of extremely vague instruction and outcome requirements, poorly photocopied onto a single sheet of paper that concerned me far more than the complete lack of tutor contact and tardy feedback, which on one occasion took nearly 2 months to arrive. However, struggling against the odds, I eventually completed it and the subsequent feeling of achievement was tremendous, leaving me with a lifelong enthusiasm for continued study. This gives rise to the question; how and why did I persevere when others do not? I did not have a history of being a diligent student and the course materials were uninspiring, so what combination of personality and events combined to facilitate my success? The mooted of this study gave me the opportunity to examine the course experience phenomenon and hopefully add to the existing data on it.

Having discussed my personal motivation for conducting the study, I now need to return to my role as director of DesignEd and raise several concerns relating to any possible conflicts arising from my dual positions as both researcher and director;

- As DesignEd was funding the research, I wanted the company to benefit from the knowledge that would be forthcoming. However, it was also important to ensure that this was an academic paper intended for the furthering of knowledge rather than a business report. If I tried to force it to fulfil both functions it was possible that the final study report may be compromised. I therefore decided that a business report for DesignEd would be extrapolated at a later date and would not form part of this thesis.
- How would I manage any negative feedback regarding DesignEd that may be received from the interview process? To resolve this, the name of the company has been changed to protect the reputation of the provider and the pseudonym DesignEd was used in its place. This also fulfils the dual role of further protecting participant anonymity.
- My dual roles would need monitoring on a regular basis throughout the study process so that any overlap or conflicts could be acknowledged and an appropriate way forward found and documented. The process devised to allow this to take place is discussed at length in the [Methodology](#) chapter.

In summary, the steps listed above have allowed me to manage with integrity the twin roles I found myself placed in for the study duration.

1.4 Boundaries

Certain boundaries to the study exist and need to be acknowledged;

- A longitudinal study was not feasible for this thesis, since the course can take students up to 5 years to complete. This study, therefore, focuses on the 12-week timeframe of the first course module and this relatively small timescale cannot be considered to necessarily extrapolate out to encompass final course completion rates.
- The study demographic and subject matter is unusual and niche, so whilst the findings may be of interest to other providers, it is unlikely the results would be aggregable to their own courses. In this case, other providers may wish to follow the study methodology when conducting research into their own student demographic and subject.
- This thesis is intended as an academic study not as a business report for educational providers, although it is likely that elements of it would be of interest as such. The intention is to produce a report and possibly also a feasibility study at a later date for the educational provider, DesignEd. However, the report will not form part of this thesis.

1.2 Original Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in two ways. Firstly, by application of IPA methodology to the unusual student demographic, private provider and subject matter in order to illuminate student experience, which at the time of writing had not been previously undertaken. Secondly, the tension created between the differing roles of the researcher added an original and initially unforeseen aspect to the study, which had not been found in any other study to date. Considerations that would not usually be included in a researcher's remit had to be acknowledged, balanced and negotiated and a methodology for undertaking this was evolved for utilization during the study, which is further discussed in the [Methodology](#) chapter.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

Following this first introductory chapter:

Chapter 2 is the pre study [Literature Review](#), which seeks to site the study both historically and contextually without compromising the interpretive nature of the IPA methodology chosen for the study. It also considers researcher role and reflexivity. A further Post Literature Review is also conducted within the [Discussion](#) chapter, which seeks to consider the study findings against pertinent literature.

Chapter 3 consists of the [Methodology](#) employed and discusses the [Theoretical and Epistemological Background to IPA](#) and then moves on to review the [IPA Methods for](#)

[Data Sampling and Collection](#) including; stages of data analysis, coding and emergent themes, the use of CAQDAS software and researcher role in data analysis and collection. It then moves on to discuss [Ethical Considerations](#), specifically the [Method for Researcher Reflexivity](#) developed for this study.

Chapter 4 articulates the experiences of those who participated in the study and includes pertinent quotes and extracts from participants, thus giving the study [Results](#) utilising participant voice. The emerging themes are further developed and considered as the chapter progresses.

Chapter 5 data from the themes reported in Chapter 4 is collated into the [Discussion](#) chapter and an outcome space for both a macro and individual participant perspective finalized and justified. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 is reconsidered and expanded upon with the addition of pertinent literature which arises from the study results.

Chapter 6 completes the thesis by presenting the [Conclusion](#) which contains the [Relationship with Previous Research](#), [Limitations](#) of the research and [Implications](#) for further research.

This concludes the Introductory chapter and leads on to the next section, chapter 2, which discusses the extant literature reviewed by the researcher prior to data collection taking place.

2 Literature review

The first steps towards meeting the [study aims](#), detailed in the [Introductory Chapter](#) are to consider the pre and post study division of literature reviewed and the rationale for this division. This chapter will move on to discuss the role of the researcher and within that role, specifically the function of researcher reflexivity and the incorporation of it into the study design. Next, the study will be placed in context by the consideration of [Historical](#) and [Contextual](#) background. The chapter concludes by identifying a gap in existing knowledge within which the study is sited.

2.1 Literature Reviewing Strategy

“The preparation of the research proposal for a study that involves an emergent research design compels the investigator to negotiate the paradox of planning what should not be planned in advance” (Sandelowski, M., Holditch, D., Glenn Harris, 1989:77).

A tension exists between the generally accepted academic requirement for detailed discussion of the pertinent literature, along with the identification of areas where existing

research is sparse or non-existent and the interpretative nature of the chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The questions which arise are; what method does the researcher employ for the review of existing literature, how much do they review and how do they recognise those parameters and work within them? To answer these questions, the researcher turned to Grounded Theory, which is an established methodology that has similarities with IPA in the data collection phase of the research. Glaser and Strauss (1967), disillusioned with *a priori* assumptions possibly prejudicing research, developed Grounded Theory as a methodology for *tabular rasa* research that attempted to generate theory from data categories which are allowed to emerge naturally from the resultant data, rather than as a result of researcher determination or existing knowledge within the field. Both Grounded Theory and IPA methodologies take an interpretivist approach, allowing the researcher to explore lived phenomena, and require a substantial amount of interaction between the researcher, participant and phenomena being examined. Data collection methods usually take the form of interviews and, to a lesser extent, observation. Both grounded theorists and phenomenologists seek to theory-build from participant generated data, attempting to ensure they are not influenced by preconceived ideas. However, unlike phenomenology, which commences with a research question and includes only participant experience when generating theory, Grounded Theory includes all data sources such as observations, diaries, past literature etc. that might contribute to theory generation. Using a 'constant comparison' technique grounded theorists compare collected data for contradictory cases, which will ultimately strengthen the emerging theory. Smith et al (2009:43) note that whilst this approach is very similar to IPA, Grounded Theory is typically used to generate a higher theoretical level account of a particular phenomenon, rather than the smaller scale, less theory driven one employed by IPA. The necessity of including a literature review has caused substantial debate amongst grounded researchers (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007, Walls, Parahoo and Fleming, 2010, Dunne, 2011). The question of how it is possible to underpin a research proposal with a theoretical framework without first developing the theory whilst employing Grounded Theory has caused Grounded Theorists to split into several factions, with some purists such as Glaser maintaining a literature review should be unnecessary, whilst others recognise the importance of producing a short literature review in order to adhere to academic protocol and appropriately site the proposed study. Glaser and Strauss diverged during the 1990s over Glaser's concern that the method was being interpreted too freely to demonstrate academic rigour and a debate began about sensitisation (Strauss) versus emergence (Glaser). This study has followed the Strauss and Corbin theory, in that it acknowledges that it is virtually impossible for a researcher to come to a

study without any pre-knowledge or preconceptions. It therefore follows that the best that can be hoped for is to keep this 'pre-knowledge' under scrutiny to ensure it does not unduly influence the data collection or study outcome. A series of checks and balances are therefore required to ensure no undue researcher bias is present; these are discussed in the [Ethical Considerations](#) section of the Methodology chapter. However, the question of how much pre-study research should be conducted remains; just enough to allow for study positioning but not too much so as to be prejudicial to the data collection and analysis, but how is that to be determined?

At this juncture the researcher returned to IPA methodology for further direction and referenced Smith (Smith,J, Flowers,P, Larkin, 2009:42);

"In IPA, primary research questions and the subsequent interview questions which may devolve from them are not usually theory driven. But a literature review should help you to identify a gap which your research question can then address and it should also help you to learn something about your research participants....it should be short and may be more evaluative than most. Your aim is to introduce readers to the field, but you will also need to inform them about some of the strengths and weaknesses within the key contributions to that field and to offer an argument which shows why your study can make a useful contribution" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The researcher therefore proposes the inclusion of a short, pre-study literature review as a vehicle for contextualization of this study. It comprises a brief introduction to the background and historical context of distance/online and blended learning, discusses the terminology derived from these areas and then moves on to identify gaps in current research and finally identify an appropriate site for this study. Crucially, it will not review any participant experience literature or any other studies which may prejudice or pre-identify what participants are likely to experience from the course phenomena. During the [Discussion](#) chapter a post-study literature review will be conducted in order to examine the findings against current subject specific literature, as areas of interest are identified.

2.2 Historical Background

Whilst distance education is generally considered to be a recent phenomenon, its history can be traced back to the early 1700s in the form of correspondence education; in 1728 an advert in the Boston Gazette offered to post weekly lessons to those living in the country (Jeffries, 1999). Technology based distance education can be linked to the introduction of audio-visual devices in schools in the early 1900s. The first catalogue of instructional films appeared in 1910 (Reiser, 1987) and in 1913, Thomas Edison proclaimed that, due to the invention of film, "our school system will be completely

changed in the next ten years" (Saettler, 1968). By the 1960s, much of the interest and funding for instructional television had disappeared, with blame placed on the mediocre quality of the instructional programming.

The recognition of attrition as a serious issue affecting all types of educational programmes first emerged during the 1970's. Early retention studies place most emphasis on understanding the circumstances and motivations of the individual learner, thus leading to the assumption that attrition rates could be accounted for by factors personal to the student, which were unlikely to be substantively impacted by the institution (Tinto, 1975). Several studies have attempted to extend Tinto's campus model to distance learning systems. This has been undertaken with varying degrees of success (Sweet, 1986, Kember and Rowntree, 1991). A UK study based on Tinto's model has been undertaken by Woodley and Parlett (1983). They report students proffering excuses for non-completion that centre on lack of time or work commitments. In practice, only 2 students admitted that they might be finding the course too difficult.

Whilst Rovai (2003) acknowledges the truisms in Tinto's seminal work, he nonetheless draws attention to the substantive differences between the attended learners studied by Tinto in the 1970s and the online learners of today. Astin's (1975) study, mirroring Tinto's in design and on campus loci, also concentrates on the personal character and situation of students, appearing to consider educational provision less pertinent to attrition. Attrition rates from distance and online learning adds further complication, as passage of time then becomes a consideration. It frequently takes several months to establish that a student has dropped out of an open or distance-learning programme, due to normal contact being more infrequent. After dropout has taken place, subsequent surveys tend to have understandably low response rates, as disenfranchised ex-students are often unwilling to participate in data collection.

Individual educational providers with approximately similar student demographics can have substantially varying rates of dropout and persistence, which would be incongruous if attrition were solely the product of learner characteristics. The UK figures available for HE and FE data are too vague when attempting to determine age and course specific data. The National Audit Office Report (Bourne, 2007), citing figures from 2004-2005, suggests that retention rates in first time degree students were slightly raised on previous years, however this does not necessarily aggregate out to adult learners. Adult specific data is relatively rare; McGivney (2003), principal research officer for NIACE (National Institute for Adult Continuing Education), questions the methods employed for collating figures and age bands. She highlights that a lack of consistency may hide underlying issues, with substantially higher rates of attrition in students over 21. However, even

utilising the lower age banding of 19-59, non-completion of FE learners was 3-4% higher than the <19 age group in 1999/2000. LSC (Learning and Skills Council) retention data from 2004/05 gives an average retention of 67% in the A/AS level qualifications, which are at the same National Qualification Framework (NQF) level as DesignEd's vocational qualification delivery (McGivney, 2003:4).

One of the closest available UK comparisons in terms of learner demographic and delivery mode to DesignEd is the UK Open University (UKOU), so data emerging from the UKOU is valuable in terms of a comparative situational match. However, attitudes and approaches displayed by various UKOU researchers appear to vary widely, which is somewhat unusual in itself. Woodley (1983:1), in considering the varying attitudes between educational providers, brackets all private providers together, labelling them as *"uncaring or complacent commercial providers who accept dropout as an inevitable part of their trade"*. However Simpson appears to have a more liberal and student centred approach and it is his work that the researcher has drawn on throughout this study (Simpson 2004; Simpson 2008a; Simpson 2008d; Simpson 2010a; Simpson 2009; Boyle et al. 2010). Some of his suggestions are both radical and compelling, at least in comparison with much of the previous literature around retention. He suggests that regardless of which system is employed for collecting attrition data, it needs to be heavily front loaded if it is to have any practical utilisation for distance learning courses. With between 30% and 40% of new UKOU students withdrawing between course start and their first assignment (Simpson 2008d), Simpson calls for *"a new theory of learner support in distance learning, based on recent findings in the fields of learning and motivational psychology"* (Simpson 2008c).

Before closing the historical contextualization section, pertinent terminology should also be discussed. A plethora of remote learning provision now exists; much via the internet, but also blended methods incorporating written, postal, televised and digital, both synchronous and asynchronous in various hybridized versions. Central to the entire discipline of distance education is the concept of semantics; how distance learning should be defined, as discussed by Shale (1988): *"Distance education is beset with a remarkable paradox - it has asserted its existence, but it cannot define itself"*.

The Garrison and Shale definition of distance education offers a minimum set of criteria. They suggest that;

- Distance education implies that the majority of educational communication between teacher and student occurs non contiguously.

- Distance education involves two-way communication between teacher and student for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process.
- Distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication (Garrison, D, Shale,D 1987).

Definition has long been a controversial and disputed subject within the field of distance learning. Whilst this may appear somewhat inconsequential, as Lowenthal and Wilson (2010) point out, the lack of consistency when titling courses causes both internal and external confusion. Moore, Dickson-Deane and Galyen (2011) concur with this view and additionally discuss the confusion which emanates from inconsistent terminology for different types of delivery and study, as perceptions can vary dependant on the description given to a course or programme of study. For the purposes of this study, the following simplistic definitions have been employed, listed in the table below;

<u>Distance Education Terminology</u>	
Term	Meaning
Online/ Web-based/E-learning	Learning and teaching activities taking place totally online
Correspondence	Learning and teaching activities all completely off line
Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)	Learning and teaching activities a mixture of online and off line methods
Blended Learning	Learning and teaching activities incorporate an attended element

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) is the most appropriate definition for courses delivered by DesignEd, which demonstrate the following characteristics;

- Course materials and exemplars delivered via internet communication
- Student and tutor contact conducted via email or over phone
- Completed work undertaken offline and subsequently digitally photographed and compiled
- Work returned to tutor via ftp transfer system
- Assessment sent to student via email

DesignEd courses essentially differ from 'e' or online learning in that they are not conducted solely online and require students to employ other skills and techniques away from their computer in order to complete the course requirements.

To summarize this section on historical background; this is a fast moving field, where data quickly becomes outmoded as new technologies or methodologies emerge. Adult learner specific data is uncommon and lacking in consistency and there is no exact data which covers DesignEd's adult further education courses in textiles, so a dependable overview of attention and attrition in this exact situation is impossible to amass. However some researchers such as Simpson have made valuable and innovative contributions to the area of retention in adult education and have signposted areas for future research, in Simpson's case the PaMS pro-active support module which he pioneered (Simpson, 2004).

2.3 Contextual Background

The key pre-study references include; Heidegger and Husserl (Husserl, 1917, Heidegger, 1927) on the theory of Phenomenology, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (Smith, 1978, Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005, Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, Smith, Jarman and Osborn, 2006, Smith and Osborn, 2007, Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, Smith, Joseph and Das-Nair, 2011) on the theory and research methods of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Simpson (Johnson, V., Simpson, 2006; L. Simpson, 2009; O Simpson, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e, 2010a) on retention. It is important to note that there are two distinct strands of literature concerned with students remaining on or dropping out from a course; retention and attrition. For the purposes of this study both of these areas have been reviewed, as both sets of findings may be pertinent to the subject area.

The review of underpinning theoretical structure relating to eLearning environments conducted by Jonassen and Land (2000), concludes that constructivism and social learning are the two existing theories considered by researchers and practitioners as most relevant to eLearning. Cognitive constructivist models of learning derive from Piaget's (1972) theory of cognitive growth, whereby knowledge is actively constructed when the learner is prompted by external or environmental stimulus. Social constructivist theories are derived from the work of Vygotsky and Cole (1978) and emphasise the importance of social encounters in prompting learning in the individual as well as eLearning environments. Students interact with each other in the process of knowledge construction. Social learning theories have also developed from Vygotsky's (ibid) writings and are sometimes differentiated from social constructivism as they have a tendency to place emphasis on social group learning. One such development is Wenger's (1998) Social Learning Theory, which is based around community life and the way that knowledge is gained, constructed and held by a group of learners.

Majority of studies investigating attrition are quantitative, producing a statistical analysis derived from questionnaires or existing provider data streams and do not typically consider student experience as a main strand of study. To illustrate the scarcity of existing data, below is an example of typical search terms employed whilst searching for attrition data. The search was limited to a 10-year period, with the number of qualitative versus quantitative studies enumerated, however only Simpson’s (2004) UKOU quantitative study was UK based.

Studies Investigating Attrition/Dropout from 2004					
Search term in EBSCO 28/08/2014	2004 to 2014	Applicable	Quan	Qual	UK
Distance learning AND Attrition	68	26	24	2	1
Technology Enhanced Learning AND Dropout	23	9	4	5	0
Adult Distance Education AND Attrition	10	4	4	0	0
Online Adult Learners AND Dropout	13	3	3	0	0

To gain an overview of the subject area, meta-analyses, such as those conducted by Machtmes and Asher (2000), Allen (2011) and Means et al (2010) are valuable; however they are far from a close fit with UK education or with the adult demographic of this study, but are the only larger scale studies available at the time of writing . Majority were carried out in the US, with the latter in particular conducted as a meta-analysis for the U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development as a means of determining future educational provision in the US. Means et al (*ibid*) reviewed empirical research and identified over 1,000 studies conducted between 1996 and 2008 into varying aspects of online learning. Whilst many of the studies analysed were small scale, the results overall presented a statistically significant positive result in support of online learning in mainly, although not exclusively, Higher Education (HE) courses across a range of disciplines. Neither Means nor Machtmes specify any major differences between traditional and online learners in terms of attrition. One of the more significant findings indicates that providing learning guidance for groups of students appears less successful than using such mechanisms with individual learners (Means et al., 2010). If demonstrable, this challenges some widely held views regarding the type and complexity of learning systems necessary in the delivery of online courses, as it places the emphasis on the tutor/student relationship and calls into question the prominence currently attributed to social learning situations.

However, meta-analysis has a number of limitations and study findings need to be interpreted cautiously. Other meta-analysis studies conducted through 1980-2000, such as Schlosser and Anderson (1994) caution that much of the data they reviewed was both anecdotal and, because of subject specific data, non-aggregable. Moore and Thompson (1990) reviewed a large body of 1980s' study data and concurred with Schlosser and Anderson, criticising the anecdotal nature of the available data and stating they considered much of it to be weak and frequently amassed by people or organizations with a vested interest in the technology employed. As all meta-analyses draw upon studies utilizing retrospective institutional data and both quantitative and qualitative research data, sometimes with the view to establishment of a predictive algorithm to aid retention in the future, reliable data in this area would clearly be very valuable to learning providers (Woodley, 2004). Whilst a minority of meta-analysis studies conducted in the last 10 years suggest that online learning is similar or even slightly superior to traditional face to face learning (Machtmes and Asher 2000; Means et al. 2010), this is not generally reflected in faculty opinion. One-third of all academic leaders continue to believe that the learning aims for online education are inferior to those of face-to-face instruction (Allen and Seaman, 2011). Allen and Seaman's (ibid) research did not determine a reason for this presumption, but a supposition could be made about continued historical prejudice or a reaction to the changes that online education is perceived to impose on individual faculty practitioners.

To conclude, meta-analysis study results generally pointed to little substantive difference in attrition rates between online and attended courses. However, the scope of these studies were limited in terms of the small amount of research conducted on attrition, the anecdotal nature of a portion of the data, the less than apposite match on student demographics and the possible institutional bias described by Schlosser and Anderson (1994), all of which call some findings into question. It is also worth noting that majority of these studies employed data that pre-dated them by 10 years or more, with most utilizing a substantial portion of the same studies on which to base their data, so it is unclear if these differences still persist at the time of writing. The quantitative studies that majority of these meta-analyses were based upon tend to measure persistence over time and pay greater attention to the measurable reasons for attrition such as finance, health etc. (Welsh et al., 2003, Patterson and McFadden, 2009, Picciano, Seaman and Allan, 2010) and are generally employed for longitudinal studies.

Qualitative research studies which extend knowledge of student attrition motivation and perceived persistence barriers are rare; students who have already left a course are frequently difficult to contact, preferring to put their 'failure' in the past and tend to resist

participation in data collection. Whilst their studies tend to be smaller scale, the UK Open University (UKOU) has a long research tradition studying student persistence in distance, online and blended learning and, whilst this is more frequently undertaken at Level 4 National Qualification Framework (NQF) or higher, UKOU also deliver and research lower level or access courses/modules. The UKOU are particularly significant to this study, as their student demographic, although not the same is the nearest available comparison to those associated with DesignEd courses: namely mature (the average age of an undergraduate is 32), working (over 70%) and self-funding adults (approx77%) without previous qualifications (44%) (UK Open University, 2011). Most notable of the UKOU researchers in this topic area is Simpson, whose work appears throughout this review, but most particularly in the sections on tutor support and finance in the post study literature review in the discussion chapter. To give an overview of the points raised by various researchers regarding the reasons for attrition or perseverance, the table below synthesizes the main areas of discussion.

<u>Overview of points raised in reviewed literature regarding attrition or retention</u>		
Areas discussed	Author broadly supportive	Author broadly non-supportive
Motivations for course completion and individual learner characteristics influence student retention rates	Welsh et al 2003 Park & Choi 2009 Moore 1983 Campbell Gibson 1990	Holmberg 1995 Coffield et al 2009
Predictability of distance study success is possible based on individual characteristics and wish to complete	Morstain & Smart 1977 Woodley 2004	Cross 2009 Chen & Lin 2008
Found substantial variation in completion rates between courses	Dabbagh 2007 Simpson 2010	Machtmes and Asher2000 Means et al 2010
Factors such as reduced FTF time, technology problems, cost, support, delivery methods and collaborative methods can influence student retention	Patterson, 2009 Means et al. 2010 Sulcic 2010 Chickering & Gamson 1991	Smith 2010

	Sjogren & Fay 2002 Croft et al 2011	
Non completion for mature students higher than other students	McGivney 2003	Tinto 1975 Astin 1975

2.3.1 Self-Directed Learning and Attrition

The extent of the problems associated with student attrition and poor completion rates in distance learning have been disputed since distance learning commenced. In recent years, the introduction of eLearning and TEL has intensified this discussion greatly, as they have gradually moved from the periphery of educational delivery towards a more mainstream role (Berge & Huang, 2004).

One of the central issues is the substantial variation seen within attrition data, with drop-out from distance learning being reported as high as 70 - 80% (Flood, 2002), with Carr (2000) estimating it to be 10% - 20% higher than for traditional on-site study. The large variations that occur within published attrition/drop-out figures and the substantially varying ways in which researchers or educational providers have compiled their data streams has lead to concerns regarding the validity and consistency of reported attrition and drop-out statistics, which are at best inconsistent, frequently do not draw appropriate comparisons and therefore could therefore be seen as unreliable or misleading (Wang et al 2003).

While the studies mentioned above do provide valuable information regarding distance learning and attrition, caution needs to be exercised as none of those referred to considers the issue from the learner’s experience or point of view. It is important not to assume the results from the few studies available that specifically review adult education, can be generalised out to the online technical context inherent within this research. A limitation of the present body of research into attrition is that even the definition of ‘adult’ or ‘attrition’ may not be consistent across all studies.

A form of self-determined learning, called Heutagogy, with practices and principles established from andragogy, may prove useful at establishing some ongoing direction for researchers interested in impacting attrition levels (Blaschke, 2012). Learners are encouraged to be autonomous and emphasis is placed on development of learner capacity. Adult learners particularly may have complex needs, which are often more to do with aspects of confidence and levels of self-belief than their ability levels (Canning,

2010). Lim's (2016) findings suggest that, whilst self-paced online learning courses meet the flexibility and learning requirements of many students, scepticism still persists regarding course quality and also the tendency of students to procrastinate when left to regulate their own learning. She found that the average length of time between assignment submissions could prove useful in predicting both final grade and course withdrawal. Nagy and Bernshutz, 2016) suggest an increase in the availability of online video reduced dropout rates.

It is important to note that faculty and student perceptions regarding attrition levels are not always in agreement. Gaytan (2015) suggests that a comparison of faculty and student responses could give a window into the understanding of how to address attrition more effectively from a student centric perspective.

It is important to acknowledge that there are a number of inherent methodological difficulties in evaluating attrition data in this area, most specifically that basic categorisations regarding what constitutes 'adult' and 'attrition' is not uniformly agreed upon, providing an inconsistent representation of actual levels of attrition.

To summarize this section, it is generally acknowledged that there exists a somewhat ambiguous relationship between several critical retention factors, which can generally be divided into firstly External Influences; family issues, financial problems, secondly Health and Internal Influences; tutor support, technology usability issues, lack of motivation, disagreement regarding individual emphasis and the possibility of utilizing this knowledge to accurately predict student retention remains. The central point of disagreement when reviewing all of the available studies is how this can be achieved and what exactly the 'appropriate elements' may be. On this point there is no overall consensus. Given the substantial levels of disagreement, it appears likely that a simplistic, cross-course answer is not available and more targeted research is needed in individual subject and situational areas. It also appears that the methodology employed needs to be one that allows for open data collection, as the areas which cause most student attrition vary considerably according to demographic and course subject.

2.4 Siting of the study

The rationale for this research is that a gap in current knowledge exists a propos our present understanding of what prompts adult learners to enrol in and subsequently drop-out from distance learning courses. If this gap remains under-researched, TEL providers will have little chance of improving student experience or retention. Furthermore, available funding streams may be more appropriately targeted for student retention if understanding of the circumstances surrounding their non-continuation were deepened. This research

was designed to meet the [3 study aims](#), referenced in the Introduction chapter, in order to ascertain the efficacy of the completed research.

Distance Learning and TEL in particular, is a fast moving and competitive field with technologies and methodologies being generated, outmoded and discarded rapidly and often at great financial cost to providers and personal detriment of students. As the pre-study literature review demonstrates, there is little undisputed agreement regarding what constitutes the most important areas of course delivery/support for distance students in general. It would therefore be somewhat naive to assume that a 'one size fits all' answer exists, but has remained elusive to all previous researchers. The researcher therefore suggests a more likely explanation would be that different types of students are drawn to study a variety of courses using a variety of delivery and support methods and it is this substantial diversity that makes predicting students' success or failure and the interventions that may be possible to keep students on their course so challenging and complex. However, it is also likely that students with a similar demographic are drawn to roughly comparable courses, types of delivery and support methods. The researcher would therefore suggest that rather than the results of the research becoming the main goal during the course of this study, it may rather be the methodological application model that TEL providers could utilize when conducting research upon their own learner demographic. Whilst this is not, of course, ideal for providers who may prefer a more definitive outcome, it is perhaps the best outcome that can be expected after recognizing the existing limitations highlighted by the pre-study literature review. Therefore, this study aims to avoid the generalizable and concentrate on the specific learner experience of DesignEd's students, building on the work undertaken by Simpson into Proactive Motivational Support (PaMS) mechanisms and incorporating his front loaded tutor contact as a starting point.

2.5 Theoretical Framework for this study

The choice of IPA as the appropriate approach for this study was based upon its consistency with the epistemological position of the research question (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As the anticipated results of the study were speculative, the employment of an interpretive approach allowed for a wide-ranging collection of data, free from the limitations of pre-conceived subject areas or data collection vessels, which was considered vital. Most critically the provision of a group overview as well as rich, descriptive individual case accounts was imperative.

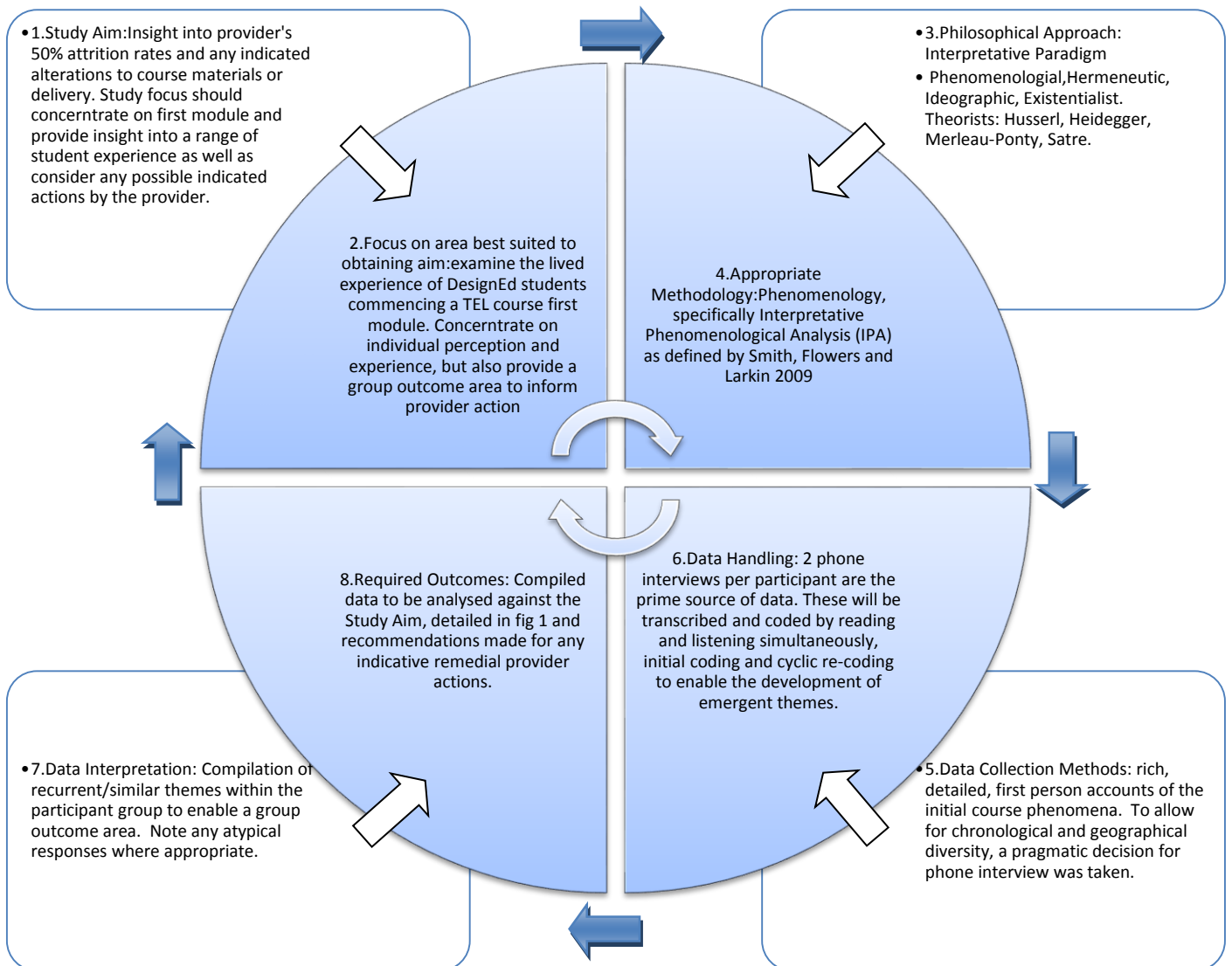
In order to graphically illustrate the theoretical framework upon which this study is based, a diagram of the framework is included on the following page, which strives to illustrate the cyclic nature of the research in visual terms.

Each outside lined box states the study's general aim, approach or methods, which are then narrowed down to the study specifics contained within the inner circular areas. However each of the 4 quarters shown as part of the inner circle and are cyclic in nature, feeding into the areas surrounding and across from themselves, so for example the Required Outcomes listed in quarter 8 are interdependent upon the choice of methodology in quarter 3, the specific Focus contained within quarter 2 and the Data Handling methods from quarter 6.

A change in any of the quarters would, therefore, require review and possible subsequent amending of adjacent quarters, thus illustrating the interdependence of each area of the study.

Conceptual Framework for Unpicking Stitches:

how students commencing technology enhanced learning describe their lived experiences



To conclude this Literature Review chapter, the background information provided by undertaking an evaluative pre-study literature review facilitated the identification of a gap in existing knowledge to allow for the appropriate siting of this study. In the next chapter, Methodology, the chosen research methodology, IPA, will be explored and the methods used for data collection and analysis discussed.

3 Methodology

As a result of the historical and contextual siting of the study, which was established in the [Literature Review](#) chapter, this methodological chapter will outline the theoretical and epistemological background to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), establishing why IPA was considered to be the most germane methodological approach and will detail how it was utilized within the context of this study. Data sampling and collection methods are discussed, as are data analysis and collation techniques and choices. The final section in this chapter engages with Ethical considerations, which also incorporates the positionality of the researcher and the methodology employed to ensure that researcher reflexivity was embedded into the study process.

To reiterate, the research aim is to examine the lived experience of the participants and to utilize the resulting rich data streams to illuminate the participant experience, firstly on an individual level and subsequently an overarching group level, upon commencement of a new course. The study had [3 key aims](#), listed in the introductory chapter, which will be used to identify the efficacy of the completed data set, results and recommendations, shown below:

- Compilation of data into individual learner voice to provide individual learner experience stories.
- Data coded, extrapolated into recurrent group themes and shared experiences and examined against current literature.
- Examination of what the data may mean for student experience and retention

In order to achieve the aims, the study needed to explore variation in individual student approach to and experience of the undertaking of technical and art based studies via TEL, specifically focusing on the first course module. As TEL course materials have substantial initial production costs, Return On Investment (ROI) is only reached if a high enough number of students can be recruited. Therefore, the production of individualized versions of the same course, if indicated, would be impractical. It therefore follows that a comprehensive range of parallel, rather than individualized, student experiences would be expedient. A study that could produce individual experience stories but also compile a

group learner profile was preferred. The student's individual perceptions of and emotions relating to their course experience would be collated and examined as a whole for areas of agreement in order to produce a group outcome area, as indicated in IPA methodology. It may be that this would indicate remedial course alteration requirements on the provider's behalf (Ashworth, 2000). IPA methodology allows for ad hoc data collection in order to take account of a number of variables, which is critical to the research design (Stake, 1995, Creswell, 2009, Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

3.1 Theoretical/Epistemological background to IPA

In order to explore the lived student experience, access to rich streams of participant centric, qualitative data were indicated. Whilst Simpson's work is certainly interesting, his quantitative study data mean a number of key areas remain unanswered or, perhaps more accurately, un-illuminated. We are told, for example, that retention was increased by a single phone call early in the student's course experience, but whilst Simpson speculates several explanations as to why this may have occurred, no participant experience has been imparted to the reader. Similarly, Simpson tells us that retention varies considerably over different UKOU courses, but offers no insight as to why this may be from a student centric view. The intention of this study was, therefore, to extend Simpson's (2008b, 2008d, 2008e, 2010b) studies in order to 'flesh out' and expand upon his largely quantitative data reports with that which IPA can offer; the detailing of a rich, lived student experience.

The theory of phenomenology advocates the study of direct experience, which is taken at face value rather than interrogated by the researcher for an emergent 'reality'. It envisions behaviour as being determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by an external, objective or physically described reality (English and English, 1958). Whilst the various branches of phenomenology differ in how and where they place emphasis, they generally agree upon the following points:

- A belief in the importance and usually the supremacy of subjective consciousness.
- An understanding of consciousness as a meaning bestowing entity.
- A belief in a set of essential structures of consciousness that allow the gaining of direct knowledge via a process of reflection (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

It is the final point which generally divides phenomenologists and which has led to a variety of branches of phenomenological study emerging.

Husserl (1917) is generally regarded as the founder of the branch of philosophy referred to as phenomenology, which he gradually developed into a 'phenomenological method'

intended to identify the core structures and features of human experience. It was he who suggested the need for 'bracketing' or putting to one side previous experiences in order to remove previous perceptions of a phenomenon from that which is currently being studied. Husserl was particularly interested in the means by which an individual may come to better know their own experience of a given phenomenon, thus his methods involve the facilitation of allowing a person to step outside of their everyday experiences in order to be able to examine that experience more closely. He explains it thus;

Focusing our experiencing on our own psychic life necessarily takes place as reflection, as a turning about of a glance, which had previously been directed elsewhere. Every experience can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner in which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal objects. Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they appear (Husserl, 1927)

Husserl's methodology details a series of 'reductions' with each reductive step presenting a different lens through which to view the considered phenomenon. Each reductive step contains a description and reflection on the process by which it was obtained. However, Husserl saw this only as a first step towards achieving generalization; whilst we all have individual views of a particular situation or item, for example driving a car, these individual views will also contain some commonality, thus establishing a central core experience or 'eidon' for a subjective car driving experience. The 'eidetic reduction' process describes the method by which getting to the 'essence' of the invariable collective experience of car driving is achieved, in other words the 'lived experience' of car driving for the combined participant group. However, Husserl was a philosopher not a researcher, so much of his writing is entirely conceptual and references only the first person, so does not detail the processes that would be involved in pragmatic enquiry. His work was progressed towards a more hermeneutic and existential emphasis by his student, Heidegger, who considered Husserl's work to be too abstract and theoretical (Heidegger, 1927). Heidegger viewed human beings as 'dropped' into the world to experience phenomena 'in relation' to something else, the consequence of which is 'meaning-making' for each individual.

Merleau-Ponty shares in both Husserl and Heidegger's aim to understand the reasoning behind the human experience of the world. He is mainly concerned with subjectivity and our holistic sense of self when engaging with the 'outside world'. He concentrates on the development of our embodied relationship with our worldly surroundings, suggesting that "the body is no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Satre (1956) extends existential phenomenology, building on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, however he stresses the continual, open-ended processes involved in being human and human existence, famously remarking “existence comes before essence”(1948), meaning that the development of self is an on-going process. Satre’s work offers perhaps the more clearly illustrated and focused accounts of what a phenomenological interpretation of the human condition can achieve. His vivid portraits of individuals engaging with various phenomena in the world and the interactive and embodied nature of that engagement display a deep level of insight into the human condition.

Two further theoretical elements come together to form the particular branch of phenomenology developed by Jonathan Smith and called Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); hermeneutics and ideography. Schleiermacher (1998) was one of the first proponents of hermeneutic enquiry, dealing with the grammatical and psychological interpretation of the written word. He considered this to be an interpretive process that, instead of slavishly following mechanical rules represented something akin to an art form, the culmination of which combined a wide range of intuitive skills on the behalf of the researcher. Schleiermacher considered that the interpretative analyst is able to bring a new perspective to the written text that the author is not, some part of which will inevitably emerge from overarching connections collected from the larger data set of the whole group data pool. Ideography, in contrast to the majority of psychological theory, refers to a study of the particular instance rather than the population as a whole. Ideography focuses on the particular, which in turn establishes the importance of the single case study. IPA’s distinctiveness as a research methodology is sited in the procedural evolution of the single ‘lived experience’ case study, subsequently progressed into more general overarching group statements, which can nevertheless still allow for the retrieval and illustration of particular experiences from any of the individual study participants.

At this point, having discussed the origins of Phenomenology and its subsequent evolution from a branch of philosophy to that of a research methodology for the study of lived experience, it would be appropriate to define IPA as employed in this study more succinctly, using the words of its founder, Jonathan Smith;

“IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience, allowing it as far as possible, to be expressed in its own terms rather than according to pre-defined category systems, in agreement with Heidegger’s approach to phenomenological enquiry. However it also pursues an ideographic commitment, situating participants in their particular contexts, exploring their personal perspectives and starting with a detailed examination of each case before moving on to more general claims”(Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Whilst it is true that IPA has in the past been more frequently associated with psychological studies (Smith et al (2009) utilized this methodology specifically in health psychology), its popularity has grown and it has more recently been employed in social and educational psychology settings and other educationally related areas (Rizq and Target, 2008, Virginia, Jonathan and Rachel, 2008, Back et al., 2011, Smith, Joseph and Das-Nair, 2011, Pothoulaki, MacDonald and Flower, 2012, Rassool and Nel, 2012). As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the researcher's intention is to build upon the research conducted by Simpson (2008b, 2008d, 2008e, 2010b) at the UKOU, which studied the results of a single proactive phone call that Simpson credits with resulting in an average 5% increase in retention over a 3 year period of small scale studies simply by instigating tutor contact shortly after course commencement (Simpson, *ibid*). Thus Simpson's studies were employed as a starting point, but the emphasis was changed from the quantitative statistical output of Simpson to the utilization of IPA as a divergent research methodology. This was done in order to explore more fully the personal experiences of study participants and to broaden understanding not just about what occurred, but why it occurred, by utilizing participant voice to illuminate the lived experiences that accompanied the course timeframe.

3.1.1 Why IPA Methodology was chosen

The choice of IPA as the appropriate qualitative approach for this study is based upon its consistency with the epistemological position of the research question (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As the anticipated results of the study were speculative, the employment of an interpretive approach allowed for a wide-ranging collection of data, free from the limitations of pre-conceived subject areas or data collection vessels, which was considered vital. Most critically the provision of a group overview as well as rich, descriptive individual case accounts was imperative. It was this duality of individual experience data, which could subsequently contribute to a group level shared experience outcome area whilst still allowing individual voice to be heard, that was the central reason for the choice of IPA methodology for this study.

The implicit assumption whilst collecting and compiling data from this viewpoint requires that the researcher identifies, describes and understands the key levels of concern in the participants' world as well as the experiential claims made by the participant in order to develop a rich, detailed and individual phenomenological account (Smith et al *ibid*). At its most basic, inherent within IPA is the assumption that the collected data will illuminate participant understanding of their phenomena experiences (Ihde, 1977). The perceptions of participants are key in IPA research and 'exploring' or 'examining' are terms frequently

associated with IPA's inductive procedures and the interpretation of meaning within an IPA study.

In summary, the main reasons for the choice of IPA are as follows;

- The ability to conduct a series of microanalyses into individual cases and, where applicable, extrapolate this data to form a macro outcome area of interest between participants.
- The particular balance achieved by IPA between the ideographic and nomothetic perspectives; research participants are individuals who can nonetheless also possess certain general properties or behave according to general rules and this balance between the generalizable and the particular was a desirable element for the research.
- IPA analysis most usually takes the form of an idiographic interpretative commentary, interwoven with extracts from the participants' accounts, which gives weight to participant voice but does not exclusively relate it, again achieving balance between the particular and general.

3.1.2 Strengths and Limitations of IPA as a methodology

Many of the strengths of IPA lie in its accessibility, which appears to result from IPA theorists employing easy to comprehend language and guidelines, thus making the methodology easy for researchers to understand and action (Brockie and Weardon, 2006). The fact that IPA is able to engage with uncharted areas of research without needing a theoretical rationale in order to do so, but can also be employed with existing theoretical frameworks is another major strength (Reid et al., 2005).

It has been suggested by Smith (2004) that IPA research may continue to develop along several lines in the future, including micro-textual analysis, different potentials in terms of participant groups and data collection and the emergence of core constructs in IPA alongside the clarification of existing relationships between IPA and other phenomenological approaches. Smith (2004) also indicates that an increase in analysis of the single-case study may be indicated, whilst at the same time reaffirming 'the idiographic commitment to the case' is central to IPA. Certainly an increased focus on the individual case might address perceived limitations in the methodology relating to preservation of the richness of individual accounts (Collins & Nicolson, 2002).

IPA's intense focus on the ideographic can be considered to be both a strength and weakness because of the forthcoming rich, yet subjective, data streams with their heavy reliance on the interpretative role played by the researcher in terms of data analysis. It is

this central role upon which so much depends, that can perhaps prove a weakness to the IPA method, when drawing a comparison with other methodologies. Collins and Nicolson (2002) contend that whilst “undertaking in-depth interpretative engagement with the respondent’s text” there was a danger that data could become diluted, or even worse, misinterpreted completely.

Whilst IPA does have a basic process (moving from the descriptive to the interpretative), the method does not seek to claim objectivity. Conclusions drawn from IPA studies tend to be specific to the particular group studied and generalisations do need to be approached with caution. Smith (2004) contends that the quality of the final analysis is ultimately reliant upon the researcher and their “personal analytic work done at each stage of the procedure”. Smith and Osborn’s (2003) guidelines advocate that it is important to distinguish between the participant’s account and the researcher’s interpretations of that same account. Researcher subjectivity, therefore, renders traditional research evaluation criteria such as representative samples and appropriate statistical analyses as irrelevant (Yardley, 2000) and thus makes claims of validity or generalizability very difficult to make.

With regard to the specific considerations within this study, the following could also be perceived as limitations;

- The [Literature Review](#), typically conducted prior to data collection, required dividing into two sections to allow for the interpretive nature of the IPA methodology, so that no pre-conceptions were formulated prior to data collation. The pre-literature review consisted of a historical and contextual review of distance education in order to identify areas of interest and existing knowledge. The post-literature review will be reported in the [Discussion Chapter](#) and will take place post data collection. Therefore, the [Data Analysis](#) phase of the study, detailed later in this chapter, also needed to facilitate contextualization and reporting of emerging data. This deviation from academic convention instigated researcher trepidation that the study be perceived as rigorous in its review of available literature and substantial consideration was given to addressing this concern during the study-planning process.
- The deep involvement of the researcher with the provider may make bracketing out previous experience more challenging that would normally be the case.
- If findings were detrimental to the provider, this would place the researcher in a problematic position regarding honestly reporting study findings.

All of the above points are addressed in length elsewhere in this thesis, with the first being discussed in the [Literature Review](#) chapter and the remaining two in [Ethics](#).

3.2 IPA Methods – Data Sampling and Collection

In order to discover as full a range as possible of rich, lived student experience accounts, one or more methods were required for the collection of extemporaneous data and a suitably sized homogenous group of participants required recruitment. Having decided upon IPA as the most appropriate methodology for this study, apposite approaches to data sampling, collection and analysis required consideration. Prior to the selection of these methods, it was important to contemplate what might constitute 'data' and what may be inferred from it as well as what the analysis of it could achieve (Creswell, 2009, Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, Silverman, 2011). This study's interest lies in the exploration of participant experience and not in the presumption of an emergent 'reality'; it therefore followed that only material gathered directly from the participants could accurately represent their singular views and thus provide the appropriate raw data (Smith and Osborn, 2007).

3.2.1 Sampling methods

Whilst Smith et al (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) considered that the recruitment of a homogenous group is particularly important, generally IPA's sampling is theoretically consistent with the qualitative paradigm in general. Samples are therefore selected because they are able to offer access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study, which also implies that as individuals they would have a joint interest in the topic or situation dealt with in the study. However, Smith (ibid) does warn that particular attention is required when a comparison is intended to be drawn from within the group and the composition of each group must be as similar as possible in order to ensure the groups are well matched in other ways, not just their joint interest in the phenomena being researched. There is little concurrence regarding the optimum number of participants in a phenomenological research study, however there has been some criticism of very diminutive sample sizes as unrepresentative. Paley (2005) questions the small numbers of participants on some phenomenological studies, suggesting that a sample size of between 6 and 12 is average, with participants frequently taken from a single source. After reviewing 6 recent IPA studies, the average participant number was 7.6 (Rizq and Target, 2008, Virginia, Jonathan and Rachel, 2008, Back et al., 2011, Smith, Joseph and Das-Nair, 2011, Pothoulaki, MacDonald and Flower, 2012, Rassool and Nel, 2012). However, all of these studies were conducted using data drawn from a face-to-face interview data pool. As it was not possible to arrange face-to-face interviews with the homogenous group chosen, for reasons which will be further discussed in the [Data Collection Methods](#) section, the decision was taken to employ telephone interview for data collection in this study. This meant that the overall interview time would reduce considerably, with around

15 minute durations considered average for each interview (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). As the 15-minute time proposition was suggested as appropriate for cold calling new participants, it would seem reasonable to expect somewhat elongated calling times for a homogeneous group, due to their existing interest in the course.

This study had the requirement of a simultaneous commencement date to allow for the formation of a peer support group via Facebook for half of the participants. From the researcher's previous experience, DesignEd students required at least 10 peer group participants to facilitate critical mass formation, which placed the sample group requirement at a minimum of 20, preferably somewhat more to cover possible attrition. At an average time of 1.5 hours per capita interview time for the 6 studies cited above, an estimated 40 minutes of interview data was assumed to be achievable from each participant: a data pool of 13.33 hours in total. This appeared to represent an adequate data pool, sufficient to provide an appropriate and diverse amount of participant experience data.

Since DesignEd had previously undertaken studies utilizing the same level and awarding body with embroidery students, a decision was taken for this study to utilize patchwork students for two reasons:

1. Participants from a different course (embroidery) had formerly been recruited from the provider's database, so there was likely to be a greater interest in an alternative subject area.
2. DesignEd had previously received several enquiries regarding the possible running of a patchwork study when recruiting for the embroidery studies. This implied interest in participation.

DesignEd's typical method of course commencement is roll on, roll off; students are forwarded course materials within a week of enrolment to commence at their own pace. It was, therefore, essential to recruit sufficient students to facilitate a simultaneous participant commencement. The chronologically synchronistic sub-set planned for course involvement with a Facebook group made this an important consideration. Participants were recruited from DesignEd's existing database via email; this had sufficed for previous studies as a means for accessing pre-warmed leads. The database contains details of those who had contacted DesignEd previously to make enquiry about course content or enrolment. The sample is consistent with the description of a "convenience sample" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), the required homogenous factor being comprised of a pre-existing interest in textiles.

However, at the planning stage of the research some concerns remained regarding the enrolment of sufficient participants to reach the critical mass requirement of 20 participants, so a contingency plan was formulated to ensure this could be achieved. If enough participants could not be recruited from the DesignEd database, an online advert would be placed on a patchwork magazine's website; these adverts have a copy to site lead time of approximately 24 hours and would make up any possible shortfall. In the event this proved unnecessary, as a mail merge (appendix 1) forwarded to 1765 prospects, yielded 51 requests for further details and 25 eventual enrolments, all of who read and agreed to the study requirements, a copy of which is available in appendix 2. Whilst one participant had studied with DesignEd some years previously, the others were new to the provider and also to studying Patchwork City & Guilds via TEL. They did not know each other and resided in 8 different countries.

Twenty-four participants commenced the DesignEd study and were divided into two groups to accommodate the extra dimension that existing students suggested peer support may contribute to their work. This also aided exploration of an emergent schism apparent in existing students, only half of which utilise DesignEd's Facebook group regularly. Other than this single differentiation, course materials and student support mechanisms remained the same for both groups. Student mean age was 56.43 years with a median age of 56 at commencement of the course and all were female, with the youngest being 41 years of age on enrolment and the oldest 74. DesignEd's students have a historical average age of 50 upon commencement of study and have to date all been female. Students were divided into two groups by alphabetical surname order, as little in-depth information was known about individuals when allocating the groupings. Both total group ages were roughly similar. Group 2 had a course requirement to contribute to peer interaction on a provider established, private access Facebook group, timed to coincide with the design part of their course work and carried out during the first 4 weeks of the study. Group 1 had tutor interaction only, but were informed they could join DesignEd's open Facebook group if they wished to interact with other students undertaking similar courses and share interaction and photos of their work with them on a non-mandatory basis. At commencement there were 11 participants in Group 2 and 13 in Group 1. One participant requested removal from the study on the day of commencement citing personal reasons.

3.2.2 Data Collection Methods

Methods of data collection acknowledged for their suitability for employment with IPA methodology include Face to Face (FTF) interviews, telephone interviews and student authored accounts such as diaries (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This is because

these methods invite participants to offer a rich, detailed and first person account of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Simpson (2006) notes that any system used for collecting attrition data requires substantial front loading if it is to be effective, as student attrition can begin almost immediately after commencement. His data collected from UKOU distance learning students suggests that between 30% and 40% withdraw between course commencement and completion of first assignment.

Data collection in IPA centres around methods which allow for a rich, detailed and first-person account of the phenomena under scrutiny, with the emphasis placed upon the micro-level analysis of small participant groups, from which it may also be possible to extrapolate macro-level claims when appropriate (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Primary data collection strategies associated with IPA are data rich streams: unstructured or semi-structured interview and diary account (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, the methods employed during this study had the additional requirement that the geographical diversity of the participants had to be accommodated. Face to face interview and group sessions could only have been conducted via Skype, Facetime or another similar service and were therefore not an appropriate option, as they were likely to preclude some participants due to lack of IT skills, geographic time differentials and availability of hard and software. Diary accounts had been employed by the researcher in previous studies, but produced poor results with a similar demographic. Participants often failed to keep written accounts, produced ones with too little detail or delayed too long after their experience for their account to be considered contemporary. Ideally the researcher would have elected to conduct face-to-face interviews to provide the primary source of data for the study. However, in retrospect, it is feasible that participants may have found this more individualized form of interview inhibiting because of its more intimate quality. Currently contacts initiated by DesignEd are predominantly via email, for the following pragmatic reasons; variety of world time zones, call costs, tutor working hours, student working hours, record keeping and data protection. Other less usual existing modes of contact include letter and phone call for those who are at home during the day or are able to use a mobile for daytime communication.

Telephone interview was decided upon as being the most appropriate method of eliciting appropriate data at a distance and in a timely, reliable manner. It fitted the IPA requirement of "allowing the interviewer and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of participant responses" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This mode of interaction provided a good fit with the IPA methodology and also accommodated the distance element of the study. Therefore, the study relies mainly

on two sets of oral interview data collected from participants by the researcher, one shortly after commencement of their course and another on completion: week 4 and 12 of the study duration respectively. Conversation could be allowed to develop, but be subtly steered back to the course experience if the participant strayed too far away from the study topic. Administration staff and assessors were approached in order to ascertain their willingness to travel into work at unsocial hours to facilitate data collection. It was considered that in this way participants would be able to develop an open relationship with the researcher, thus resulting in a candid relating of their course experiences.

The participant course materials were made available via email and ftp (file transfer protocol) transfer. Participants were given date and approximate times on which their tutor and subsequently the researcher would attempt to contact them. All interviews and contacts were to be completed within a 12-week timeframe, promoted by DesignEd as the upper timescale for completion of module 1. However, participants were made aware that this timeframe was for data collection purposes only and did not preclude them from continuing with the course after this period. The flow chart in Appendix 5 shows the chronology of all formalized student contacts and processes that took place. The researcher conducted twenty-three participant telephone interviews on week 4 and week 12 of the 12-week study duration. Of these, 15 participants contributed to both interviews, with 8 only contributing to one interview, due to contact difficulties. Contacting the participants proved to be challenging throughout the study. Eight participants lived abroad and time zones and work schedules frequently caused communication difficulties.

The initial contact consisted of an email compiled by the course tutor, giving partly personal and partly professional details, is available in appendix 7. This was timed to arrive during the first week post commencement. An initial email was utilized as the first point of contact for delivering participant course materials (appendix 4) and also to prompt an exchange of data with their tutor because:

1. Students are often unable to get much benefit from a week 0 contact, as they have not had the opportunity to completely read their course materials by the time their tutor phones, which also wastes tutor time.
2. Past experience indicates that students will frequently say more about themselves and their lives in a written reply to personal tutor emails than they would on the phone. From observation, but also from Freud's theory of narcissism (Hollitcher, 1947) and introducing what Kohut called the 'self object transferences' of mirroring and idealization (Banai, Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005) the researcher found that student replies tend to mirror the initial tutor

email; e.g. if the tutor mentions she is employed doing x in her job, the student will also allude to their occupation when responding.

3. It ensures access to course materials has been achieved and their course book has arrived.

Contact 2 was a brief phone introduction with their tutor to ensure they had received and understood course materials and had no problems or issues that were preventing them from commencing the course. It was also intended to bolster their confidence for study commencement. Contact 3, an email from the office admin staff reminded them that 4 weeks of the course had already passed, giving them an opportunity to benchmark their progress to date (appendix 8). Contact 4 was a phone call from the researcher in which an open-ended interview approach was employed and participants were encouraged to raise issues and relate any personal experience they felt pertinent to their course experience by the researcher initially asking "tell me about your experience of the course so far". If this was enough to elicit their contribution nothing more was asked, but if not the researcher prompted for their response in the following manner;

The initial questions;

- Can you tell me about how you undertook this task / project / assignment?
- What did you expect to learn from doing the project?
- Probing on process/approach

Probing for conscious decisions about approach;

- Was there anything you found difficult? What did you do then?

Further prompting if required;

- Can you tell me any more about that?
- When you say ... what exactly do you mean?
- Can you give me an example of that?

Contact 5 was a further admin email with the same basic format as Contact 3, which is available in the appendix, supplying participants with a further benchmarking opportunity. Contact 6 was a tutor phone call discussing course progress. Contact 7, an admin email reminding them the ideal submission date was in a week's time. Contact 8 was a final contact from the researcher to collect the second data set. This was prompted in the following way;

Initial Questions;

- Can you tell me how your course has gone to date?
- Did you achieve what you had hoped for?

Further prompting if required;

- Can you tell me anymore about that?
- Was that what you had anticipated occurring?
- Could you be a little more specific?

Tutor and researcher crib sheets are available in appendix 6.

The interviews were conducted over a VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) programme and digitally recorded using Call Graph software with the prior written permission of the participants. This was subsequently transcribed into written electronic format for analysis by a professional transcription service, Nadine Loxham Associates. In order to preserve participants' privacy, a confidentiality agreement was signed by the researcher and the transcriber prior to data being handed over. Full interviewers' script and prompts are available in appendix 6, however transcribed interview scripts have not been included to preserve the participants' anonymity. The two sets of transcribed data collected by the researcher formed the basis of the study. At a later date it was considered important to supplement these by including participant responses to their tutor's introductory email into the data pool, as it provided a window onto participants' attitudes and beliefs early on during the participant's module 1 commencement.

3.3 Participant Background Information

The focus of this research is the first module only (a full course contains 12 modules), which becomes the phenomenon around which the data was collected. A City & Guilds of London Patchwork and Quilting certificate is achievable upon successful completion of eleven further non-elective modules.

3.3.1.1 Course Trajectories

As a course tutor for many years, the researcher's anecdotal impression of students who have in the past undertaken the same or similar City & Guilds courses to that studied in this thesis is that they are frequently hoping for a change to take place within their own lives and are placing their trust in the course to precipitate it. They have often undertaken needlework classes in school or later on at an adult education centre and have developed an impression of textiles as a therapeutic, social and peaceful pastime, perhaps a way of escaping from other concerns or worries. This tends to make those who are in a difficult personal or work situation or who have reached a crossroads in their life particularly eager to revisit a subject they have previously enjoyed. The fact that they are able to achieve a qualification that may allow them to teach in FE is an added bonus and perhaps a means of justification when making the decision to undertake the courses.

DesignEd's existing student demographic is 50 years of age and 100% female. Internet usage is 80%, however only 48% of prospects considered themselves to be sufficiently IT literate to complete effectively all of the processes required to return a module to their assessor digitally without extra support. As students are enrolled worldwide, there is no course requirement to visit DesignEd or meet Face-to-Face (FTF) with their tutor; so all instruction is delivered electronically and includes course materials, email, phone and video elements. The City & Guilds Patchwork Level 3 course, on which this study is based, historically had a 50% completion for module 1 with an average time frame on module 1 of 9.75 weeks from enrolment to return of work. These figures represent the six months immediately preceding the study.

In the process of enrolling students onto a course, DesignEd collects certain information sets in order to facilitate contact with the student and registration with the appropriate awarding body. These include name, address, date of birth, phone number and email address. Previous experience appears to suggest that students view any further attempt to collect further personal data prior to course commencement as intrusive. However, a post-enrolment, voluntary attempt is made to collect further data from students using a personalized email introduction from their tutor.

DesignEd appreciate from experience that students commonly relate more private details in a written response to the personal tutor email request for extension of background knowledge, as mentioned previously. The responses below give an indication of the background of the 15 participants who responded to the initial tutor email;

- Everyone had an existing interest in textiles/patchwork to a greater or lesser extent and had undertaken some type of previous courses or classes on the subject.
- The majority of the participants fell into one of two subsets; the first had retired or finished working due to personal circumstances and found they had time on their hands in which they could indulge their existing interests. The second subset were still working, often with young children, and were considering a career change. In both groups it appeared that participants perceived they had reached a pivotal moment in their lives and they in turn experienced a need to precipitate some type of self-directed change to normalise the situation they found themselves in.
- A third small but significant subset appeared to undertake the course in an endeavour to fill a gap in their lives. Some had experienced the death of a partner or an illness that made other sorts of socialization difficult or impossible. Those who belong to this subset may present a challenge to tutor and administration staff, as previous DesignEd experience suggests that this subset may entertain unrealistic expectations of the course and the impact they hoped it would have on

their lives. If participant goals included an increase in social activity, it may be that attending a local course whose objective was social contact rather than formal certification would have been indicated.

- There was a mixture of career, educational and motivation backgrounds.
- Two opposing approaches seemed apparent in the course participants: some seemed confident in their abilities to plan and action their studies, whilst others seemed pessimistic about their abilities to undertake either the management of their time or the technical demands of the course. These attitudes appeared to reflect the personality of the individual rather than any objective assessment of their abilities.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Carr (1986) refers to educational theory as an 'applied science' where it is admissible or even preferable to use thinking and writing as a form of theorising which can then be used to inform further practice. "There are not theories of theory and theories of practice and yet more theories about the relationship between the two. All educational theories are theories of education and practice" (Carr, 1986). He speculates that attempting to split the practical from the theoretical fractures or compromises the overall integrity of educational research.

The IPA methodology employed for this study had a similar theoretic approach to Carr during the collection of data, in so much as it was important not to pre-identify the outcomes of the research prior to commencement of the study. Whilst this methodological choice and the reasoning behind it have been covered in depth at the beginning of this chapter, it seems appropriate to re-state a cyclic, reductionary approach to data classification was utilized when collating the data, thus allowing emerging themes to be included in forward planning the next cycle of data collection. Thus there was cyclic action and reaction throughout the data collection phase, exploiting classification, writing and coding as a form of theory building (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Open or *in vivo* coding allowed capture of key data, thus allowing for the evolvment of theory. The themes are grouped into similar concepts in order to make them more workable. From these concepts, categories are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

3.3.3 Stages

24 participants were initially recruited, but one withdrew, leaving 23. All participants were female, with a mean age of 56.43 years and a median age of 56 at commencement of the course. They formed a homogenous group, according to Smith (Smith, Flowers and

Larkin, 2009) because of their gender and interest in patchwork as well as their simultaneous exposure to the phenomenon of the course. 23 participants had telephone interviews conducted with them by the researcher over the 12-week study duration. Of these, 15 participants contributed to both interviews with 8 only contributing to one, due to contact difficulties. Contacting the participants proved to be an on-going challenge throughout the study, as 8 of them lived abroad and time zones and work schedules caused time conflicts.

Ensuring participants' consistency of focus was important in order to gather quality data. However, it frequently proved challenging for the researcher to ensure the participants' attention was subtly but consistently drawn back onto their course experience without allowing it to move onto course practicalities. Separation of the 'researcher' role and the 'tutor' role became difficult as participants repeatedly turned their dialogue to discussion of course content. On-going verbal reinforcement of the separation of these roles was required to prevent participant digression, whilst simultaneously appearing to be supportive and interested in order not to alienate the participant.

After setting up ATLAS.ti, the CAQDAS software chosen for the study, the 76 primary files containing transcribed interviews and MP3 recordings of the original phone calls were gathered together into a hermeneutic unit to form a database for the study. These were consecutively numbered in order to facilitate ease of coding and main document reference generation. In the [Results](#) chapter, each participant quote has a 'pd' number following it, which references the primary document it was taken from as well as the line number of the quote. The researcher followed the exercises and suggestions for obtaining the most from ATLAS.ti contained in the book 'Using Software In Qualitative Research - A Step by Step Guide' (Lewins and Silver, 2007). The decisions regarding the coding of data (thematic analysis) were taken in a progressive way, in order to correlate with the IPA approach employed. Thematic analysis identifies emergent themes as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman, 1997). The process involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. The system of analysis chosen for this study was the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) rather than the template of codes approach outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999). This approach allows themes to emerge directly from the data instead of utilizing a pre-defined coding strategy or template.

A "good code" is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). Encoding organises the data in order to identify and develop themes.

Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon”. The researcher negotiated 4 stages when conducting the phenomenological data generation and documentation. Each stage is described below in order to establish an audit trail that could be followed by another researcher if required. Memo-ing was also undertaken throughout the process within a notebook format. The researcher appreciated that the documentation of this process demonstrates the transparency of the analysis and also the credibility and dependability of the study.

Stage 1

Whilst carrying out the initial coding exercise, open or *in vivo* coding was employed, thus noting but not labelling areas that appeared to be of particular interest to the participant or of particular significance to the study. Whilst reading the transcribed text the researcher also simultaneously listened to the MP3 recording of the interview to ensure that no voice-nuanced meaning had been missed. A third of the way through stage 1, the data reviewed became unwieldy to manage by *in vivo* coding alone, so the researcher reviewed the content of the *in vivo* coding collected to that point and formed it into rough categories to enable recommencement of coding the remaining data to take place. These rough themes also generated a quicker retrieval method. At the end of stage 1 the categories formed were; Course Content, Tutor, Excuses, Profound and Commencing. This was primarily achieved using quantitative criteria.

Stage 2

A second pass was then made at data coding to ensure nothing had been missed and to refine the existing themes, which were then amended to the following; IT issues, Aspirations, Facebook, Social, Financial, Difficulties, Initial Impression, Criticisms, Beliefs and Timing. At the end of this stage each of the main themes were subdivided to form sub-themes. For example, Excuses were further divided into Family, Illness, Work and Other. 43 different themes and sub-themes had now emerged, which was unwieldy to locate and manage. It was also apparent that the holistic nature of the data was becoming compromised and the researcher was concerned that certain phrases may be taken out of context.

Stage 3

The researcher looked to ATLAS.ti for a differentiated method of coding main and sub-headings, however ATLAS.ti appears lacking in this functionality, so the researcher used the only method ATLAS.ti makes available for differentiation of main and sub coding

categories which is the capitalization of certain themes as being MAIN themes showing in capitalised lettering.

Stage 4

By the end of Stage 3 the coding method developed needed review. The researcher took some time away from the coding to review the process thus far and subsequently decided that certain areas of the data had been classified for easy retrieval of factual information rather than faithfully replicating the interpretive aim of the study. Whilst the initial coding categories were sufficient for a first-pass filing system, they were not constructive in the identification of the main themes running through the data, as they had by this stage become too dilute and diffuse to signpost this aim accurately. In an attempt to mitigate this problem, a review of the data as a whole was undertaken. Student experiences were subsequently reformed into 4 new main categories; Confidence, Timing, Support and Persistence. These categories were chosen on a quantitative basis and resulted from a holistic review of all interview data. At this juncture writing up of the findings began, which aided the development of further sub-themes and quotations utilized in the [Results Chapter](#).

3.3.4 CAQDAS

CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) software, a terminology and acronym introduced by Fielding and Lee (1991), offers an efficient means through which to manage and organize data while supporting rigorous data analysis (Banner and Albarran, 2009). At its most basic, the advantages of using this type of software include simplification of clerical tasks, managing large amounts of qualitative data digitally, increased flexibility in output methods and improved validity of qualitative research. However there is some existing literature voicing generalized concerns about the utilization of CAQDAS, including deterministic and rigid processing of data, prioritizing of coding before meaning; reification of data, increasing focus on volume and breadth rather than on depth and meaning of data, time and energy spent learning to use computer packages, increased commercialism, and distraction from the real work of analysis (St-John and Johnson, 2000).

The researcher employed CAQDAS software for two reasons;

1. The utilization of CAQDAS software to catalogue and file the data in order to improve code retrieval and organization. This method reflected the researcher's preference for cataloguing and retrieving data digitally and with more ease than using a highlighter pen or cutting up transcripts. Whilst initially this proved a

challenging programme to understand, after perseverance the filing system proved to be helpful. It supported the organized storage of data but also gave easy access to digital data in order to perform word searches and query the data in a variety of ways in order to inform first pass coding tasks. It was considered to be of particular importance given the volume of data involved in the study and also the simultaneous use of MP3 recordings and written transcription material.

2. Listening to MP3 audio versions of the data whilst coding was supported within ATLAS_ti and was valuable for understanding context whilst simultaneously coding, enabling identification of any particularly interesting areas from voice emphasis as well as written word.

Several different CAQDAS software programmes were considered for use in this study, subsequently narrowed down to two, Nvivo and ATLAS_ti, which both fulfilled the functionality requirements for this type of study (much CAQDAS software is used for quantitative research and is configured for use as such). ATLAS_ti was chosen for its ability to reference files in situ, which speeds up the analytical processes and appeared prudent for dealing with large amounts of data. Several sources were used to corroborate the researcher's conclusion regarding the choice of package prior to study commencement (Barry-Lewis, 2004, Lewins and Silver, 2007, Hariri, 2011).

ATLAS_ti presented the researcher with a number of utilization difficulties, which appeared from online forums and Scientific Software's own support forums (Anon., 2012) to be prevalent. The main concerns are listed below;

1. Un-intuitive to use: ATLAS_ti appeared deceptively simplistic, but the programme did not contain a fully comprehensive help section.
2. All Primary Documents (individual files) have to be loaded into ATLAS_ti to form a hermeneutic unit for the entire project, during which an automatic numbering system is generated. However, if a Primary Document file is subsequently moved or edited the link is broken and the file is therefore removed from the unit, thus compromising output data and disrupting the referencing system.
3. Creating a hierarchy system inside individual themes appeared impossible
4. Code to graphic format to provide a visual representation of the coding system was too complex and became unreadable at A4 sizing. Such as it is, it can be found in appendix 10.

The main criticism levied at ATLAS_ti from a philosophical rather than a pragmatic viewpoint is researcher distancing from the original data source; however, this may be a ubiquitous occurrence with any manual or digital technique used to sort large amounts of

data into a much smaller collection of codes and quotes. ATLAS.ti appeared complex to use, lacking both intuitiveness and a comprehensive free user guide which resulted in its worth as a complex research package remaining largely untapped by the researcher.

3.4 Validity

Increasingly, qualitative researchers are rejecting the traditional concepts and measures of validity that had been commonly accepted within quantitative research. This is based upon their rejection of the realist assumption that a reality external to our perception of it exists; that there is a 'truth' which can be found existing independently of our personal experience. Elliott (1997) suggests that quality indicators are a fundamental requirement for a properly instituted educational practice and therefore cannot be pre-decided in a generally relevant way, but should instead be individually tailored to each piece of research undertaken.

Transferability references the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. In qualitative research and most particularly in IPA, the researcher diligently detailing the research context along with any assumptions central to the research can enhance the concept of transferability. Other researchers who may subsequently decide to "transfer" the results to a different setting then become responsible for making the judgment regarding the suitability of the comparison, based upon the information offered. No claims regarding the generalisability of the data contained in this thesis are made, however it is likely that some of the results could be transferrable to other settings.

As this research was concerned with interpretation of the reality experienced by the individual participants taking part in this study, the researcher does not seek or expect to find a universal truth or reality (which is a primary concern of validity), so therefore a different set of standards for judging the quality of research must be found. Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose four criteria for judging the reliability of qualitative research and propose these as a substitute to more traditional, quantitative criteria. They suggest replacing Internal Validity, External Validity, Reliability and Objectivity with Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability. Clearly, the concept of 'objectivity' when taken in the context of this IPA study is meaningless, since the stated outcome of the research is to discover the participant's subjective view. Oancea and Furlong (2007) argue that quality in practice-based research should not be condensed to narrow definitions of 'scientificity', 'impact' or economic efficiency. They instead propose an account of quality in practice-based research which is able to incorporate methodological

and theoretical solidity, but also, equally importantly, dialogue, deliberation, participation and ethics.

The quality or credibility of qualitative research is key and involves ascertaining that the results of qualitative research are believable, not in a generalisable way, but instead from the perspective of the research participant. For this study the purpose of the research is to understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's perspective, therefore the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. The process for ensuring this took place involved a consultative process between participant and researcher, which is documented further in the section on [Researcher Reflexivity](#).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This section on Ethics is sub-divided into three main areas, the first of which presents the overarching philosophy that was followed with relation to ethical considerations throughout this research project. Secondly, the practicalities of ensuring Ethical Guidelines For Educational Research (BERA, 2011) guidelines were followed throughout and documenting how this was achieved. The third discusses the positionality of the researcher and 'insider' research and documents the steps that were taken to address this potential conflict.

3.5.1 Overarching Philosophy

Ethical dilemmas resulting from IPA generally centre upon the collection and reporting of verbatim extracts from interview data and the securing of anonymity and obtaining of participant consent in relation to it (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). For this study in particular, there were also other areas of potential concern; the dual role of researcher and provider was contentious, as was the potential conflict of interest this could create. It was obvious from the outset that these issues would need particular attention throughout the study to ensure they did not prejudice the outcomes and an overarching philosophical positionality for achieving these aims required establishing. A useful starting point is that proposed by Braidotti (2006a), who argues for an alternative view on subjectivity, ethics and emancipation. A recurrent theme throughout her writing is the imperative of combining theoretical concerns with a commitment to constructing socially and politically relevant knowledge that in turn contributes to making a difference in the world of ethical and political subjectivity in contemporary culture.

Braidotti argues against moral universalism, instead offering 'nomadic ethics' as an alternative. She proposes that ethical accountability takes 'life' as the subject, not the object, of enquiry. Braidotti presents these ethics as a fundamental review of our being,

calling for an extension of conceptual creativity when constructing our worldviews to enable appropriate ethical action in a globally mediated world. Nomadic ethics appears to successfully negotiate the tension between a variety of political forces on the one side and the sustained commitment to emancipation on the other (Braidotti, 2006b). Whilst the concepts of nomadic ethics are relatively wide ranging and complex, for the purposes of this research they are taken to reference the process of continuous change and re-evaluation of the ethical situation as it unfolds, whilst at the same time asking not “what should I ideally be doing” but instead “what am I able to do” to in a given situation, thus guiding action which, whilst it may not be perfect, can be viewed as an improvement. A similar view is taken by Cieurzo and Keitel (1999) who also concluded that it is impossible to establish general rules that apply to all aspects of empirical research because of the wide range of issues that can emerge which are peculiar to each individual research project. They also stress the danger that a researcher’s personal experience, presence, experience, and biases may affect research findings.

In order to emulate a similar philosophical perspective to that of Braidotti’s nomadic ethics whilst conducting this study, the ethical deliberations that were anticipated at the start of the project and were also inherent in the research design, were assigned an on-going series of evaluation dates and have thus continued to be reviewed and reflected upon at each stage of the study progress. If further concerns emerged that were unforeseen on commencement, then these were also added into the review programme and considered simultaneously in an organic and on-going way. This process has been fully documented and the pragmatics of the process is enlarged upon in the next section. The recording of the process had a dual purpose; to enable reflection to take place and also to facilitate the establishment of an audit trail that another researcher could, if required, follow.

3.5.2 BERA Guidelines

Having now achieved a suitable framework for dealing with arising and reviewing ethical dilemmas, the second chapter section on Ethical Guidelines For Educational Research (BERA, 2011) also had to be addressed. They state that any incentives offered during research must be ‘acknowledged’ as they have the potential to create biased outcomes. A small up-front financial reduction was used as a vehicle for attracting a suitably sized participant group to participate on the study, with the amount of discount offered roughly similar to purchasing two cinema tickets or two bottle of vodka. Participants were given an initial statement of what their, the researcher and DesignEd’s obligations would be during the data collection and signed to agree to this, complying with Standards and guidelines for making accessible software guidelines (BECTA, 2009). This covered issues such as

where data would be stored, how it would be collected and how it would ultimately be used and is included in the appendix 2.

BERA guidelines also state that there must be no harm deriving from participation and whilst it was considered that the potential for harm to the adult participants was low, they were however informed they could withdraw at any time from the study if they wished to cease participation, without the need to give a reason or forfeiting their course place or fee.

The BERA guidelines also establish the participant's right to privacy, so although mp3 call graph files were sent out of DesignEd's offices for professional transcription, a confidentiality agreement was signed by both the researcher and the transcription service (Nadine Loxham Associates) prior to this taking place and a secure file transfer system was employed to transport the files to and from the transcriber. The fully transcribed files for each participant have not been made available in the appendix in order to further preserve participant anonymity, although selected quotes from these files have been employed to give student voice authenticity in the Results and Discussion chapters. An on-going review of any arising ethical considerations was periodically raised at peer debriefing meetings. Whilst confidentiality was promised to participants, it became clear that this could only be reliably fulfilled if the name of the provider was removed from this study; hence the pseudonym of DesignEd. The researcher felt conflicted that her obligation to report findings faithfully could be undermined by loyalty to the provider so discontinued use of the provider's name.

3.5.3 Insider Research

The third main section was the 'Insider Research' element of the study, indicating that it was carried out within an educational provider that the researcher not only worked for, but also had a financial interest in. Whilst this may not be considered ideal, it was hard to imagine how another window onto the lived experiences of this student set could have been studied otherwise. It is a very unusual student demographic and subject, details of which have been expanded upon earlier in this chapter and also in the [Introductory](#) chapter, so locating and then obtaining access to a similar set would have been highly unlikely. However, it was important to recognize the difficulties that could be experienced when conducting research in this setting, so that steps could be taken to mitigate any arising issues. For example, it could be difficult to draw boundaries around the researcher/director roles and ensure that the subsequent study remained as free as possible from researcher bias. Pendlebury and Enslin (2001) tell us that *“Educational research is unethical when it misrepresents or misidentifies and so betrays its putative*

beneficiaries or the goods and values that they hold most dear". Therefore, how should the insider researcher conduct herself in order to deal ethically with these kinds of issues? Because of the interpretative nature of the study, there was no way of knowing with certainty prior to commencement what type of data would be forthcoming and therefore no means of instigating a ridged set of protocols for the occurrence of recognizable scenarios prior to the study start.

According to Pendlebury and Enslin (2001), positionality has recently become a critical element for good qualitative research writing in education. However, they also suggest the following as a caveat to this;

"Along with her research topic and tasks, the critically reflexive researcher introduces herself, often at some length. She does so less for the purposes of confession or to bring into the open the idiosyncrasies of personality and temperament than to acknowledge her autobiography as one marked by gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and so on, and to acknowledge the possible effects that her position may have on the form and outcomes of the research" (Pendlebury and Enslin, 2001).

Usher and Scott (1996) tell us that this type of positional reflexivity is not confined to the personal or simply directing our attentions to the problematic of the researchers identity, but also to the 'identity' of the research. It highlights the questions; what is going on in this research? What kind of 'reality' and what kind of knowledge is being constructed by the methods I am using? The process of reflexivity is, therefore "*continuous, critical and an examination of the practice and process of research to reveal its assumptions, values and biases*" (Wilkinson, 1988).

The researcher also had two further roles; sometime practitioner and director of centre. Initially these three roles were perceived as a disadvantage because of their potential to create conflicts of interest during the study, however as the researcher took the decision not to act as tutor to study participants, the number of roles under consideration reduced to two, although of course the researcher's practitioner experience must be expected to resonate within her director of centre role as well. It was acknowledged early on in the planning of the research that time needed to be set aside throughout the study in order to keep under review the interaction between these roles and attempt to identify and address bias and resolve it when possible. If a resolution proved to be elusive, it was important for the integrity of the research to document the conflict honestly and give reasons for the compromise solution decided upon. Whilst the IPA methodology employed allowed this tension between roles to be further examined and serves to underline the impossibility of completely separating the researcher's own prior experience from the phenomenon being observed (Smith & Osborn, 2007), the necessity of developing a methodology to allow this process to occur became clear. It was important to allow researcher subjectivity to be

openly acknowledged, subsequently interrogated and a compromise solution formulated. As the study progressed, it became obvious that, whilst this certainly made the research process more challenging for the researcher, it also acted as a mechanism to ensure actions and decisions were regularly interrogated for researcher bias.

There were three particular areas of concern prior to study commencement:

- The impracticality of conducting an academic study whilst simultaneously also producing a business report for DesignEd. Whilst the data would be the same, the presentation and emphasis would be different.
- Experience gained in a previous study (Burton, 2007) had shown that the researcher/ tutor role combined did not elicit the best data from participants. They found it difficult to speak candidly during the open data collection phase to someone who was also their tutor, especially when discussing the support aspects of the course, for fear this may adversely affect the tutor/student relationship. This was addressed by enlisting another assessor to act as tutor for this study, thus allowing the researcher to appear impartial to participants when collecting data.
- The head of centre role with its attendant financial and organizational confusions undertaken alongside the researcher role, proved more challenging to address and required on-going evaluation. When what may be ideal from a researcher's viewpoint conflicted with organizational practicalities or data collected was critical of the provider or their methods, researcher conflict inevitably ensued.

Having defined the ethical questions raised by the researcher's dual role the final two sections will now move on to discuss the methods used to mitigate these issues. Since this study is conducted utilizing IPA methodology, the researcher was regarded as the main tool for collection and interpretation of the data. Therefore, much relies on their inevitably subjective viewpoint and their pre-knowledge, background and understanding of the situation being researched.

3.6 Researcher Reflexivity

"As research continues, researchers bring their own personal sensitivities, research questions and powers of reflection to enhance understanding. As in all science, no one project, no one researcher, can claim to provide the final word on a research topic or problem" (Wertz et al., 2011).

It is important to acknowledge that a different researcher would likely produce subtly different findings and interpretations of the data. It is also possible that a different researcher may choose alternative ways to interpret and present the data. Therefore, it is

essential to acknowledge that this thesis constitutes one possible way of viewing the obtained data, rather than the only way.

In order to mitigate researcher bias, a number of checks and balances have been planned and built into the study methodology. The practise of writing memos as the research process progresses to illustrate the researcher's train of thought at a particular point in time Dunne (2011), along with peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Weiss, 1994 Baxter, J., Eyles, 1997). A further method that has been suggested by Jones and Alony (2011) is that of third and first person narrative. In order to 'stand outside' the different roles of the researcher and company director the researcher has separated these two 'personalities' or approaches by applying a third and first person narrative to appropriate areas of the thesis. Also the participants have been referred to at 2 key points to ensure interpretation of their experiences are valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Ashworth, 1993). Transcripts of the researcher/participant phone interviews were returned to participants for validation to ensure that the content was a true representation of what was said by both researcher and participant and the opportunity to add, remove or alter was offered prior to analysis. As a final validation, a draft manuscript of the study findings was forwarded to them to ensure it represented a true and fair account of the group experience. Again, whilst they could not comment on the collective group experience, as this inevitably contains a cross section of participant experience, they could make alterations or suggestions for extra inclusions if they considered something they had perceived or experienced had been missed or needed adjustment. This correlates with McNiff's suggestion of utilizing a validation group, which she describes as "a group of people you invite to look at your research from time to time, and offer critical feedback" (McNiff, 2002).

This tension created between the differing roles of the researcher added an original and initially unforeseen aspect to the study, which has not been found in another comparable study to date. Considerations that would not usually be included in a researcher's remit had to be acknowledged, weighed and negotiated and a methodology for undertaking this was evolved for utilization during the study. Rather than weaken, the research process, as was initially feared, the need to create a particular method for reviewing role conflict and acknowledging study pre-knowledge or bias helped to strengthen the robustness of the reviewing process. This method or mixture of methods is known as researcher reflexivity; it was suggested by Robson (2002) who defined it as; "an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process" (Robson, 2002).

Guillemin and Gillam(2004:275) state;

“Reflexivity involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process—what sorts of factors influence the researcher’s construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research. A reflexive researcher is one who is aware of all these potential influences and is able to step back and take a critical look at his or her own role in the research process. The goal of being reflexive in this sense has to do with improving the quality and validity of the research and recognizing the limitations of the knowledge that is produced, thus leading to more rigorous research” (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004)

A number of reflexivity mechanisms such as the practise of writing memos as the research process progresses to illustrate the researcher’s train of thought at a particular point in time were employed. Dunne (2011) suggests that;

“Regular memos resulting from an early literature review could record and outline the new ideas to which the researcher has been exposed, the propositions, values and context linked with a given theory, the possible shortcomings of the theory, and could also chronicle the manner in which the researcher’s thinking might have changed as a result of accessing that knowledge”(Dunne, 2011).

3.7 Method for Researcher Reflexivity developed for this study

Taking the last section as a starting point, the researcher developed a methodological schema particularly for this study, using Braidotti’s (2006b) process of continuous change and re-evaluation of the ethical situation as it unfolds, continually asking ‘what am I now able to do to make this as right as it can be in the circumstances’. The memo-ing, first and third person narrative and peer debriefing were still the pivotal techniques for ensuring researcher reflexivity, but rather than conducting this activity solely in consideration of the researcher role, it was decided to also conduct a further set for the provider role. In practical terms, this involved memo-ing in two separate journals; one reflecting on the researcher’s role and the pragmatic aspects of the study, the second one reviewing actions, choices and emerging data from a provider viewpoint. Peer debriefing meetings were conducted with both a peer researcher and a management team member. Finally, whilst the researcher role is related in the third person throughout the written study report, there are also first person accounts discussing the topics raised from a provider viewpoint. In this way it is hoped to disaggregate the roles of the researcher and provider and highlight any areas of tension between the two, as well as the eventual method of settling any on-going anomalies.

When documenting the decisions made throughout the study, in order to allow for a transparent method of researcher reflexivity, the following has been incorporated into the study design.

<u>Methods of Researcher Reflexivity Incorporation</u>	
Action	Frequency
Memo-ing of decisions and thought processes	Memos taken at appropriate moments throughout the study. Reviewed by researcher weekly
Peer De-briefing on both roles by colleagues specialising in that role	Monthly or more frequently if needed
First and third person narrative to keep researcher roles defined and separate	Included within this thesis under the heading of Researcher or Autobiographical

3.8 Researcher’s Personal Story

In the interests of full disclosure, it appeared appropriate to include a short autobiography documenting the history and background of the researcher, so that her personal journey and experiences could be known and understood and would therefore contribute to the reflexive nature of the study as well as adding validity.

Her personal story is presented below, in her own words, and italicised for clarity/separation from the rest of the text.

As a child it took me a long time to learn to read and I was 9 years old before a teacher at my small, country primary school realised there was a problem and insisted I spent all my breaks having extra tuition. From what I can remember, my dislike of school stemmed from that point and I spent the rest of my school years sitting at the back of class staring out of the window, bored and disengaged with what was happening around me. I left with very few qualifications and went to work in catering from ages 16 to 21, when I moved to retail and eventually into textile sales. By the time I reached 26, I had periodically decided to ‘better myself’ and had enrolled on various courses during that time, however I failed to complete any of them, which gained me the reputation with family and friends as being ‘the one who never finished anything’. At 26, I undertook a distance-learning course to gain my City & Guilds Part 1 certificate in embroidery; this was to some extent for personal satisfaction, but also because I knew there was a chance of a teaching job when I completed it. Friends and family exchanged knowing glances when I announced my new venture and for some reason, their lack of belief in me suddenly felt very irksome. So irksome, in fact, that I suddenly became absolutely determined that no matter what I would complete the course. I found it difficult, not least because the course materials were dire, but the sense of achievement when I finally managed to gain my award was a

completely new experience for me and in no small way a turning point in my life. The sudden realisation that, in return for perseverance, success was possible which in turn improved my self-esteem and confidence, spurring me on to complete a Further and Adult Teaching Certificate, further C&G craft qualifications, an Art and Design Diploma, obtain Qualified Teacher Status, a first degree in Design, an MA in Education and eventually on to undertake a PhD. It also played no small part in my determination to alter my personal circumstances and start my own business. For me the tipping point was a small one; determined to prove friends and family wrong, I persevered with a course which was nothing particularly special and which it is very likely I would previously have given up on. I have always wondered; why then and not before, why at that moment in my life did I find the determination to continue? Was it the course itself, or perhaps my state of mind at that time? How would it have affected my life if I hadn't completed that course?

Hopefully this glimpse into my personal story will explain my reasons for wishing to understand more about the participant's experiences on DesignEd courses.

To conclude this section, the researcher also had a number of choices to make regarding how the research results should be presented to provide an accessible and comparatively concise narrative. As the study participants formed a sizeable (at least for IPA) number and produced a substantial amount of transcribed data, the written format of the emerging data and presentation of it became key. Smith (Smith and Osborn, 2007), described how Interpretative Phenomenology results can be accessed in two ways: firstly through summaries of participants' own accounts and secondly through any themes that emerge across participant accounts, which may be illustrated through quotes from individuals. He suggests two possible methods of translating this into accessible written narrative;

"The 'results' section contains the emergent thematic analysis, and the separate 'discussion' links that analysis to the extant literature. An alternative strategy is to discuss the links to the literature as one presents each super ordinate theme in a single 'results and discussion' section" (Smith and Osborn, 2007).

Allowing the narrative to follow each participant individually would have been far too lengthy, so the first of Smith's suggestions regarding reporting of the findings was employed; in the first instance separating into a narrow number of overarching areas or 'themes' and then reporting these in a [Results Chapter](#) which details findings. The subsequent analysis of those findings results in a further chapter entitled [Discussion](#) where the findings detailed in the [Results Chapter](#) are discussed alongside the post study literature review.

4 Results

This chapter presents an interpretative account of the data pool amassed from participant interview, which is presented without reference to any extant literature. It begins by examining the IPA method for reporting results and moves on to detail the emergent super and sub-ordinate themes formed utilizing the method detailed in the [Data Analysis](#) section of the Methodology chapter. The main body of the chapter contains a detailed consideration of each super-ordinate theme and its attendant sub-ordinate themes in the form of raw interview extracts, interwoven with analytic researcher commentary and interpretation. These themes are detailed below in the form of a hierarchical table in order to present an overview of the chapter contents.

4.1 IPA Results Handling

Smith et al (2009) attach substantial emphasis to the writing process undertaken whilst constructing the Results section of an IPA study; they consider the researcher's role to be both explanatory and interpretative and to incorporate discursive as well as analytic interpretations of the participant transcript extracts. The purpose of this chapter is therefore twofold; to provide a window into participant experience via excerpts from individual's interview transcripts and also to proffer the researcher's interpretation of them on both an individual and, where applicable, a group level.

The hierarchical theme table below provides a brief overview of the main coding categories, which were developed in conjunction with the Coding Decisions, a justification of which is available in the [Methodology Chapter](#).

<u>Super-ordinate Theme</u>	<u>Sub-ordinate themes</u>	<u>Description of sub-ordinate theme parameters</u>
Support	Tutor Support	The role of the distance tutor, modes of contact, frequency of contact and content of contact
	Social Interaction	The impact lack of fellow classmates and weekly sessions may have had on course experience
	Online Interaction	Online interaction via social media whilst participants were taking part in the study.

Confidence	Perception of ability	Participants' belief in their own skill sets and abilities to complete the course module.
	Perception of Self; assurance/reliance	Participants' level of self-belief and the qualities of their individual personalities
	Physical or cognitive confidence	The interpretation of course materials to an extent where participants were able to progress with relative confidence.
Timing	Course Timeframe	The time planning strategy participants employed when starting and progressing their course
	Participant time constraints	The reasons given for non-commencement, non-achievement and/ or non-completion
	Tutor time constraints	Consequences of actions undertaken by the tutor and how they impacted on the student.
Persistence	Motivation	The motivations associated with undertaking the course, including financial and aspirational.
	Beliefs	The real or perceived gains that result from undertaking the course and how these may help to sustain participant study as they progress their coursework

Quotes from the participants are used to support and illustrate the findings and also allow the reader to access the original material directly in order to ‘hear’ the participants’ voice for themselves. This contributes authenticity and allows the reader to form their own opinion of the conclusions drawn from participant interview data. When quoting participants accounts, *italics* are used to identify the voice of the study participant. The participant’s initials, primary document number and line and finally, a 1 or 2 to depict if the comment was made during the first or second interview follow each quote. These Primary Documents are not listed in the appendix in order to protect participant anonymity, as discussed in the [Ethics Section](#) of the Methodology chapter.

4.2 Support

The first theme, Support, was disaggregated into 3 sub-ordinate themes: Tutor Support, Social Interaction and Online interaction. Tutor support considered the role of a distance tutor, modes of contact, frequency of contact and content of contact. Social Interaction revealed how the absence of fellow classmates and weekly attended sessions impacted on participants' course experience and finally, Online interaction considered the role that social networking played in supporting the participants.

4.2.1 Support - Tutor Support

Tutor support was provided in a number of ways to participants:

- Email sent from tutor to participant 1 week after course material delivery, welcoming them and requesting an email response in order to develop a relationship.
- Week 2 - first tutor phone call to participant.
- Week 8 - second phone call from tutor to participant.
- Week 12 - feedback for those who had returned work.
- In between phone call contact encouraged by tutor throughout the 12-week study.

In general participants appeared to welcome and appreciate tutor contacts, although there were two participants who indicated that they would have preferred to attend classes locally in order to facilitate greater tutor input into their coursework. A minority participants appeared to experience a personality conflict with their tutor and their subsequent course satisfaction appeared to suffer due to this, however in contrast the majority appeared to find her input beneficial. Satisfaction with this aspect of the course rose slightly between the first and second interview data pools, indicating an overall approval level in the tutor support offered. PH enjoyed speaking with her tutor and felt that she experienced more contact than had been the case on another distance learning course she was undertaking.

I enjoyed the way it was done in terms of having more contact than would normally be the case. More contact with tutors and receiving information about how far we were supposed to be. I found that very helpful actually. PHpd54:32:2

Many of the participants wanted to know how their treatment differed from the 'norm' and were also interested in finding out more about the research project, its aims and objectives. The researcher speculates that this was a way of judging if their experiences mirrored those of other participants and also those of the wider student community of DesignEd. PH raised an interesting point when she mentioned that the tutor phone contacts, as well as being useful to her from the point of helping her understand her course materials and what she should be doing, also acted as a reminder or stimulus to continue with course work.

I must say it is rather nice having the telephone contact.....for two reasons. One is that because we have all been told well your tutor will be ringing you on a certain day, you are thinking ah, must make sure I have done something and got some of the work done by then. Which is an incentive you wouldn't normally get and secondly to hear a voice at the other end rather than just emails and you know information being sent on line is good because it obviously makes it more human, makes it more contactable and you feel oh if I wanted to, you know, I could easily get in touch and there are people at the other end. PHpd57:116:1

The majority of participants appeared not to want to 'waste' the tutor contact time and therefore made an effort ahead of the contact to undertake some course activities or at least look over their course materials to ensure they knew what their next step would be, along with perhaps compiling a list of questions or queries that they could put to their tutor when they spoke to her.

..... it's that little bit of a thing that says actually there's only someone at the end that says oh you're doing great, or how's this going or whatever. NHpd50:80:2

Some participants clearly wanted to build a stronger contact with their tutor, perhaps anticipating that this could make up for having no classmates or face-to-face meetings with their tutor. They also appeared to expect that in doing so this would form a beneficial relationship with her and expedite their on-going coursework.

I do. (asked if she thought tutor contact had helped) I think it would. I suppose it's very old-fashioned but I'd rather somebody could see my work. JCpd27:19:2

There also appeared to be a perception from JC, that her tutor could be missing some of the finer details of her work because of the digital submission of photographs that the course culminated in, as opposed to having sight and handle of the actual stitched samples. JC's tutor requested that she send some test images of her work in an attempt to satisfy JC on this point, but JC did not do so.

Whilst nearly all participants welcomed the tutor contacts, a small minority appeared to feel that the timing of the contact had not met their needs. PC commented that she would have preferred an earlier contact and another participant also intimated that she had been waiting for her tutor to contact her so she could give her verbal permission to begin the course (which was not a course requirement). When this did not happen due to the tutor's inability to reach her by phone, the tutor was subtly blamed for her falling behind in her timetable.

But yes, I think if that had come a week or two earlier that would have been good for me. PCpd58:47:2

On a minority of occasions the tutor contact was not as supportive or comfortable as would have been hoped for by either the provider or participant. NH appeared to be disgruntled that during a contact with her tutor, the tutor referred her back to the course

materials. Whilst this may have been meant in a helpful way, it was not taken as such by the participant, who felt that she had been treated like a child who had not read the course materials properly and was therefore being somewhat belittled. It is worth noting that phone calls with NH were problematic for both researcher and tutor, as NH wanted to spend considerable amounts of time on the phone, frequently repeating points during the duration of a phone call. The length of calls along with the repetition involved may be a contributory factor for her feeling like an 'inconvenience'.

Because I think, I did feel sometimes that, not at first, not afterwards but at first I did feel like I was a bit of an inconvenience, you know. I thought oh better not message her again. NHpd50:70:2

AH raised the point that a spirit of collaboration could be perceived as missing when studying by distance. She found that the camaraderie and collaboration that could happen within a regular craft group meeting face-to-face on a regular basis, can help tutor and students bond and subsequently achieve more than could be achieved alone.

So that erm, you get ideas from what other people are doing, erm, if the tutor is explaining something to somebody else you pick up on that you think oh I wouldn't have thought of that. AHpd1:59:1

Uhm, yeah, well, company, more being in a group and the way you learn from other people in the group in all sorts of ways. AHpd1:57:1

However, AH was drawing this comparison with the leisure classes she had attended close to home, as City & Guilds certificated courses were not available in her local area, so this was not a like for like comparison. Certificated courses are necessarily more goal focused and students are therefore under more time pressure whilst working on assessment pieces or samples, which must be completed in a timeframe and to an appropriate standard. In contrast, leisure courses whose primary goal is social and where students can bring along whatever they are presently working on to obtain the tutor's advice is more relaxed and informal.

4.2.2 Support - Social Interaction

The above comments from AH illustrate the type of social interaction that many participants mentioned they had either experienced personally whilst attending previous courses, or believed may occur between members of an attending class. However, it may be worth noting that, in the researcher's experience of tutoring attended classes over a 10-year period, this idealisation of the classroom situation does not always translate into reality; personality clashes and competitive attitudes can frequently prevail over camaraderie. A majority of participants believed that an attended local group is the ideal learning environment, but for various reasons remained unachievable by them; often this

was because one was not available within a reasonable travelling distance, or at least not available at a time that it suited them to attend. The prevailing opinion on this point suggested that the group considered the lack of social interaction was detrimental to their course experience. Interestingly this aspect was not raised during the responses to initial tutor interview, but only occurred in subsequent contacts, so it appeared that this facet of TEL was unforeseen or unlooked for when first undertaking the course.

SB would have liked to be able to attend a local class, but found it did not easily fit around her other commitments.

But all the ones I have found locally were during the day and it conflicted with work or other things and so I sort of gave up on the idea. SBpd70:60:1

Some found that the act of attending an extracurricular local class helped them to undertake their patchwork on a more regular basis. SH viewed her weekly class as something she never missed, as she clearly relished the companionship she derived from it.

Yeah, because I'm going to a class tonight, a patchwork and quilting class, because you've got a commitment because you're going with other people I suppose. I never not go. SH63:15:2

Her comments also suggested that the act of having to leave the house and attend a weekly class with its personal interactions was more pleasant or easier than staying at home and getting on with her course work on her own. It is worth noting again that the attended class was a leisure one, not a certificated class, which required no preparation from her prior to attending, making this perhaps more of a social occasion rather than a certificated course which would require a greater input from her.

No, it's just finding time to fit it in really and I think with...probably because I'm not actually having to go somewhere to do it, it doesn't make me do it if you see what I mean. SHpd63:11:2

Several students appeared to use their attendance at extracurricular local classes, groups or shows as a way of comparing themselves favourably to those they considered to be less talented textile artists. NH regularly attended quilt shows and exhibitions and appeared to find that if she was able to achieve a favourable comparison between her work and that of the exhibitors, she could thereby increase her own self-assurance.

But actually I looked at some them and I thought oh god that's not right that doesn't match up properly and sometimes I do myself a favour by looking at that, and realising that they make mistakes. NHpd50:42:2

NH seemed eager to increase the social side of her distance-learning course and was keen to explore opportunities that would allow her to extend self-comparison with her local

groups and classes to include those studying on the same course and level as herself with DesignEd. She appeared to wish to initially compare progress and then subsequently commiserate with other participants about any set-backs which may have occurred in her or their coursework or wider life, perhaps hoping that this would make both parties feel better about their position or lack of progress. The possibility that knowing how other students were progressing, especially if they were progressing more quickly than she was, may make her feel depressed or de-motivated did not appear to occur to her.

Maybe that would give them that push to keep up or to say do you know what I've had a crap week as well. Everything's gone wrong and I'm in the same boat.
NHpd50:104:1

It was noted that participants frequently assumed a mirroring of their own views and feelings would automatically occur in others. If this did not happen it appeared to prove isolating and de-motivating for them. PH took a different, minority view and felt that she worked better independently of others, viewing them as a distraction from her course work and a possible way of wasting time in a social context.

.... I am a person who can work independently, I find social interaction sitting next to somebody else working on the same subject can for me, be a distraction and off-putting and I find myself being more sociable than actually learning PHpd57:92:1

PH's preference for independent working and the benefits she found it to bring to her coursework, however was certainly not shared by all the participants and in the final interview the majority still considered the lack of social interaction to be detrimental. It was noteworthy that when this is disaggregated into completers and non-completers, with both interviews added together, then non-completers are substantially more pessimistic about the lack of social learning contact than those who completed the course, who appeared to find it less of a concern. The marked difference in these two views suggests either that the social aspect of learning has a marked effect on certain participants or that they chose to blame this aspect of the course for non-completion. This facet will be addressed further in the [Discussion](#) chapter.

An observation from VM also indicated the existence of a further perspective regarding social contact; the demoralization and de-motivation that can ensue when faced with a set of work obviously better than anything that they could or have produced. If this occurred early in the course experience, it appeared to hamper progress, perhaps by depressing confidence levels.

I enjoyed looking at other people's work and I said, oh my God, I'm not of that standard. VMpd76:34:1

4.2.3 Support - Online Interaction

This sub-ordinate theme references online interaction via social media whilst participants were taking part in the study. This was either required of one half of the participants as part of their coursework, or was deliberately sought out by the other half on a voluntary basis. In general, data referencing the Facebook (FB) interactions was not especially positive. The majority of those who had been included in the FB users support group considered that not enough was going on or that it was hard for them to access. The participants in the voluntary FB group frequently expressed envy for the compulsory FB group and articulated a belief that they would have performed better on their course if they had had the opportunity to be included with the closed FB group. They appeared to rate peer interaction more highly than the FB group, which may indicate that they considered it would have added a positive aspect to the course for them, or it may mean they participated in the voluntary group and derived satisfaction from that. Neither the FB or non-FB groups appeared content with their online interactions. MB, who was a FB group student, reflected that she would have preferred more direct contact with her tutor, or at least with someone else from the course provider rather than her fellow students.

...Actually, I think we needed to hear from the school more often. MBpd45:82:1

JC expressed her concern that fellow students were able to view images of her work online and raised the possibility of plagiarism. She appeared to be suggesting that, as a result of sharing her visual progress with her fellow participants via FB, they might copy it. JC also called attention to what she perceived as falseness that appeared to accompany much of the FB discussion. This was a recurring theme throughout the data, with many of the students who were required to utilize FB as part of their course requirements considering that they had been put into a false situation by being impelled to 'talk' to people that they did not know and thereby pretend a false intimacy with them because they shared a common course.

I mean I did query plagiarism on it, but you know, at least everybody could contribute, you kind of you have got to put one on at a time (photos) and write a comment on it and then you're kind of stuck really. JCpd26:60:1

Those who were already FB users reported a more positive view of the value of the FB interactions than those who had had only come to it through the course requirement, without previously having used it or had an account. DW suggested that those who had the time to post consistently might be 'ladies who lunch'.

...I shouldn't say ladies who lunch should I? Ladies who had a little bit more time, than perhaps somebody like me who's a manager and you know, has got a lot of commitments. It would be interesting to know...DWpd11:56:2

There were also some issues centred around netiquette and how much to agree or disagree with what others were posting. LW had asked for help via FB posts to her group, but had been dissatisfied with the feedback she had received from others in the closed group. However, she had not been forthcoming about her feelings with the person concerned.

I thought well, how did she do those? she answered and I thought, mmm, I don't understand that either..... I said, oh thank you, that has helped me, only because I couldn't be bothered and say well actually I can't understand that but I didn't want to make her feel worse. LWpd41:95:1

To conclude this section, support proved a contentious issue with personal support requirements i.e. the timing, amount and method of support, varying substantially between participants. Participants' mainly positive pre-commencement impressions of online interaction and face-to-face interaction appeared not to be generally substantiated by the study findings.

4.3 Confidence

Confidence was a recurring subject that was common to all of the super-ordinate data themes. The sub-ordinate themes were Perception of ability, Perception of Self; assurance/reliance and Physical or cognitive confidence. Perception of ability references participants' belief in their own skill sets and abilities to complete the course module. Self-assurance/reliance references the level of self-belief participants displayed and the qualities of their individual personalities. Physical or cognitive confidence refers to the reading and understanding of course materials to an extent where participants were able to progress their coursework from their interaction with the course module and other course materials supplied to them.

4.3.1 Confidence - Perception of ability

Along with Physical or cognitive confidence, perception of ability was the area most remarked on by participants when responding to tutor introduction emails. Concerns centred around the level of their abilities in a number of key areas, namely IT/Digital skills, Study Skills and Subject Specific skills, which could be extrapolated further into Design Skills and Craft Skills. During the 4-week period between initial commencement of their course and the conducting of the first interview, participants appeared to become more aware of any self-perceived weaknesses in their ability to undertake certain tasks or possess certain skill sets, indicating a large drop in perception of ability during the initial phase of the course; a period which covered the time from their first tutor email to the first researcher contact. In participants who had responded to the introductory tutor email sent during week 1 and also given participant interview responses in week 4, the drop was

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substantial. Whilst participant perception may not necessarily have reflected the reality of the situation, the awareness of ability drop noted in majority of students appeared to contribute substantially to an 'I've not got the appropriate skills for this course, so I may as well give up now' mind set. Some participants were very condemning of themselves in this respect and cited their perceived lack of course-appropriate skills as a reason for non-progression in their coursework; it may therefore be implied that they became caught in a self-deprecating loop of low ability perception.

Those who had been away from any learning environment for a lengthy period of time appeared to approach their return to learning with trepidation and demonstrated some concern that they would find their study, technical or IT skills were insufficient for the course requirements. Tutor reassurance did not appear to improve this negative attitude towards their skill sets. The prevailing attitude exhibited could be distilled into the quote from PC, below:

...and then kind of went 'oh, I have to write real words about stuff' and I hadn't done that for a long time.....Ahm, I think with all of them, the exercises and the writing that was required, it was just almost having the confidence to get started.
PCpd58:24:2

Participants also cited age as a reason for lack of skills and confidence in existing skill levels. Below JL, CW and GB suggest that their age and the time elapsed since their last formal education was a factor. JL also differentiated between "professional" qualifications which would be likely to be knowledge based, ending in a summative testing process and the more formative, experiential and self-directed learning approach offered by the City & Guilds syllabus and art and design education in general.

It's the fact that I, well, I'm 53 years old and haven't been to school for a very, very long time. I've, I can study. I've studied, I've done professional qualifications, I know how to study, butJLpd24:25:1

Yeah I'm getting too old to do that aren't I? CWpd7:207:2

I think the main difficulty I've had is that it's been 20-something years since I left school and did any sort of study, and getting my head around books and all that thing hasn't been easy GBpd21:28:2

Art based tasks in particular caused consternation in the majority of participants, as this was a skill set which appeared to be viewed as the possession of a 'talent' individuals are born possessing and which cannot be acquired in later life. Participants did not generally consider it as a skill like any other, which can be improved on with practice. In the researcher's experience of students studying art and design based topics, they often exhibit concern about exposing themselves to what they are concerned may be ridicule by attempting to draw or design. However, conversely, the majority did not verbalise the

same sentiments regarding, for example, IT skills and therefore looked more positively on attempting to acquire that skill set to add to their existing abilities. Interestingly, the one or two participants who already had an art or design background did not exhibit the same levels of concern or inadequacy when reflecting upon the acquisition of quilting skills. JL had only basic skill levels in both design and craft upon undertaking the course, but did not seem to feel the same degree of trepidation at undertaking the improvement of her craft based skills as she did with her design area ones.

I've got books that give me step-by-step instructions and I am more than happy to do that, but the art stuff, if I'd have known what that was, I probably wouldn't have done it (the course). JLpd24:21:1

JL had decided very quickly that the course was not for her, appearing to base this assumption on her lack of confidence in her design skills and her initial impression of the course as being more art based and "not what she'd thought". Her viewpoint was broadly representative of around 4-5 participants, so whilst in the minority, her view was shared by others.

And I haven't, I don't think I've got the skill in the art side of it to do it.....I really don't know enough to do it well enough and I certainly don't see myself going any further with it. JLpd24:47:1

JL did not avail herself of any tutor feedback or help, despite her tutor requesting that she send in some preliminary photos so she could provide help and support for what JL saw as her design problems, but instead she appeared to feel deflated and angry with the course provider, her tutor, but perhaps most of all herself.

The art side of it and completing the art side of it to me is just a flipping pain and an aggravation at the moment and it's a nuisance and I'm cross with myself for feeling like that but that's how I feel. JLpd24:88:1

By the time that the final interview was conducted with responses collected from just 18 of the 23 participants, their perception of ability appeared to have steadied. However, this is likely to indicate that, rather than the whole group perception of ability stabilising, the 5 who only completed the first interview had decided prior to the final interview that they would not continue with the course and had therefore not made themselves available for further researcher contact.

4.3.2 Confidence - Perception of self; self-assurance/reliance

In this context Perception of self; self-assurance/reliance was taken to refer to participant concerns regarding personal attributes such as; ability to apply themselves to the course, perseverance, age, intelligence. It references the participants' perception of themselves

rather than the actuality of their personal attributes. When the interviewer suggested to JL that she was perhaps being rather harsh on herself, she initially agreed, but then continued to compare herself to members of her local Quilters' Guild and berate her quilting and design abilities even further.

Maybe, quite possibly (being too harsh on herself), but...I'm astonished at what they (Quilters Guild members) do, I mean, it's a million times better than anything I could ever doI'm never going to achieve all of that but looking at what I've done with the art, I kind of, I'm quite disappointed with what I've produced because I think, I feel like I don't really know what I am doing. That's the problem. I'm guessing at what I am doing whereas, if I am doing a nine-patch block, I'm not guessing.

JL24:53:1

JL appeared concerned about the non-prescriptive, experiential nature of some of the course materials. She seemed to blame herself for not having the right skill sets for the course and did not undertake any of the coursework. Rather than viewing the course as an opportunity to make her own choices, work with images or materials that pleased her personally and generally expand her creativity, she appeared to perceive it instead as an unintentional vagueness or lack of direction, particularly in the design area of the course. A minority of the other participants similarly voiced concern that their work would not be up to the standards required and/or the standards of others on the same course, although JL appeared to be alone in her depth of feeling.

Feelings of inadequacy, trepidation, uncertainty and fear of embarrassing themselves seemed to interfere with some participants' abilities to start and continue with their course work. The participants' initial impression of the course materials appeared to play a pivotal role in this area, especially when any deviation from their prior expectations was identified or a re-appraisal of what the course was comprised of and how they would be expected to undertake it was required. In this case, initial impression refers to their overall view of the course that was formed on their first reading of some or all of their course material, in some cases often just the first page or the first few pages.

If you'd had an experience of working on site if you like, it's almost as if you're spoon fed with that..... You'd get a bit at a time every week, but with this it's like it all comes in at once and you think oh my god! CWpd7:73:2

Those participants who sent email responses back to their tutor during the first week of the course appeared to have relatively high self-assurance/reliance at that point, however in general this had dropped considerably by the first interview. If there had been any technical problems prior to first access being possible, this seemed to exacerbate and entrench any negative impression of the course as a whole. It appeared that if participant's initial enthusiasm and subsequent self-assurance/reliance was lessened either by the course content itself or their inability to access or understand it at this first

access point, then it was very hard to retrieve at a later date. For instance, TF who had initial problems downloading course materials says:

I have not really got going or got started, I have read through all the modules, found it a little bit daunting and I started doing some research on the internet That is about as far as I have got with it. TFpd72:17:1

It was not possible to contact TF again for her second interview and she subsequently failed to submit any coursework. In general, those who only gave one interview, like TF, appeared to be substantially less self-assured/reliant and more pessimistic about their own abilities to remain engaged with the course, as opposed to those who gave both interviews and stayed in contact with the provider and their tutor. However, it is hard to know if this is as a result of their attitude or the cause of it or had another origin entirely.

4.3.3 Confidence - Physical or cognitive confidence

This references the participants' interpretation of the course materials and their ability to translate them into actions and understand what was required of them.

A minority of students appeared to feel that there was either too little written instruction, or that it was too vague to give them total clarity regarding the coursework they were about to undertake, thus dampening their enthusiasm to commence. Underlying this seemed to be that, for certain students, even a very slight degree of uncertainty gave them a reason not to commence the course straight away. They could have started with the areas they felt complete certainty about, but chose not to do this, even when encouraged by their tutor to do so. It appeared that they lacked self-assurance in their own ability to read through the instructions and interpret them appropriately. A number waited to commence until they could speak with their tutor and ensure that their interpretation of the materials was 'right'. When told that they did not have to worry about being too precise in their interpretation of the instructions, the leeway they considered this created appeared to give them even greater concern and seemed to result in a continuing lack of self-reliance when making decisions. A further minority appeared to consider that there was too much instructional material and that it was too onerous to be asked to read through it all before commencing the course, perhaps seeing it as an imposition upon their time or alternatively considered they could acquire the information contained within it in another way. For participants in all of the above scenarios, this appeared to be the first indication of non-commencement.

I think I found that a bit overwhelming as there were an awful lot of notes. CWpd7:20:2

One or two participants made false starts because they had failed to completely read or understand the course instructions. Anything construed as 'misdirected' work was generally viewed by the participants as a waste of their time, rather than a natural part of experiential learning, and caused confidence issues, such as those FC mentions:

*No, it's been a bit of a learning curve but...and I haven't completed yet because at the beginning I didn't quite understand what I was meant to be doing so I started, but I hadn't realised what I was doing and so wasn't doing the right things
FCpd19:18:2*

This was identified as an area of interest early on in the interview process and the researcher began to ask participants how they had gone about accessing, reading and acting upon their course materials in order to try to understand more about this aspect of the study phenomenon.

I scan, I just scanned every, I skimmed everything at the beginning just to get a general picture for myself and that really worried me and has been like a big cloud on the horizon. ES pd15:70:2

The majority of participants, such as ES, began by giving everything a brief skim through. Some then appeared to worry almost immediately about the amount of work to come as well as their cognitive or physical ability levels. For a minority of participants this resulted in them never revisiting the course instructions or details. The students who took this approach, without exception, did not succeed in forwarding any work to their tutor and this proved to be the least successful of the initial impression reactions exhibited by the participants. Others reacted by printing the digital files and beginning to work their way through them systematically.

No, printed it off because I am 49 so I am, I am somebody who likes books. I have to be able to touch pages so there was no way I could have just read it off the computer. JCpd29:60:1

PC appeared to follow the most successful method when she suggests reading it through initially and then re-visiting it almost immediately in order to subdivide it into areas of work, whilst at the same time formulating a personalized timeframe for the whole. No formal advice about how to read or interpret course materials had been given to participants. A pragmatic point, however, was raised by a number of participants regarding the usability of the course in relation to this action. As there were a number of http (hypertext transfer protocol) links embedded into the file, after printing these became invalid. This meant that students who had printed copies of their course materials also needed to return to their pc in order to view digital copies and thereby have access to the links embedded in them. Nearly all the participants who sent work in to their tutor on or before the completion of the study period followed an approximately similar pattern of compartmentalization and

chronological ordering in their undertaking of the course materials. The researcher speculates that during this segmenting process, the student gains familiarity with the materials and therefore mentally 'buys' into the course and their abilities to complete it. The action of personalization undertaken by participants when re-arranging the course into manageable data chunks and time allocations allowed them to familiarize themselves with the course materials. This appeared to dispel any possible initial shock and also gave them chance to visualize themselves completing in their own time-frame, unless something unexpected arose which required alteration of their planning. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that this planning and timing process also necessitated confidence in their own planning abilities and required participants to have a degree of confidence in their own physical and cognitive abilities to allow them to trust that they would be able to deliver on the plans they made for completion.

I then picked it up again and read it properly and started getting on with it and my approach has been to do what I generally do with life which is to go, "right, well I can do this bit then and then I've got two weeks when I should be able to do this, this and this and split it up, so kind of timetable it across the summer just to make sure that when I get to the end of a week, I'll have completed something PCpd62:29:1

However, it is important to note that not all participants completing or returning work to their tutor took exactly the same approach. A more relaxed, casual and generally confident approach, defined by the near absence of any aspirations for course completion and also an apparently high physical and cognitive confidence level, also appeared to be a successful one for the couple of participants who employed it. Whilst this was a much more unusual approach, it seemed to work by removing much of the pressure induced by self-benchmarking and ultimate qualification utilization that some of the less confident participants placed upon themselves. It appeared to achieve success by negating the pressure to perform and allowing enjoyment of the on-going creative process to take place. Thus the 'choking' that had occurred in those who lacked confidence in their physical or cognitive abilities after taking an initial glance at the course materials appeared to be removed.

I'm the kind of person who reads the directions last. MB pd45:60:1

MB exhibited a very relaxed attitude to the course and was one of the first to return work to her tutor. Not all of the work was present, suggesting that the student had not carefully read and checked the course 'to be submitted' list, but sufficient was available to form a good body of work, allowing the rest to be added in at a later date. MB had set herself a general time scale that fitted in with her other commitments and this meant she co-incidentally frontloaded the coursework into the first few weeks of the study, thus taking full advantage of her post enrolment enthusiasm. She appeared to have a very positive

attitude to the course in general and a high opinion of her own abilities and completed a full month ahead of the suggested 12 weeks.

A small subset of participants did not print the materials and consequently had to return to their pc each time they wished to check course requirements or the next step.

I downloaded the PDF straightaway from the email and I opened it all up and I read through everything. And I mean I didn't print it because I don't have a printer attached to my laptop. So, it sort of costs me money every time I do that. But I think having it on a PDF is fine. SBpd70:40:1

Neither SB nor the other participant who took a similar approach to non-printing returned any work to their tutor or appeared to have progressed with their coursework.

A minority of participants appeared to blame the course/course provider for their lack of progress, but a majority seemed to blame their own lack of ability, as JL did. Her self-deprecating way of referring to herself as stupid and her apparent underlying lack of confidence in her cognitive and physical abilities served to reinforce her belief that she did not have the skills or the intelligence to cope with learning at a distance. This approach may well impact adversely on her future confidence levels and perhaps prejudice her undertaking of any subsequent further education and training. This is concerning from an ethical standpoint and is considered further in the Discussion Chapter.

..... because if people are as stupid as I am in that respect then they perhaps they won't realise what's expected andthen get disappointed with themselves. JLpd24:102:1

To conclude this super-ordinate theme, in general a correlation appeared to exist between participants' initial confidence in their cognitive and physical abilities and their capacity to complete and subsequently return work to their tutor for assessment. Those who vocalized their ability concerns and appeared to focus strongly on them generally did not progress as well as those who were able to put them to one side, thoroughly read the course materials and thus compartmentalise and plan their coursework.

4.4 Timing

Timing proved to be a wide-ranging theme, including the difficulties participants experienced in allocating their time appropriately. Also, and perhaps most interestingly, the role that the timing of course commencement appeared to have on how successful participants were in returning work to their tutor as well as their enjoyment of the course experience. The study allowed participants a recommended timescale of 12 weeks from receiving their course materials to sending work to their tutor. It was brought to the attention of participants that between 8 and 12 weeks was the recommended timescales for completion of one module, but if they over-ran this they could still continue with the

course if they so wished. The Timing theme had three sub-contextual themes, Course timeframe, Participant time constraints and Tutor time constraints.

4.4.1 Timing - Course Timeframe

Participants appeared to place substantial emphasis on the time they chose to enrol upon and commence the course. This seemed to be linked to a sense of giving themselves the best possible 'run at it'. It also appeared that a financial element was present in this and may have helped to decide the time they commenced or if they enrolled at all – this will be discussed later in this chapter under [Persistence](#). This impression was, perhaps, emphasised by what they considered to be a 12-week 'deadline', even though it was brought to their attention prior to course commencement and at each subsequent contact thereafter that this was an average module completion time only and the timeframe over which the researcher would be contacting them to collect data. It also appeared to be an aspect that only a minority of participants had considered prior to enrolment, with only one mentioning it at all in the reply to the tutor's initial email. Those who did allude to it at this time seemed to consider it to be a positive aspect which would keep them 'on track' for completion. However, by the time of the first interview 4 weeks later, the timescale appeared to be concerning a majority of the study participants.

PC seemed to feel that she needed to complete in 12 weeks or she would have somehow failed. She was assured by her tutor that this was not the case, but still appeared to consider that adherence to the suggested study timeframe was, for her, important. Perhaps this feeling of urgency helped to motivate her, as she did send in work to her tutor within the study timeframe and has subsequently continued with the course.

I think on reflection, doing it in 12 weeks which included a hectic run up to the summer holidays and then the school holidays wasn't my wisest idea. PCpd62:15:1

A minority of participants voiced their concern that if they failed to adhere to the 12-week study timeframe their subsequent efforts would be pointless. A certain level of discomfiture also seemed to exist regarding where they were up to in the course when compared to other students, which will be discussed in the [Persistence](#) section later in this chapter. LD was concerned that, because she had fallen behind, she would not be allowed to finish.

....obviously well behind everyone but I didn't know if I could continue.... when everyone else is more or less finished LDpd37:15:2

After subsequent reassurance from her tutor and her apparent relief that she would still be able to continue and complete the course module, she failed to send in any work for

assessment. Other students, however, found the 12-week model a positive aspect of the study and appeared to consider that it had helped them not to have timing left open ended. GLB felt that she would have put off doing the course work without it.

I think it was quite good having a rough deadline to work to, and I'm quite good at saying "Well I'll do that tomorrow, and I'll do that tomorrow," GLBpd21:52:2

PH also makes the point that she found it easy to allow weeks to drift by without some sort of timescale to work to, echoing the positive responses to tutor emails in regard to having a 12-week study timeframe to work towards. She compared this with another distance learning course that was enrolled in, where there is no suggested timescale for completion or on-going contact to remind students where they should be up to if they wish to adhere to the completion date.

I'm finding that with my other course that I'm enrolled on, very easy to just let the weeks go by and not actually do anything. I think the fact that there's a timescale associated with the work or you are getting reminded now and again, does actually give you a sort of, a boost to actually get on and do some, even if it's only a little bit of work. PH54:34:2

A minority of participants appeared to feel the pressure of the perceived timeframe more keenly than most. They seemed to consider that the pressure of the 12-week study was simply too much and thought that it may be detrimental to their enjoyment of the course. ES returned work to her tutor at the end of the study, but likened the stress involved to an OFSTED inspection, finding it stressful and disagreeable, especially on an on-going basis if she decided to undertake the whole course.

Um, for me personally it's not been so good. I retired from teaching 3 years ago and I used to live my life under that kind of pressure really it was just like preparing for an OFSTED inspection again. I thought, I can't do this anymore,being a teacher I spent my life under that kind of deadline pressure. ESpd15:56:2

However, a significant minority appeared to find it helpful to have an overarching timeframe in mind for each module. PH considered that it decreased her natural tendency to procrastinate and proved how efficiently she was able to progress the coursework when she applied herself on a regular basis.

I think that's a spin off benefit for me, in that having seen that if I buckle down to things and get on with it and not sort of keep putting it on the back burner, I can actually get on with it pretty efficiently PH54:84:2

PH also raised the point that gaps of too long in-between study may mean that participants forget where they are up to and subsequently lose impetus. She considered that a more rigid timeframe helped to eliminate this and prevented time wasted reviewing previous work before commencing new.

I find it is a good idea if I cannot leave too long a gap in-between doing work on it because if I leave too long a gap I have got to go back over what I did before and I forget. PHpd57:54:1

4.4.2 Timing - Participant time constraints

This sub-ordinate theme was one of the largest data collection sections derived from the study, which peaked during the first interview and was mentioned far less frequently by those participants undertaking the second interview. No participants, when giving their written responses to the initial tutor email, alluded to it. Participant time constraints fell roughly into five areas: time, illness, family, work, other. Therefore, there were a wide variety of reasons that students gave for not commencing, continuing or finishing their coursework when speaking with the researcher. Those mentioning this area frequently suggested that they had picked a bad time to start the course for a variety of largely personal reasons. The majority of participants intimated that something unrelated to the course experience had occurred during the 12 week suggested timeframe that had either caused them to false start or in some other way instigated a hiatus in progression. SB was one of these;

I started a new job, and I was in the middle of it, what I shouldn't have done was took on another course, which was really heavy and a lot of reading, with sort of heavy exams, written exams. SBpd67:13:2

Instead of considering, when planning out their time over the 12-week period, that they may have to allow for times of illness or over commitment and subsequently factor in this extra time to their timetable, a majority of participants appeared to prefer to try to find a free 12-week calendar window and then rely on being able to participate in their coursework for the majority of the 12 weeks in order to complete. The researcher's personal experience suggests that planning a 4-week contingency into their 12-week deadline would have been the most beneficial strategy; thus planning to work only 8 weeks and spreading the workload accordingly, but only one or two participants employed this approach and it was not specified in the course materials. LW was one of those who seemed to find the pressure too much.

I'm not actually enjoying this, I'm getting very stressed out about it and I don't need that but that's not you or the course necessarily, that's me putting pressure on myself which is ridiculous. LWpd41:123:1

This failure to build in break or contingency time appeared to take a toll on a majority of the participants as well as placing increased pressure on them, particularly as the end of the 12 weeks drew near and they were unable to complete.

.....I'll think right, okay, I'll do some patchwork on the Sunday afternoon as well and I find that by Sunday..I am flaked out and I think well, I'll do it next week, so, DWpd14:91:1

A minority, after having to make a substantial final effort in order to complete, mentioned that they would not do the same again, but instead of considering better time management, they instead wished that the time pressure could be lifted to allow them to take as long as they wished. ES was one of those who mentioned that she would prefer all time restraints be removed for future modules.

I wouldn't have this pressure another time would I because I'd have a longer time scale. ESpd15:54:2

One participant raised the point that a certain level of prior experience is needed in order to make a realistic estimate regarding the time a given task will take. If it is necessary to take time to review basic knowledge before undertaking a task, then the time required to gain that knowledge can be considerable. Participants were given basic timescale suggestions in their course materials, but there can be a large variance regarding how long it takes individuals to perform the same task. JL raises this point below.

You know, it might say oh you need to spend three or four hours a week on it but if you have got no grounding in art at all, which I haven't, you know, it's going to be more like five or ten hours JLpd24:39:1

4.4.3 Timing - Tutor time constraints

This section references the actions taken by the course tutor to remind participants of time constraints and reinforce the need to plan and pace during the study. Throughout the 12-week study participants were regularly sent email contacts from their tutor to remind them where they should be up to if they wished to complete the module within the 12-week suggested time frame; their reaction to these was varied. The majority appeared to feel that they proved generally useful for reminding them that they needed to continue with their course work and also served to provide them with a helpful benchmarking system. NH appreciated the reminder

I found that prompt to say you're so many weeks in and by now you should be heading towards that three month,.... I think we all need that, cos I set myself actually a time frame to know that I would spend so much time of a week doing my City and Guilds NHpd50:82:2

However, some, whilst apparently feeling that they did prompt some action on their behalf, considered them to be panic inducing.

I just thought oh heck I am nowhere near that far, but to have no emails I think I would have not done anything TFpd72:35:1

It gave me a hell of a shock..... I thought I was doing really well and I was spending, you know, lots of time and, you know, I wasn't skipping it and then I suddenly realised 'Hang on, you should have finished your design work by now and be starting the sewing'.... it was really helpful to say 'Now hang on, this is where, if you're going to work within this timescale, this is where you need to be by now'. CWpd10:147:1

Others considered them to be less useful, as they served to re-apply the feeling of already mounting pressure to complete. LW felt the pressure they brought to bear on her:

But I think I put pressure on myself because I think oh, they want it in a certain time. LWpd41:119:1

It also gave those who had fallen behind a benchmark against which they could identify their progress. CW considered pressure was being exerted by the email.

Because sometimes it is a shock, because you think oh I've been working for hours and hours and days on this and then you get this email that says if you're doing 12 weeks, this is how far you're going - I'm nowhere near that! CWpd7:51:1

The need to know where other study participants were up to proved to be very strong for nearly all the participants. JC seemed to feel the need to be informed more frequently and also to receive some sort of reassurance that she is keeping to the appropriate stages along the way.

Well I would of liked to have known are you at stage 1, are you at stage 2, or are you at stage 3, and you know you should of got to this stage by this, JCpd26:48:1

Despite a suggested completion date being contained both within the pre-study statement and later in the course materials, apparently to the point that it had induced substantial stress for some students, JC, the same participant as above, appeared not to have understood this. She requested that she be given a deadline to work to and she seemed to be experiencing problems both with breaking down the work to fit in with her available free time and also in fully reading and understanding the course instructions or contacts.

And I would have preferred to have a deadline to work to; I mean I work better when I have a deadline.....because I know I've got to get it done by that date so I'd go for it, whereas this phase in 12 weeks it's not particularly helpful for me in that respect. JCpd26:50:1

Overall tutor time constraint data was negative, although this did improve a little by the second interview. It may be that those who had felt themselves to be negatively impacted by this (perhaps because the tutor had experienced difficulty contacting them or they had encountered a problem downloading course materials) had already decided not to complete the module and therefore did not contribute towards the second interview data pool.

4.5 Persistence

The fourth and final theme was Persistence, which was divided into two sub-ordinate themes; Motivation and Belief. Motivation references the impact of their decision to enrol and the costs and expectations inherent within it. Beliefs refers to the real or perceived gains which could be a result of undertaking the course and how these may have helped to sustain students' study as they completed their qualification.

4.5.1 Persistence - Motivation

This section refers to the impact of their decision to enrol on the participants. It appeared to be the case that, along with the commencement date of their course, certain motivations did have on-going impact on some participants in two key ways:

1. Their initial enrolment decision
2. Their determination to complete the course

Finance played a small but interesting part in participant enrolment decision making, with only a third of the interviewees touching on this subject at all; however, those who did reported a very positive experience. This held true over both the earlier and later interviews. AH was alone in her criticism of the detrimental role she considered finance had played in her enrolment. She based her initial decision to undertake the study on the fee reduction that was offered to participants but later considered that she had acted on the basis of the reduction rather than an all-round considered opinion of how the course met her needs.

But because it was a bit reduced I bought it. AHpd1:43:1

The majority of participants' opinion was that they had been offered an opportunity to enrol in a course in which they were already interested at a slightly lessened cost. They also appeared to highly value the lack of commitment to continue with the course after the first module and this seemed to override the consideration that it was offered at a time that may not have been ideal for them. These two factors appeared to play a key role in the decision making process for a number of the students and participants seemed to consider them to be a generally positive aspect rather than a negative one. The researcher speculates this was in large part due to the study participants having previously expressed interest in the course and may well not have been the case if the original call for study participants had gone to cold rather than pre-warmed leads.

I liked the idea of doing like one module at a time, and of course I liked the idea of a reduction of fees for feedback, that was helpful. CWpd7:312

I can just, you know, as a bit of a taster, see if I like it. SBpd70:62:1

In the majority of cases participants appeared to feel less committed when allowed to take on just one module without any requirement to move on the next one on completion. JA was one of these.

But then when the email came through with the discount I will do the first module, 25% discount and then see how it goes I'd been thinking about doing something, one of the distance courses for quite a while JApd33:46:1

The initial assumption the researcher drew from this is that, as they felt they had committed less money to the course, they would therefore be less motivated to continue if they encountered complications at any point. Conversely, however, this proved not to be the case, with a number of participants stating that it was often the thought of 'wasting' money which kept them studying at a time when their natural inclination was to give up.

I've persevered with it I suppose, because I've spent the money and there's this kind of feeling, well, I've spent £130.00, I ought to do it JLpd24:49:1

I mean I got to the stage where I did think well I just won't bother to finish it and I'm thinking well I paid the money, DWpd11:18:2

The researcher's impression was that, whilst the expenditure for the course was a consideration, it would not, by itself, be the only factor that determined persistence whilst remaining at the present level. However, it was certainly a partial consideration and it may be that this factor would increase exponentially if the reduction were also to increase.

The majority of students appeared to consider that they had committed to undertaking the course and expressed a wish to complete it, although in practise only 7 did so. It is interesting to note that all those who did complete did so in accordance with the 12 weeks' study guidelines and, although a majority of those who did not were very definite that they would do so at a later date, none of them subsequently followed through on this. This suggests that, for some at least, a timeframe had proved useful, with open-ended study proving less effective. Alternately it could be that the time for optimum enthusiasm had by then passed and it was this factor that prohibited completion at a later date.

.....because if you have gone to the trouble to commit to doing the course and to pay the money for doing the course, you are obviously taking it seriously, it is something that is important to you. PH57:126:1

Although PH did go on to complete, several interviewees who expressed a similar sentiment did not. Why this should be the case is unclear when considering the participant data pool on a macro level. Certainly individual participants gave personal reasons for non-completion, which have been reported in the [Timing – Participant time constraints](#) section of this chapter.

When considering the impact of course finance, the question of whether the fee reduction offered to those participating in the study could cause them to enrol before properly reading the course details, as in the case of JL, is of concern. This is especially the case when considering the ethical context, which is further deliberated upon in the [Discussion Chapter](#). However, she was alone in expressing this sentiment. She describes below how she impulsively enrolled before reading properly what the course contained and then later regretted it.

Perhaps I should have researched a little more before I agreed and I will be honest with you, I probably jumped straight into it because I thought, oh, that's a really good opportunity to do it cheaper because it's a research project, I quite impulsively thought, oh yeah, I'd really like to have a go at that but having done that, I now think to myself I should have looked into it more JLpd24:29:1

It is worth noting that, whilst participants suggested in their interviews that the fee reduction played a part in the timing of their enrolment, there is no evidence to suggest this affected the module outcome or whether they subsequently returned work to their tutor for assessment.

Aspiration to do or be something more also appeared to motivate student enrolments. Some, like JC and AH, wanted the qualification as a means of re-training for another job.

I suppose if I am honest, teaching would be.....something that I have had an inkling for a long time. JCpd29:128:1

So that, you know and I thought well if I start this and really like it it would be very good to have a qualification at the end of it. AHpd1:47:1

Others simply wanted to improve their skill levels or prove to themselves that they could study to the required level.

.....self-achievement that I can actually do it. And that I can produce work that is the equivalent to this. Also it is possible that I could use it further along the line to go into adult education CApd6:68:1

I suppose it was because I had sewn all my life.....I have always been very good at the making up, not so good at the designing,..... I don't want to spend the whole of my time using other people's designs. I would like to be able to create something that is mine. JCpd29:116:1

With some it was a mixture of the two, a hope to improve their skills for now and also perhaps have a qualification 'banked' for the future if they should ever need it. This motive was not often mentioned directly by participants, but when it was it had consistently positive participant responses, with little difference between the completers and non-completers in either interview. Many, as below, mentioned that if they achieved completion it would make them feel proud or give them extra confidence.

I think it would give me the confidence to say yes I have got this. JCpd29:128:1

The idea was to actually take my textile work further and to get a qualification at the end to, you know, be proud of, that I'd actually achieved something. JLpd24:29:1

Whilst both JC and JL raised the issue of how they considered the successful completion of the course would boost their confidence, both failed to complete the first module, so it raises a concern if the converse could be true and by failing to complete their confidence has thus been reduced. This in turn raises a possible ethical issue, which is discussed in further detail in the [Discussion Chapter](#).

4.5.2 Persistence - Belief

Belief in themselves appeared to be what made some participants complete at least the module they undertook whilst participating in the study while others failed to achieve this. This aspect is perhaps one of the most challenging areas to comprehend. A fine balance appeared to exist between how much time and effort they had to put into the course versus how much satisfaction and enjoyment they were able to obtain from it in return for their input.

Well I'm determined. I mean I've got a little studio at the back of the garage and I marched out the other day and I said 'It's war you know?' [laughs] but then it's the sense of achievement when you finally think 'I did it, I didn't give in, I struggled with it and I've produced it', there's a great satisfaction then but it doesn't necessarily come easily. CWpd10:115:1

The belief that they would succeed appeared to be much greater in some participants than others and tended to manifest itself early on in the course. Those who completed, exhibited early signs of self-belief and mentioned it frequently during interview; however, those who failed to complete the module did not exhibit the same preoccupation with personal belief. Instead they frequently referenced a series of time constraints, detailed in the chapter section [Timing – Participant time constraints](#), referring to external rather than intrinsic factors. This appeared to be the single largest point of diversion between participant completers and non-completers during the study. In some the aspirations and beliefs, they had brought to the course appeared to play a part; so a desire for a useable qualification could sometimes sustain them in their studies, whereas simply a wish to generally improve their skills may not. However as only 1 participant mentioned this aspect in their initial tutor email response, it would appear that it was an unforeseen aspect that developed over the course duration. It would seem reasonable to suppose that participants' attitudes went through a negative change when they realised they were unlikely to complete the course, whilst conversely those who had progressed well had derived satisfaction and pleasure, which in turn reinforced their self-belief and persistence.

And then I thought no I do want to do it. I want to do this. I want to get the qualification. NHpd50:126:2

However, this was not universally the case and two participants did complete the module they had paid for whilst at the same time stating that they would not continue on to the next.

Some participants appeared to have much greater fortitude than others and, after initially taking a leap of faith and beginning the coursework when they were perhaps still uncertain about what was being asked of them, they were rewarded with achievements above and beyond their expectations. This in turn appeared to add to their determination to continue and foster a belief that they could complete, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of achievement.

This is the thing, you've got to get the balance, haven't you, if you want the individuality and the creativity but it's like learning a language, isn't it, you've got to get the grammar before you can start writing the poetry. CWpd10:129:1

Some, like PH, surprised themselves with their capacity to work consistently and well, especially when working to a timescale.

I think that's a spin off benefit for me, in that having seen that if I buckle down to things and get on with it and not sort of keep putting it on the back burner, I can actually get on with it pretty efficiently PHpd54:82:2

Others found that the concerted effort required of them was beyond their capacity to maintain and gave up on the module, without attempting tutor contact or contact with other students for support.

And as much as I love it, you know, I do love doing this, I suppose really, I haven't got the patience to work out, well what are you asking. I just want to be told, right, do this LWpd41:89:1

In conclusion, this chapter presents the results of the data collection and has offered a window onto the participant's view of their course phenomenon. The support role that tutor, social, and online interaction played in assisting students through their first module has been discussed. The need to bolster confidence levels in order to facilitate a higher rate of course commencement has been identified. The part played by course, tutor and participant timing during the course module and most particularly the participants' frequent failure to fully and realistically engage with planning their available time effectively has been highlighted. Finally, the factors that influence persistence have been discussed and expanded upon and a number of areas for future research highlighted.

The findings presented in this chapter will be further examined in relation to the extant literature in the following discussion chapter.

5 Discussion

In the previous chapter, an account of the participant data pool was given alongside interpretive researcher analysis. Transcript extracts were included in order to illustrate the findings with participants' own words. In line with Smith et al's (2009) suggestions on IPA discussion chapter frameworks, this chapter will place the research within a wider context by engaging in a dialogue between the findings and the extant literature and will evaluate them against the stated study intention to examine the lived experience of students commencing technology enhanced learning, both through a macro and individual lens. It begins by evaluating the study rationale and methodological choice and then moves on to discuss the study's findings within the context of the super ordinate and sub ordinate themes. Finally, it will highlight the areas of most interest within the study findings, along with any arising ethical issues and areas considered appropriate for future study.

5.1 Study Rationale

This research is significant because at the time of writing, although individual studies have made valuable contributions to various individual aspects of data, such as student support (Astin, 1975, Simpson, 2002, Dzakiria, 2008, Gaskell, 2012, Inkelaar and Simpson, 2015), student retention (McGivney, 1996, Martinez, 2001, Rovai, 2008, Boyle et al., 2010), adult learners (Ausburn, 2004, Findsen and McCullough, 2007, Bundaberg, Willans and Seary, 2011), attrition (Tinto, 1975, Woodley and Parlett, 1983, Patterson and McFadden, 2009), cost (Sjogren and Fay, 2002, Simpson, 2008c, Rumble, 2014), emotions (Zembylas, 2008), women specific issues (Machanic, 1998, Daniels, 2010), motivation (Morstain and Smart, 1977, Hoskins and Van Hooff, 2005, Kungu and Machtmes, 2009) and online learning (Coldeway, 1982, Conole and Oliver, 2007, Barefoot, Oliver and Mellar, 2016), none address them in combination. This study discourses;

1. The lived experience of the participants commencing their course
2. A specific demographic: mature, female learners
3. Specific topic area: design and textiles

Whilst prior studies have proved useful in providing background and indicating possible causation for attrition levels, DesignEd courses do have atypical aspects that may cause variation from previous study findings. The distance delivery, mature age group and single sex demographic taken alongside the commercial provision are uncommon in themselves. The technical subject matter and additional design element to the course are also unusual. It became apparent that, whilst forming a similar group as far as age and subject interest were concerned, the study participants had substantially differing education,

aspiration, home and career backgrounds. It has not been possible to find anything comparable in the extant literature to date. Literature searches were conducted using Ebsco, Swetswise and Google Scholar using the search terms; dropout, attrition, retention, design and craft prefixed with distance learning, online learning or technology enhanced learning.

However, it would be incorrect to imply that the course content itself is unique; on the contrary, it is typical of one that would, until a few years ago, have been provided at a local college for part time students attending perhaps one half day or evening a week over a 2-year period. With decreases over the last 10 years or so in funding of vocationally based adult learning in UK FE, technical courses have reduced substantially and have, in many areas, stopped altogether. This scarcity, together with the doubling of private education providers in the UK since 2000 and their increasing utilization of online delivery methods (Simpson, 2009a), which Simpson forecasts will grow 30% over the next few years (Simpson *ibid*) have meant that students who would usually prefer to study by attending a local college have been left with little choice but to move to a TEL (Technology Enhanced Learning) alternative. This research, therefore, has a growing potential audience amongst commercial providers of technical education to adults studying at a distance and will be of interest to those delivering technical qualifications to a mature, female demographic, an increasing and relatively new area of provision.

5.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

The full rationale for choosing IPA as the most appropriate methodology for this study is detailed in the Theoretical/Epistemological section of the [Methodology Chapter](#). After completion of the data collection and results analysis stages of the study, the researcher was satisfied that the methodology chosen was the most apposite for the study aims: briefly, compilation of data from individual learner voice, coding of data into study themes, examination of what data may mean for student retention. The utilisation of IPA methodology scaffolded the collection and collation of phenomena-centric emotions, experiences and viewpoints from participants. This in turn facilitated the extrapolation of a group experience from individual participant data. Whilst personal course experiences were frequently not expressed directly to their tutor, participants were instead enabled to share their experiences with the researcher due to the open-endedness of the IPA interview method employed.

The study had some inherently unusual aspects; for example, the combination of craft and design techniques in this demographic has not to date become the focus of research. However, the concentration on personal experience served to reposition the research

somewhat away from education into motivational theory, in order to consider literature encompassing motivation and behavioural patterns. The super ordinate [Confidence](#) theme and its 3 sub-ordinate themes indicate the substantial effect that self-awareness of their own abilities and confidence levels had for the participants. There are also areas of other themes that indicate motivational theory could be appropriate, such as the participants' abilities to manage their time effectively. Although this was a somewhat unexpected development, it has broadened the scope of the study considerably and added interest and depth to the findings.

5.2.1 Macro Level

Viewing the study at a macro level, it is useful to begin by reporting areas of commonality between the participants. These have been conveyed below in order of chronological progression;

Enrolment

The trigger for enrolment was an interesting area, as it was initially presumed that a link to participant persistence may be forthcoming, however this did not appear to be the case in this study. This is further discussed in the [Persistence](#) section of this chapter.

Pragmatically, the mean study participant, aged 56, may have reached a time when large areas of her life were subject to change; children were no longer young and money concerns not as pressing. However, the 'averaging out' implied by this does not yield enough rich insight to fulfil the brief of this study, therefore a deeper understanding of this is sought. Conversely, younger participants cited home life as a reason for undertaking the course. JC remarks on this;

"I don't work, so home is everything and sometimes as much as you love your children, it is sometimes not quite enough". JSpd15:34:112.

Other participants cited boring or pressurised careers as a reason for distracting themselves with a new course, perhaps thinking that a textile based course would be easy and fun to do, thus providing some light entertainment or diversion rather than adding to their overall life pressures.

My biggest concern about the course is finding the time to do it, my job is very demanding and I only get one clear day a week off". JL Intro.

Rather than necessarily considering their new course to be a positive undertaking and enrolling on it for constructive purposes, it may be that the decision to enrol for some participants more accurately represented a move away from something else in their lives and that their course enrolment may have provided a vehicle for transition into a new area of their life rather than a goal in itself.

Sheehy extended her 1976 research, in which she notes major fluctuation in physical and cognitive confidence as women pass through mid-life crisis; from a lack of confidence in the mid-30s to a feeling of "un-boundedness" in the 40s and beyond (Sheehy, 1976), into women in their 50s and beyond, revealing that college educated working women over 45 do not believe they will be middle-aged until they are 60 and that 90% of professional women say that 50 feels like 'an optimistic, can-do stage of life' (Sheehy, 1995). However, the results of this study suggest that this attitude proved unhelpful when applied to pre-enrolment decision-making and the subsequent adjustment of approach may have caused elevated participant attrition levels. This may translate into a pre-enrolment assumption by participants that they would encounter few difficulties whilst undertaking a textile course; only a small minority undertook further research into the course prior to enrolment in order to ensure they had understood the exact course contents and requirements. Certainly the majority of the participants considered that the course would be well within their skill and capability levels and only two exhibited a marked level of concern regarding their suitability for the course. Unfortunately, this 'un-bounded' approach in the pre-enrolment phase appears to have caused participants to have unrealistically elevated expectations regarding their own skill sets and abilities, thus triggering a realisation post-enrolment that the course would be markedly more challenging than they at first expected and requiring a substantial mental adjustment in order to continue successfully.

All the participants placed substantial emphasis on their eagerness to receive course materials, appearing to reflect the significance the decision to embark on the course had for them. They had been given a specific commencement date for the study and they all appeared to be looking forward to this 'milestone' event. All had been anticipating commencing their course work and had pre-formed conceptions regarding the new experiences and likely outcomes that would result from involvement and eventual completion. Gilbert's (2006) study suggests that people are poor at anticipating what will cause them to be happy or satisfied in the future. The term he uses to describe this phenomenon is *Impact Bias*; it refers to the pre-event assumptions made by the individual regarding their feelings after an anticipated event has occurred. It is typical that the actual effect is substantially less than the anticipated one, thus giving rise to feelings of disappointment and disillusionment (Gilbert *ibid*). It seems probable that some Impact Bias was present in the study participants, given that positivity regarding their course was at its highest in the pre-interview group, but had fallen significantly by the first interview. It appeared that once the initial elation of commencement anticipation and actual commencement has dissipated, participants were left with a feeling of disappointment resulting from their initially inflated expectations. Several comments made during the introductory emails support this theory;

"...so looking forward to starting my City & Guilds adventure". GLB Intro

"I am so excited about starting this course....looking forward to having you as my tutor and working together". MC Intro

"I am so looking forward to getting started and plan to spend time looking at the materials this weekend." KT Intro

However only 1 out of the 3 participants quoted above actually completed the study module, with the remaining 2 non-contactable for interview 2. Aiding students with the effective management of their pre-course expectations proved challenging for both tutor and support staff; however, this is a particularly interesting area for future research.

First Phase

Receiving and first viewing the course materials had a marked psychological impact on the participants and a majority of them shared a subsequent crisis in confidence.

I scan, I just scanned every, I skimmed everything at the beginning just to get a general picture for myself and that really worried me and has been like a big cloud on the horizon. ESpd70:70

"I have now had a chance to read quickly through the course materials, etc. and I have to confess that I have found it all rather daunting and a little scary. I just don't know where to start....I was so looking forward to some new challenges". SH Intro

There appeared to be two phases to this phenomenon; firstly, they received the materials, scanned them quickly and found there was, in their opinion, a substantial amount of reading to do in order to understand what was required of them. The most successful participants began to work through the modules step by step, as PC suggests.

I then picked it up again and read it properly and started getting on with it and my approach has been to do what I generally do with life which is to go, "right, well I can do this bit then and then I've got two weeks when I should be able to do this, this and this and split it up, so kind of timetable it across the summer just to make sure that when I get to the end of a week, I'll have completed something PCpd62:29:1

However, three quarters of the participants put the course materials to one side, promising themselves that they would return to them at a later date. This postponement appeared to lead to a hiatus in course commencement that a number of participants failed to recover from.

I printed it off, read it and then thought, "oh crikey" and put it down for four or five days.62:5:70pc

"...but it took me probably about four weeks to get my head around what I was actually being asked to do and then I had to send Jeanette (tutor) an email which said "Look, do you know what, I'm really struggling" "NHpd 23:30.

Participants' pre-commencement enthusiasm for the course and their pre-conceptions about undertaking it and obtaining a City & Guilds with ease showed itself to be somewhat of a misconception, again providing a fit with Gilberts' Impact Bias theory (Gilbert, *ibid*).

"I wanted the City & Guilds to say that I had the qualification and I thought I'd learn a lot from doing it....but when I actually got it through it said about the art and design thing and I thought 'I can't draw' then there was this terrible fear that went through me and I said "Oh I can't draw. I can't do this". NHpd27:21

After this 14 of the 23 participants failed to regain their initial enthusiasm and it appeared that their motivation had been significantly compromised by their initial reaction to the course materials.

In concluding the macro level review, the most marked issues were; the student's rationale for undertaking the course, the raised expectations prior to commencement and a failure of the majority of participants to fully read or engage with the course materials. After this point experiences did vary considerably, although the individual coding area reviews below will indicate where there was correlation.

5.3 Support

The support code was subdivided into 3 sub themes, as indicated in the [Results](#) chapter; Tutor Support, Social Interaction and Peer Support (via social networking)

5.3.1 Support - Tutor Support

Tutor support was provided in a number of ways to participants during their first course module:

- Email sent from tutor to participant 1 week after course material delivery, welcoming them and requesting an email response in order to develop a relationship.
- Week 2 - first tutor phone call to participant.
- Week 8 - second phone call from tutor to participant.
- Week 12 - feedback for those who had returned work.
- In between phone call contact encouraged by tutor throughout the 12-week study.

This proved to be a substantial area and was therefore subdivided again into 4 smaller areas, namely Nature of Support, Role Conflicts, Interpersonal Issues, Timing of Support.

Nature of Support

A significant minority of participants expressed surprise at the amount of work they were expected to undertake without direct tutor supervision, as well as the self-reliance required in order to achieve this. A number of studies (Daniels, 2010, Manousou and Xartofylaka, 2011) reference this 'shock to the system', especially when transitioning from traditional forms of attended study or no previous study for some time. It may be that students who had not recently undertaken formal education had a preconceived idea of the roles a tutor would undertake and that the old teaching quote regarding teachers being either, traditionally, a 'sage on the stage' or, more recently, a 'guide at the side' had significance in this context. The majority of participants had a number of queries that were not subject related and could possibly have been addressed by an administrator rather than their tutor. Concerns about time lapse when replying to email and what participants described as 'vague' or hard to disseminate tutor response were raised, as was time 'wasted' in trying to understand what was required of them from their course materials. Participants did not generally appear to appreciate that all distance study is self-directed and experiential in nature; instead they preferred to speak with a tutor rather than re-read course materials. The same concern is cited by participants in previous studies (Palazesi, Bower and Schwartz, 2007, Dzakiria, 2008).

Participants on this study experienced a substantially increased interaction level over normal course delivery; researcher as well as increased tutor contacts augmented communication, thus giving participants further opportunity to voice concerns or ask questions. It was made clear to participants from the outset that only their tutor could answer technical questions, but in reality there were only two such queries; the majority of contacts involved administration queries or personal issues. Simpson draws attention to the importance of fund allocation for course material production versus that of quality student support services, clearly suggesting that he considers support services lose out to expensive multi-media course delivery and production methods (Simpson, 2002). He advocates front loaded tutor support as the best means of achieving maximum retention, citing a UKOU study's findings that a single phone call prior to the course commencement averaged a 5% improvement in retention (Simpson, 2006), which he estimates may represent around a third of the possible retention impact that institutional activity alone is able to achieve (Simpson, 2008e). It is worth noting that during a normal DesignEd course process, students would not benefit from this extra contact, thus suggesting they would experience elevated feelings of disenfranchisement. However, it is interesting to note that the levels of completion for study participants were no greater than historical student retention levels for DesignEd, so whilst communication was substantially increased, it does not appear to have directly impacted completion rates. This contrasts with Simpson's (2008b) assertion that during a course module he could make as much as a 25%

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difference to retention by employing a pro-active series of emails and phone calls. It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that the difference in retention between the UKOU and DesignEd courses originates from either the student demographic or the subject matter, or another as yet unknown factor.

Role Conflicts

The implication derived from collected data is that a representative of DesignEd (other than the course tutor) may be able to deal effectively with the majority of participant's concerns regarding initial choice and course management. A course administrator, councillor or peer mentor may be as well or even better placed to aid students with these ancillary issues; especially as participants expressed apprehension regarding expressing views pertaining to their tutor or course which could be perceived as negative. Their concern was that this could affect their relationship with her and perhaps in turn be reflected in their course assessment/feedback. Simpson (2002) also speculates that an equivalent effect could be achieved by support staff instead of tutor contact, so that any personality clashes are minimised. Certainly that proved to be the case for this study, with participants welcoming contacts from either the researcher or the tutor, so there is every reason to suppose that an administrator could take the researchers' place during a normal course cycle. Thus participant confidence is supported by removing their worry regarding expressing views concerning their tutor directly to her and also by increasing the extent to which their relationship with their tutor is not their only contact with the provider, thus providing a greater impression of learner autonomy. Currently, whilst this approach is more frequently found in higher degrees, it is infrequently employed at FE level. The UKOU has in the past piloted personal advisors to provide continuity of student support throughout course life, however this project was largely curtailed due to cost considerations (Gaskell, 2012).

Interpersonal Issues

One participant cited the course tutor as too brusque, whilst others that commented on this area found her approach appropriate for them. She appeared to be perceived as 'business-like', which may have meant that participants were given minimal opportunities for voicing some of their peripheral concerns to her. From an organisational perspective her approach worked well, as phone calls were to the point and did not over-run; this in turn meant participants benefitted from punctual pre-arranged phone calls and direct responses. However, tutor/student personality preference and mix did prove challenging, especially as this small provider had limited numbers of available assessors. Whilst the majority of literature broadly agrees that the tutor/student relationship plays a central part

in student success (Chickering and Gamson, 1991, Sjogren and Fay, 2002, Sulcic, 2010), this is unfortunately the relationship most side-lined when undertaking distance study, as regular contact and interaction can often be compromised.

Clearly there will not be a perfect match for each student and some student/tutor relationships may develop as difficult or strained. A good tutor/student relationship and the positive effects it can have on students has been previously documented by Smith (2011), who calls attention to the importance of the tutor in reducing the number of 'negative relational features' resulting from the dual channel tutor roles of critical friend and assessor. Tutor roles will always necessitate constructive criticism of student work but conversely also entail the bestowing of positive support and encouragement where and when appropriate. This is generally referred to as 'feeding forward', which Manning and Wilmslow (Manning and Wilmshurst, 2013) describe thus ;

"Students engage in a first attempt at an assessment item, receive feedback from tutors and then use their increased understanding of criteria and relevant standards to tackle the subsequent summative piece, which usually carries greater weight." (Manning, M., Wilmshurst ibid)

Stone, Patton and Heen's (1999) 'identity conversation' theory speculates that a difficult conversation regarding an aspect of work can negatively impact self-image or self-esteem; a link is forged between negative feedback regarding work and the recipient's value as a human being. They suggest that whilst some individuals will instinctively learn to negotiate these necessary conversations in a more constructive manner, others may require help in order to do so. This concurs with the experiences of this study's participants, some of who negotiated the relationship with their tutor well, whilst others exhibited a greater degree of difficulty. It may also be that participants would benefit from post-enrolment reassurances that feedback they receive from tutors will inevitably contain some constructive criticism of their work. West (2011) suggests that this is particularly important in the case of female learners who, if the feedback is received electronically, may struggle more with computer mediated communication than men.

Timing of Support

Simpson (2010) suggests that proactive support employing tutor-signed email templates sent on behalf of individual tutors had a positive retention effect (varying from 3% to 20% depending on the calculation used). However, he emphasises the importance of front-loading this method of communication in the period of time immediately after commencement in order to ensure the retention effect is maximised. Timing of tutor support also appeared to be important to study participants; a number stated that the frequency of contact was unsatisfactory and considered that they required supplementary

contacts. Despite being encouraged by their tutor to instigate extra contacts if and when they considered them necessary, the majority of participants failed to do this. Contact initiated by their tutor was perceived to be of greater value to participants than self-instigated contact; the researcher speculates this could be related to a perceived degradation of power or confidence when feeling forced to seek help. Whatever the reason behind the reluctance of the participants to get in touch to request tutor support, the lack of personalized contact timing was cited by a substantial minority of students as having a detrimental effect on their impetus to continue with course-work. A normalizing of this contact balance could, perhaps, be attempted by requiring students to initiate contact more frequently with their tutor as part of their course requirements, perhaps by submitting a weekly diary or another activity which would illustrate current state of mind, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2007).

Problems relating to the interpretation of course materials, which are discussed in detail later in this chapter in the section [Confidence – self-assurance/reliance](#) may also be linked to the timing of tutor support; a majority of participants expressed the belief that without appropriately timed and articulated tutor guidance they may be 'wasting time' trying different approaches and methods. The timing for tutor contact will always be specific to the individual and will vary according to progress, so no 'fit all' pre-determined timescale would be appropriate. A minority of participants considered that experiential learning would aid them in developing into more autonomous learners; they instead appeared to feel irritated that it may cause them to undertake more work than was strictly necessary for the course requirements and expressed a preference instead to be directly told what to do, as in a taught class situation, rather than spend time experimenting on their own. Conversely, a minority of students actively enjoyed this freedom to experiment and stated they had found it to be challenging but worthwhile, helping them to develop into more confident learners (Kolb, 1984). Briggs Myers (1995), in her seminal psychometric testing methods examining personality typing, classifies the first approach as a 'thinker' approach: thinkers need to know what sort of results they are required to get before commencement of a task or project and need to have the situation explained to them in terms of a set of logical points or progressions. Prior knowledge of student personality type or learner type (Morstain and Smart, 1977) would prove useful to a tutor in facilitating the most appropriate individualized approach for students; however pragmatically, it is difficult to envisage students agreeing to be routinely tested in this way prior to course commencement.

5.3.2 Support - Social Interaction

In the context of this study, social interaction refers to face-to-face interactions with other like-minded individuals that do not form a mandatory part of the course. Of those who commented on this area, 9 of the participants could be described as reluctant distance learners, meaning that they could not find the course they wanted locally and therefore had to either enrol on a different course or study via TEL if they wished to engage in further learning in their textile topic. The majority of participants valued social interaction and believed that the social aspects of attended learning played an important part in their continuing course engagement. Post enrolment, participants frequently expressed concern about how this aspect of their course could be replicated or replaced when studying at a distance and mentioned their apprehension regarding possible feeling of isolations during the study process. Social integration is one of the most frequently cited aspects in persistence (Park and Choi, 2009, West, 2011). However, when considering this aspect of their course, study participants frequently drew on their previous leisure course experience and failed to take into consideration the constraints formative and summative qualification assessment places upon tutor, provider and student.

Participants frequently attempted to draw comparisons of themselves in relation to others, estimating both positive and negative attributes. This self-benchmarking activity was extraneous to the course but was actively sought out by majority of participants in order to identify their progress against that of others. The small minority who refrained had better overall coursework, seemed generally more autonomous learners and had elevated persistence levels: however, as the number in this sub-set was so small (less than 3), any inference is tenuous at best. These findings certainly concur with Schwartz (2004), who refers to 'upwards' and 'downwards' comparisons with others in a similar sphere of existence; the former tend to engender jealousy and lower our self-esteem, whilst the latter boost mood and bolster esteem. It is possible that circumvention of the more negative aspects of student compulsion to seek self-comparison may be achieved by the provision of a regulated space and time for this to occur as part of a participant's course activities. This aspect appears to be heightened because of the artistic nature of the course, as students are encouraged to develop their own individual style, rather than solely meeting a set of criteria. According to Festinger's (Dijkstra et al., 2008) theory of social comparison, although individuals prefer to evaluate themselves using objective and non-social standards, nevertheless they will still fall back on comparison with others when such objective information is unavailable. This appears to describe succinctly the situation participants encountered in the study, as the usual classroom situation for discrete comparison with others is removed from the learning experience. Dijkstra et al (*ibid*) suggest that adult learners have three reasons for comparing themselves with others; self-

evaluation, self-enhancement, and self-improvement, an aspect of learner behaviour which appears to be more pronounced in female learners.

However, a small sub-set of successful learners did not attempt to seek out these benchmarking activities within local groups or classes and the marked difference in these two approaches suggests that either the absence of a social aspect to learning has a more marked effect on certain participants or that this was the area they considered as having the largest divergence from traditional learning and was therefore the most likely for them to comment on. The researcher speculates that this aspect would vary substantially depending upon the type of social interaction participants engaged in.

5.3.3 Support - Online Interaction

Whilst the above section, Social Interaction, refers to the amount of preferred contact with others during study, Online interaction specifically references Facebook interactions (this being the only online interaction contact participants encountered during the study) with others on the same course.

Peer tutoring, is one way of making an active, socially constructive contribution to knowledge acquisition. It is also amongst the most cost effective means of providing support to students and has been found to be beneficial (Verba, 1998, Topping, 2005) when organized well and thoughtfully. An increase in distance learning provision inevitably leads to more staff time spent on individual tutoring as well as course development and maintenance. This is predominantly due to the extended classroom model being followed; personalized tutor feedback in written format is more time consuming than FTF tuition. Part of the answer to this problem may be a move away from extended classroom models towards a distributed learning approach, thus increasing empowerment for students and easing time pressure on tutors. However a model has yet to be demonstrated as successfully implemented (Van Rosmalen et al., 2008, Croft, Dalton and Grant, 2011), with part of the challenge appearing to lie in implementing this as a compulsory course requirement, effectively forcing students to interact with peers in a somewhat false situation.

For this study, the participants were divided into 2 groups, one of which was informed that Facebook membership and interaction was a mandatory part of the first module requirements; a closed group was formed expressly for this purpose and participants were given basic instructions on its use. The course required they introduce themselves to the group and subsequently post photographs of their first design exercises to the group. The second half were given details of a general DesignEd Facebook support group to join on a voluntary basis; this was extracurricular comparable with what would constitute part of the

normal course induction process for DesignEd. The first group were generally unimpressed with their Facebook experience, citing falseness in interactions, lack of other participants posting or individuals over-posting as negative aspects. Several papers have cited the challenges of collaborative learning and its impact upon sufferers of SAD (social anxiety disorder) which affects 13% of the population, when encouraging group learning (Hopper, 2003, Ke and Carr-Chellman, 2006). It is thought that this phenomenon may also extend to online learning environments, although there is insufficient data at this time to support this theory (Hopper *ibid*). Participants also expressed concern regarding the possibility of plagiarism when sharing their work with others, this despite the group being closed to all but fellow study participants. Over 50% of this group were not previous FB users; they found setting up an account and other technical aspects challenging. It became clear that this put them at a disadvantage when attempting to foster social interactions with others in this particular environment. DesignEd has previously experimented with a variety of other platforms, such as Blogger in an attempt to make the apparent IT challenges involved easier for participants with mixed results; it would appear that the success of a group depends mainly upon the character mix of the individual members rather than the platform used. In the second group just under 40% were regular FB users, but only a small minority took up the invitation to join the general DesignEd group. A majority of members of the second group expressed concern that they may have missed out on social aspects of their course by not being a member of the first group; the implication is that online interaction is seen as initially desirable to students, but the actuality falls short of their expectations.

Research undertaken for the UK Higher Education Academy Retention Grants Briefing Programme, (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2010) outlined a number of key areas relating to student retention and progression. One of these key areas was “use of social networking tools such as Facebook to help social and academic integration” (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2010). However this view is contentious and by no means generally held; studies have emerged that offer contradictory findings to the prevailing opinion that social interaction with one’s peers is necessarily helpful to distance learners (Smith, 2010, Poellhuber, Roy and Anderson, 2011). The findings of this study supported the view that peer contact is seen as desirable, however participants appeared to view it as a poor substitute for face to face meetings with their classmates.

Learners, who confront collaborative learning that requires them to learn the content among peers without traditional instruction, may experience an imbalance between their beliefs and the demands of new learning expectations (Smith, 2010)

The utilization of social networking sites such as Facebook is divisive within the existing literature, with some studies finding this method of online interaction to be helpful in

retaining students and others not. Poellhuber et al (2011) differentiate this issue by considering the methods by which students study;

“a significant portion of distance students are interested in collaborating with peers, but that there is also a significant proportion of self-paced distance education students who are not” (Poellhuber, Roy and Anderson, 2011).

Poellhuber et al's (*ibid*) study also concluded that interest in collaboration with other students via the use of social media increased with age, but that the interest was not matched by experience in using social media, thus leading to speculation that it may be the idea of collaboration that appealed rather than the method of doing so, which concurs with this study's findings. Women and older students were the least likely to wish to collaborate with their peers.

During this study netiquette became an issue, with some group 2 participants overloading their peer FB group with multiple postings in order to fulfil course requirements. Also, several ill-considered or inappropriate posts and responses caused annoyance. This aspect of the study challenges educational provider models, as it requires personalized programme compilation to deal with the individual effectively. Wegerif (1998) suggests that a 'warming up' phase could be built into the course so that students are able to acclimatize to the course structure as well as communication style, online personalities, level of commitment and learn how to develop a presentation of 'self', however it is challenging to see how this could be made to work on a pragmatic level. Whilst FB may well take a greater precedence in the future as more students use it with increased frequency, it was not a successful method of providing online interaction during this study, as demonstrated by the [Online Interaction](#) area within the [Results](#) chapter. The positivity and skill sets required to nurture themselves and other group members in an environment such as Facebook appeared to be absent in majority of the study participants (Sivakumaran and Lux, 2011). Moreover, other considerations for the use of Facebook include data protection issues that mean providers can have difficulties balancing a perceived need for social contact between their students with that of revealing personal details to allow this contact to take place. Unwillingness of tutors to become 'friends' with students via the Facebook experience was also highlighted.

“Many instructors are not interested in this exposure and prefer not to share their personal lives with the students. Many students too are not interested in this exposure; they prefer a separation between learning space and social space. In light of these findings, it seems that Facebook is not a suitable environment for formal learning activities that require instructor-student interaction”(Madge et al., 2009)

A British study by Selwyn (2009) considering educational use of Facebook revealed that only 4% of the content posted by students contained study related materials. It also found

that Facebook appeared to serve as a channel for expressing difficulties centered on their course, to gain moral support from friends and for sharing humor relating to their course experiences, although this study did not find even that level of social contact to be forthcoming among participants.

Throughout the Support theme, the differing facets of the tutor/student and student/student support roles provide important insights into the participant relationships. To summarize, increased contact with both tutor and peers seems to be valued more by some than others. Whether FB is an appropriate means of facilitating contact between students is by no means certain; it certainly did not prove popular during this study, however a majority of participants did express their preference for some form of increased peer and tutor contact. Increased contact with tutors proved to be time sensitive and a student led method for determining optimum contact timing needs to be formulated to achieve success. A further method needs to be evolved which expedites contact with peers for those who wish for it, but does not place undue pressure onto those who do not. However, if this contact also means students are required to familiarize themselves with the communication mode demanded, then success may be predicated upon them being able to do this effectively.

To conclude this super-ordinate theme, support proved a contentious issue with personal support requirements i.e. the timing, amount and method of support, varying substantially between participants. Participants' mainly positive pre-commencement impressions of online interaction and face-to-face interaction appeared not to be generally substantiated by the study findings

5.4 Confidence

The three Confidence sub-ordinate themes are:

- Perception of ability; Student's concerns about whether their own abilities in a number of areas are sufficient for the course, namely IT/Digital skills, Study Skills and Subject Specific skills, extrapolated further into Design Skills and Craft Skills. A sub code emerged here, which was titled Creativity.
- Physical or cognitive confidence; Student concerns about their personal attributes such as ability to apply themselves to the course, perseverance, age, intelligence. This area refers to the participants' perception of themselves rather than the actuality of their skill levels.
- Self-Assurance/Reliance; references the participants' ability to correctly interpret the course materials and trust their own abilities when carrying out actions.

5.4.1 Confidence - Perception of ability

Along with physical or cognitive confidence, perception of ability was the area most remarked on by participants when responding to tutor introduction emails. It dropped substantially in the majority of participants during the 4-week period between tutor introduction email responses and the conducting of the first interview. Participants frequently commented on their self-perceived lack of ability to undertake certain tasks or their possession of certain skill sets. This is further discussed in the [Perception of ability](#) section of the [Results](#) chapter. Some participants were very condemning of themselves and frequently cited their lack of skills and abilities as a reason for non-progression of their coursework, thus, it may be argued, further diminishing their perception of their own abilities and confidence through negative repetition.

It should be stressed that this was self-diagnosed, not corroborated by their assessor, as no course work had been returned at this juncture. JL comments;

"I don't think I've got the skill in the art side to do it.....I really don't know enough to do it well enough". JLpd12:047

There was a strong correlation between the participants who used the most negative terms when describing their own skills and abilities and the failure to submit any coursework to their assessor. This was generally contrary to their pre-course view that they would encounter no problems whilst undertaking the module; only a small minority had called their ability or skill sets into question prior to commencement. Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013) suggest that this combination of over-appreciating innate differences and under-appreciating the roles of effort and practice can lead individuals to assume that there are certain limits on what they can learn, resulting in an underestimation of their own capacity to learn, which appeared to be the case with this study's participants. Carlesmith and Festinger's (1959) study illustrates Leon Festinger's 1957 original theory of cognitive dissonance, later expanded upon by Aronson and Travis (2007). According to Festinger, as individuals we hold many beliefs about the world and also about ourselves; if some aspect of these belief sets clash, then a discrepancy is evoked, resulting in a state of tension known as cognitive dissonance. As the experience of dissonance is unpleasant, we are motivated to reduce or eliminate it, thus restoring consistency. We can do this by either changing our latest belief or reviewing our original belief. Which action we choose depends upon our personality type and the path we consider to be the least costly to our self-esteem. It may, therefore be argued that whilst being placed in a position where we have to re-evaluate our skills and abilities in the light of a new phenomenon (the course), some participants will conclude the course is at fault and their initial high impression of their skills and abilities was correct. Others will draw the opposite conclusion and may

become de-motivated by their newly formed belief. Older students appeared to have a greater level of concern regarding their existing skill levels (predominantly in digital literacy and design), perhaps because they are especially conscious of a possible lack of IT skills or a longer time away from a formal learning environment. However, Steel (2007) found that older adults procrastinate less; presumably this is as a result of repeated practise at time management, although that was not found to be the case during this study. Micari and Drane's (2011) study found that students who had reduced belief in their own ability to succeed felt less comfortable and more concerned about how they compared with others; this effect was slightly elevated among female participants.

Creativity

This is a particular area of Perception of ability that caused consternation amongst participants. It is also a very under researched area, so finding extant literature to use for comparison proved difficult. A minority of participants considered that this was not what they had expected from a textile course; they had assumed it would consist only of sewing and were unnerved when they realised they had to undertake design work on which to base their samples. This may indicate that they had failed to read even a basic course description prior to enrolment.

“you know, I, just doing all the drawing, I mean doing loads and loads of drawing is not what I expected a textile course to be”. JLpd12:033

Although taking a more creative approach to textiles and the creation of unique designs was frequently mentioned as a reason for undertaking the course, art and design based tasks caused particular consternation and doubt in self-ability in a majority of participants.

“I mean I’m not very good, well I never do design my own stuff, I usually use someone else’s patterns for my patchwork”. ESpd9:54

“I had nothing about the art side of it, as it were, and therefore found that side of it quite daunting and difficult”. JLpd12:019

Huber et al (2012) suggests three components of creativity exist: domain relevant experience, creativity relevant skills, and motivation. It appeared that, for a majority of the participants, all of these three components might have been missing upon commencement of study. Even those who had read the course description, were expecting to undertake design work and whose stated aim was to produce unique patchwork items featuring their own designs, appeared to consider that this could happen without any practice or application on their behalf. LW sums up the prevailing attitude;

“I suppose really, I haven’t got the patience to work out, well, what are you asking. I just want to be told, right, do this, do this, do this and then develop whatever design

*comes from that, rather than have to think well, what are they asking, I don't know".
LWpd21:089*

Amabile and Pillimar's (2012) research indicates that whilst some degree of creative personality components need to be present in an individual, the intrinsically motivated state is conducive to creativity, whereas the extrinsically motivated state is detrimental to it. This appears to be a very determinist position, suggesting educational providers or tutors can do little to advance art or design students. However, it is consistent with the traditional view of art/design as an innate talent rather than a learned skill. Whilst attitudes to creativity and design are gradually changing, impressions from last few decades of the 20th century generally are:

*"Creativity is a quality of the person; most people lack that quality; people who possess the quality—geniuses—are different from everyone else, in talent and personality". (Amabile, T & Pillimar *ibid*).*

Participant JL comments that she knows she does not have art skills and considers *"completing the art side of it is just a flipping pain and an aggravation at the moment"* JLpd12:088

Participants' appeared to fear ridicule when asked to share their design work with others. They worried that their attempts to paint or draw may appear childish or inept to others and generally did not view art and design as a skill that could be learnt and improved upon through practise, so therefore exhibited elevated levels of concern regarding this aspect of the course. This was especially true of those who were required to post their design work to FB as a mandatory part of their course. This is discussed further in the [Social interaction](#) section of this chapter. Conversely, the small minority of participants who came to the course with an art or design background did not appear to feel the same levels of concern or inadequacy when acquiring quilting skills, so it would appear that the creative aspect of the course was perceived by participants to centre upon the design section and not in the technical skill requirements.

5.4.2 Confidence - Physical or cognitive confidence

Low physical or cognitive confidence in relation to coursework was apparent in the majority of participants, with a minority of notable exceptions. A number of the non-completing participants' pre and immediately post enrolment contacts appeared to indicate moderate to high confidence levels, consistent with Sheehy's (1976) theory of older women's feelings of un-boundedness and also Gilbert's (2006) theory of impact bias. However, when they received their course materials, the realisation that they would not find progression as rapid or simplistic as previously anticipated appeared to create a tension between what they believed pre and post commencement. ES described it as a

real worry and like "*a big cloud on the horizon*" ESpd8:070. Some participants reacted by placing the blame on the course materials, tutor or course provider, which was congruent with Maurer's (2006) study that highlights links between cognitive dissonance and student course evaluations. He theorizes that 'shifting the blame' onto the tutor or provider in this way has the effect of restoring self-esteem. Other participants solved the dissonance by blaming themselves for undertaking the course in the first instance and failing to anticipate the amount of work required; it may be that it was easier to renounce the course straight away rather than invest extra time upgrading existing skills and knowledge in order to continue with the course and prove their original ideas correct. One or two did undertake this 'upgrading' of skills and knowledge, but generally only if their personal stakes were very high, meaning that they considered they had a substantial amount to lose if they failed to 'up-skill' and thereby could not progress on the course. Whilst this loss could be financial, it was more likely to be an extrinsic loss of face (perhaps with family or friends) or an intrinsic drop of self-confidence. Hollitcher (1947) suggests the motivation for students who undertake this upgrading of their skill-sets in order to complete their coursework may be explained by the existence of a very active superego in that individual, thus making failing their course inconsistent with their high self-esteem levels. Alternatively, it could simply be that the participant had a more realistic view of what the course would entail prior to enrolment, so accepted in advance that they would need to up-skill in order to complete their coursework. However, the apparent decline in physical or cognitive confidence immediately after the delivery of course materials does flag up a possible cause for concern about the accuracy of pre-course information and the participants' engagement and understanding of it.

It appeared that for certain participants even a slight degree of uncertainty gave them a rationale not to commence course work straight away. When their tutor told them not to concern themselves about being too prescriptive or exacting in their interpretation of the instructions, they appeared to exhibit even greater levels of doubt. Far from relishing the freedom and opportunity for experiential learning, this creativity requirement appeared to cause a continuing lack of confidence in their own decision making process. This could be attributed to the same rationale that Amabile and Pillimar (2012) proffer for general creative motivation, namely that intrinsic motivation provides the best results; however a majority of the participants appeared to rely on extrinsic motivation provided by either course materials, tutor or time pressures, which are imposed from an external source and do not require as great a creative input from the participants.

5.4.3 Confidence - Self-assurance/reliance

Some methods of accessing and on-going referral to course materials appeared to be

more successful than others, with those who printed off materials to have them constantly to hand appearing to reap most benefit. One or two participants made false starts because they had apparently failed to fully read or perhaps understand the course instructions. This aspect was noted by the course tutor, who commented upon the small but significant number of participants she spoke with who appeared not to know many of the course requirements covered in their course materials. This seemed to lead to participant concern over their understanding of what was required and in turn caused them to question their self-assurance and ability to rely on their own interpretation of course materials. Even slight deviation from what was asked for within the course materials tended to cause concerns regarding the production of 'misdirected' work, which was generally viewed by the participants as a waste of their time rather than as a natural part of experiential learning. Errors and mistakes are typically viewed by students as something to be avoided during the learning process, however Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013) suggest that making errors appears to create opportunities for learning, introducing desirable difficulties for students to overcome and learn from. Conversely, they also suggest that manipulations to learning materials and situations intended to eliminate the possibility of student error and help students learn within their comfort zone without feeling challenged can often eliminate learning altogether. In this study, if the participants perceived work as being undertaken unnecessarily, it appeared to impact upon their self-assurance levels and caused annoyance, both with themselves and the course/tutor. They subsequently felt they could not rely on their own interpretation of materials and began to lose self-assurance. This situation was often exacerbated by a failure to get in touch with their tutor if they required clarification. This suggests a lack of self-knowledge from participants about how they learn best and also a lack of explanation from DesignEd about what to expect when undertaking study.

Course material design is a vast area of research in its own right, which generally falls outside the scope of this study. However, it is worthwhile flagging up that differences in student demographic are cited as a particular point of disparity, especially when considering the gender divide. Lee (2002) tells us that "*it is a very recent phenomenon for gender differences to receive attention in the cyber learning environment*", but finds that there are three gender issues present in the existing literature: first, the styles, purposes, and dynamics of social interactions; second, motivational factors; and third, the styles and frequencies of expression and discussion. Her findings imply that significant gender differences exist within contextual encoding as well as the ability to express feelings and ideas online. She calls for further research to explain the apparent gender disparity.

“The results of the current study have implications for instructional design and research which might respond to learning strategies in favour of both genders. Instructional interventions should be considered to overcome potentially negative impacts of the cyber environment on specific genders” (Lee, 2002).

Chapnick (2005) also concurs that presentational choice is (or should be) affected by the sex, age and interests of the student in order to ensure an emotional connection with the materials. For example, a predominately young, male audience may respond to action adventure type of presentation, perhaps using a format that follows a popular computer game.

This raises the possibility that this study’s participant demographic (older, female learners) may have failed to fully read or engage with the course materials because an inherent issue exists within the course materials themselves; were they appropriate for purpose and for the participant demographic? Why were they not comprehensively viewed and subsequently engaged with more thoroughly by the study participants? The materials themselves are around 4 years old and were assembled using contemporary guidelines for engaging female learners. An inspirational story runs through each module to keep the reader positive and motivated, colours and icons are used to indicate what the student should be doing in a particular area, motivational quotes and checklists for tasks are included along with many images of previous student work and diagrams for techniques. A course book that offers step-by-step technique detail is also included with the course. City & Guilds examiners endorse them and, when asked, students give them a high approval rating. This appears to indicate an ambiguity between the way participants initially rate and then subsequently interact with the course materials during their course module. This remains a contentious area of research, with some data suggesting that difficulty with course material interpretation may be gender (Lim and Kim, 2003, Ausburn, 2004) or learning style related (Coffield et al., 2009) or that materials may require matching to individual students (Pashler et al., 2009). Further investigation has been called for into learning styles (referencing specifically the Visual-Auditory-Kinesthetic (Barbe, Swassing and Milone, 1979) learning styles model) and of the role they play within distance/online learning, but at present this remains an area of substantial divergence (Machanic, 1998, Rovai and Baker, 2005, Zembylas, 2008, Pashler et al., 2009) within existing literature and is outside the remit of this study.

Whilst it may initially appear that DesignEd should attempt to make the learning process (especially the art content) easier for students, according to Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013) that assumption may be erroneous. They suggest that it can be counterproductive to assume that learning can be, and should be, easy. Early reading and substantial engagement with course materials appeared key to on-going success. A minority of

students engaged well at an early stage with their course materials, to the extent that they were able to produce a schedule of work and allocate their available time appropriately. It may be that this activity allowed for contemplation of the required tasks, thus permitting them to visualize themselves performing them and thereby subsequently aiding completion. Those who allowed a time contingency within their planning activities were also more likely to keep to their schedule and eventually submit work. Ironically, this planning activity required both physical and cognitive confidence to initiate, so it may be speculated that participants' lack of self-assurance when planning their own course activity schedule could be at least partially due to a lack of confidence in their own abilities to do so effectively.

Finally, a very small minority of participants overcame any possible difficulties by refusing to concern or worry themselves regarding the course requirements. These learners had personal interest in the coursework, but no financial or qualification anxieties. The main area of concern mentioned by participants was the length of the course materials, so there may be an argument for shortening the modules in order to retain their interest. If confidence is the main barrier to complete engagement, it may be that shortening just the first module in order to gain student trust and sure up initial confidence for commencement could be an appropriate tactic.

To conclude this section on the Confidence super ordinate theme, it appears that a strong correlation exists between participant perceived ability levels prior to course commencement and their subsequent confidence when carrying out course work tasks and planning effectively. Self-assurance and self-reliance can facilitate progress and culminate in the production of timely and appropriate course work. Participants who substantially vocalized their under confidence generally did not progress to submission. It is of concern that this may impact adversely on their future confidence levels, perhaps especially when considering further training or educational opportunities. Simpson (2010b) raises concerns over the long term impact of course failure on students, citing the following as challenging areas in non-completing university students; higher chances of suffering depression, (for women) higher chances of experiencing violence from their partners, higher chances of an increased body mass index and therefore higher chances of physical ill-health, (for men) higher chances of not working (and thus indebtedness, due in part to lower chances of paying back their student loans). A particularly interesting aspect of Simpson's observations is that whilst some of the above may be expected when drawing comparisons with completed graduates, it was also true when a comparison was drawn with those of a similar educational background who had not gone to university, thus inferring a specific link between dropout from any educational opportunity and the ill

effects listed above. Whilst this does not necessarily imply causality; it does serve to highlight that there is more at stake for students when undertaking a course than simply the achievement of a qualification. If course failure is indeed at fault, then further research is needed regarding what elements of the provision may be to blame. An ethical issue also arises for the provider regarding the appropriateness of enrolling learners who would be particularly vulnerable to dropout and if steps should be taken to prevent the enrolment of unsuitable candidates.

5.5 Timing

This section covers the difficulties participants experienced in allocating their available time advantageously. Also, and perhaps most interestingly, it discusses the part that timing appeared to play in the completion of their coursework and in the enjoyment of their course experience. The study set participants a recommended timescale of 12 weeks from receiving their course materials to sending work to their tutor. It was emphasised that whilst this was the recommended timescale for completion, if they over-ran this they could still continue with the course if they so wished, however data collection would not continue past the 12-week study timeframe. The super-ordinate theme of Timing, had three subordinate themes, namely Course Timeframe, Participant Time Constraints and Tutor Time Constraints.

- Course timeframe references the participant commencement point and what effect it appeared to have on their course experience and continuity.
- Participant time constraints examines the variety of reasons participants proffered for non-commencement, non-progression or non-completion.
- Tutor time constraints reviews to any time sensitive actions taken by the Tutor and the affect they may have had on participants.

5.5.1 Timing - Course timeframe

Participants placed substantial emphasis on their course commencement date and many exhibited a need to benchmark their progress against that of others, as referenced in the [Confidence](#) section of this chapter. Participants appeared to exhibit a lack of self-efficacy when planning course activities manifesting either in no planning activity at all, a lack of cognition about how long tasks would take or a failure to meet planning goals when set. In addition to self-efficacy failure it may also be that a privation of engagement with their coursework caused participants to falter, exhibited by a lack of knowledge of course material content or a concern regarding their interpretation of them. This highlighted concerns regarding on-going participant procrastination and their apparent lack of efficacy when attempting to establish effective time management practices. The findings of this

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study correlate well with those of Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013), who suggest that to become sophisticated and effective as a learner requires the ability to accurately assess the state of one's learning, which is often less simple than it may appear. Learners can be mistaken about their self-perceived achievements and can also have mistaken beliefs about which activities are and are not effective for learning. This includes estimating the type of learning required and the time it should take, which majority of participants appeared to struggle with throughout the study.

The term 'student syndrome' refers to the phenomenon where a student will only begin to fully apply themselves to a task immediately before a deadline. Ariely and Wertenbroch's study results indicate that many students are aware of procrastination and respond by attempting to set deadlines long before the date for which the task is due. Whilst these self-imposed 'internal' deadlines do correlate with better performance than without any deadline at all, their findings suggest that performance is benefited by evenly spaced, external deadlines. Students were shown to have difficulties setting self-imposed deadlines, with results suggesting a lack of optimal spacing prior to the due date (Ariely and Wertenbroch, 2002). Further reasons cited for student procrastination include fear of failure, perfectionist expectations and other activities that may take precedence over their studies. Procrastination is a result of personality types and traits, so this may explain that while a majority of participants did not complete their coursework, those who did complete but resented the perceived pressure placed upon them to do so, decided not to continue with the course. There may also have been financial considerations too, which are discussed in the [Motivation Persistence](#) section.

Long-time elapses in-between engaging in course related activities was also cited by some students as counter-productive; they considered that this caused them to spend extra time re-familiarising themselves with course materials and thereby caused loss of impetus and enthusiasm. Whilst the majority of participants considered a pre-set modular timeframe to be beneficial and said they believed that it assisted them in time planning so as not to leave their study time open-ended, this conviction did not appear to translate into participant behaviour, as even with a time-scale in place, the majority still failed to submit work. Whilst in the minority, several participants developed and put into place relatively sophisticated planning strategies to help them keep on track. These findings do not correlate with Schraw et al's (2007) study, where participants unanimously reported a high level of satisfaction and achievement during the last 2 weeks of their course, in part, we are told, because they accomplished a great deal of work in a short period of time. Not all participants mentioned timetabling or division of coursework, so whilst it is possible that

those who did not could have experienced this 'completion euphoria' without remarking on it, it seems unlikely.

5.5.2 Timing - Participant time constraints

This section contributed by far the largest amount of raw participant data collected for the study, as it contained details of participant's personal rationale for non-completion of course requirements. It is also traditionally the area that course providers find most challenging to impact, other than perhaps in the provision of support for the development of appropriate time management strategies.

The majority of participants considered they had chosen a less than ideal time to start their course; something had occurred during the 12 week suggested timeframe that had either caused them to 'false start' or in some other way caused a hiatus or complete halt in course-work progression. Most common time constraints were work, children, holidays and illness, as might be expected.

A phenomena called self-serving bias (also known as self-serving attributional bias), suggests individuals attribute their success to internal or personal factors but, conversely, attribute their failures to external or situational issues (Campbell and Sedikides, 1999). Campbell and Sedikides (ibid) indicate that individuals with high and low self-esteem react differently when their self-image is threatened by negative situations or feedback. Those with higher self-esteem are thought to protect their self-image and therefore exhibit the self-serving bias more often than those with lower self-esteem. This self-serving bias provides a mechanism for the enhancement or protection of individual's self-esteem. If affected, participants with low confidence levels may react by blaming themselves for poor time management or understanding, which in turn threatens to lower their already reduced self-image. Conversely a participant with high self-esteem may blame the course materials, tutor or other external factors such as work for a failure to complete coursework. This is by no means intended to imply that all of the time constraint reasons given are invented or that participants did not genuinely encounter difficulties during the course module. However, it appears that if any planning activities did take place prior to course commencement, the majority of participants either failed to adhere to it, lacked a contingency plan in order to deal effectively with unforeseen events or had already decided that the course was not for them. When reviewing their progress, majority of participants expressed the opinion that their lack of progress could be attributed to commencing the course at an inopportune moment and they appeared to consider they would have performed better had they been able to pick their own start time. Steel (2007) suggests that people are basically self-interested and that self-regulatory failure is

correlated with diminished overall efficacy, in terms of both mood and performance. The consequence is that procrastinators tend to be worse off in terms of both how they feel and what they achieve. He goes on to suggest that a procrastinator's intention/action gap is of particular importance when considering their advance planning requirements, since the likelihood of unforeseen events will tend to increase over time, so the further away an event is the more likely procrastination will ensue. His findings correlate well with the study participants, as so few of them appeared to move their initial intentions to complete their module on to the next phase to plan how they would achieve this outcome.

5.5.3 Timing - Tutor time constraints

Throughout the 12-week study the participants were sent weekly email contacts to remind them of what they should be undertaking if they wished to achieve an average progress rate and complete within the recommended 12-week timeframe. Their reactions to this varied, with some finding it helpful and others panic inducing. This correlates with the findings of Solomon and Rothblum (1984), which reveal a resentment reaction they term 'rebellion against control' when examining motivations for procrastination. This resentment appears to stem from others attempting to impose deadlines on behalf of the participant.

A lack of incentive tends to increase procrastination, so it may be reasonable to assume if the stakes of the study had been higher in terms of finance or need for the final qualification (external motivation), then the degree of participant motivation would also increase. Surprisingly, higher efficacy students tend to exhibit the least amount of motivation. These students perhaps feel so confident in their ability to succeed that they find it difficult or impossible to motivate themselves without a deadline or some external motivator in their lives (Schraw, Gregory and Olafson, 2007). It would be interesting to consider further what form of external motivation could be provided by the provider or tutor or awarding body to avoid procrastination within DesignEd students.

In summary of this section, it is worth noting that a certain level of prior experience is required in order to estimate the time a task will take. If the task is an unfamiliar one and it becomes necessary to study at a more basic level of knowledge prior to undertaking it, then the time required to complete the task can be much more considerable than would appear to be the case at face value. It appears from the data that a majority of students may need appraising of this possibility and perhaps an indicative time allowance for undertaking course tasks may prove helpful. It may also be advantageous to students struggling with this aspect of their course to be required to submit a proposed timetable to their tutor as rapidly as possible after receiving their course materials in order to minimise attention drift or demotivation.

5.6 Persistence

The final super-ordinate theme is Persistence, which is sub-divided into the sub-ordinate themes of Motivation and Belief. Motivation deals with the reason/s a student had for enrolling in their course and their pre-conceptions for what the qualification may lead to, as well as the costs associated with undertaking the course and the expectations of financial improvement that may be inherent when re-training. Belief refers to the real or perceived gains that can be a result of undertaking the course and how these may help to sustain students' study as they complete their qualification.

Distance Education of all types has historically suffered from higher attrition rates than attended education (Bernard et al., 2004). This phenomenon was especially acute for self-paced and continuous enrollment forms of distance education (Misko, 2001).

“Self-pacing and continuous enrolment increase flexibility for students and teachers, yet this flexibility comes at a cost of greater requirements for student motivation, self-direction, and discipline”(Poellhuber, Roy and Anderson, 2011).

It is clear from this study's results that whilst a majority of participants initially preferred the flexibility distance study could bring to their coursework, majority subsequently struggled to pace, plan and organize their study effectively. It became apparent that when these 'building blocks' for successful distance study were not in place, persistence levels were subsequently affected.

5.6.1 Persistence - Motivation

This section references what effects their original motivation/s to enrol had on the participants. It appears to be the case that financial motivations altered normal behaviour for some participants in two ways:

1. Their initial enrolment decision
2. Their determination to complete the course

Only a third of the participants touched on this issue, but of those who did the majority considered it to be a positive aspect to the study throughout the data collection phase. Just one participant voiced criticism of the detrimental role she considered finance had played in her enrolment. She based her initial decision to undertake the study on the fee reduction that was offered to participants but considered in retrospect that she may have acted on the basis of the reduction rather than an all-round considered opinion of how the course met her needs. Although this appeared to be the case for only a single participant, it still has ethical implications, therefore the circumstances leading up to her enrolment and the way in which she enrolled by signing the study consent form indicating she had

read the course details, but had in fact failed to do so, require a review of the study processes in order to ensure the same thing could not happen again if any future study were to be undertaken.

Cost is a central issue that the majority of extant research addresses only briefly, if at all. Simpson (2008a), however has made a substantial contribution to knowledge in the area of course finance, examining the cost implications for developing online courses, the utilization of tutors and other support methods and also the cost to student implications. A concept particularly apposite to this study is his introduction of WTP (Willing to Pay), in which he speculates what price a prospective student is willing to pay for their qualification. WTP is dependent on a number of variables, foremost of which is a student's current financial position. A student who does not have enough capital or who is unwilling to contemplate going into debt will have a low WTP and may not embark on education at all (Simpson 2008a).

One of the largest determining cost factors for all courses is the level of tutor support required. Tutor support is central to the course fee, borne by the student, and is usually the most expensive aspect of online tutoring, secondary only to the original production of distance learning modules. It is also one of the aspects most mentioned and valued by the study participants, so the researcher has attempted to highlight some of the central issues below in an attempt to aide further understanding and evaluation. Whereas it could be argued that there is a possible economy of scale in the original production of learning materials (Salmon, 2002), no such rationalization can be proffered for large amounts of tutor support. Simpson (2002) suggests that this may be mitigated somewhat in certain situations such as the development of IT support systems and the possible inclusion of administration staff in the student support team. Financial considerations surrounding tutor support are contentious, as support both for and against developing this aspect of a course is somewhat dependent on how the costing breakdown is compiled.

Salmon(2002), who is clearly a strong exponent of online learning, gives two example sets of course costs with the online option appearing cheaper by over 400%. However, staff and development overheads have not been included in her calculations: clearly a much larger cost in remote rather than attended learning scenarios when course production and administration are considered. Coldeway (1982) investigated the possibility of mitigating dropout by the controversial introduction of monetary incentives for tutors who retain students. His data highlights 'higher drop out risk' courses in terms of the course characteristics; for example, a course with a mathematics component and few students which has run for some time and has no residential school, would be likely to have a high dropout rate. A course may also have a 'high-risk' population, which would include a

higher than normal proportion of students with low entry qualifications, living in urban areas and with low average age; each of these factors would be likely to increase dropout rate. When the two sets of factors were put together, they increased the student attrition risk levels substantially. Coldeway's study was conducted at Athabasca University in Canada, one of the leading for profit universities with a huge online offering.

Three participants raised the slight reduction in fees for the first module as a reason for enrolment. SB's comment that she used the study as *"a bit of a taster to see if I liked it"* summed up the generally expressed opinion. It was, with the exception of one participant, seen as a generally positive thing that had allowed them to access the course at a slightly reduced rate to see if it was for them on a longer-term basis. However, it also appeared that those who had this motivation had not taken the time to go through a number of the other processes that enrolling students usually undertake; looking through the available details very carefully, requesting a chat with the course tutor, downloading a brochure and downloading the available taster course to check their suitability for distance learning. This impulsive behaviour suggests a lack of in-depth consideration regarding the course requirements or their self-perceived abilities and also perhaps a feeling that because they were paying less than usual, it was just worth a try without the financial implications involved requiring a large amount of in-depth research. JL alludes to this when she says *"perhaps I should have researched it a little more....I should have looked into it more"*

McGivney (2003) suggests that mature students experience more acute financial difficulties than younger ones and Rovai (2003) agrees that finance is a concern to older students "older students expressed concern about the ability to finance a college education" (Rovai 2003). In this study, a two-thirds majority reported they had been considering the course for some time (unsurprising as the study was only offered to pre-warmed leads) whilst 3 mentioned that when the study offer came through this swayed their decision to enrol at that particular time. Several participants stated that they viewed any financial payment as a commitment which would keep them studying, so it may be that even pre-course they assumed they would require incentivising in order to complete. PH said *"if you've gone to the trouble to commit to the course and to pay the money....you are obviously taking it seriously"*. Two participants mentioned that it was the thought of 'wasting' money which kept them studying at a time when they would otherwise have given up. Whilst 9 of the participants mentioned money at some point during their interviews, the amount they actually paid was rarely mentioned, so it appeared that a saving roughly equivalent to purchasing two cinema tickets or two bottles of vodka was of less concern than their perception of wasting what they had paid by non-completion. Only 7 participants completed the course module within the 12-week study window.

Martinez (2001:2) states that the student decision-making process could be:

“Characterised as a continuous weighing of the costs of continuing with, or abandoning, a programme of study and that decisions to leave resulted from rational decisions to respond to the difficulties faced”

Whilst the fee reduction for study participants was certainly a consideration for some, they referred to it as a determining factor in the timing of enrolment rather than whether they enrolled at all. It could therefore be assumed not to be the only factor that determined persistence. It would be reasonable to assume that should it increase to a 50% or 70% reduction it would be a greater motivating factor in the initial enrolment decision, but not necessarily in the completion rate. Completion would depend not only on the participant's other reasons for undertaking the course and their tenacity, but also on their individual financial situation. Some would view the course fee as a small amount they could afford to lose, so it would not prove motivational, whilst others would consider it to be a considerable sum and would try to make sure it had not been 'wasted' by non-completion. To illustrate the latter viewpoint, 2 participants did complete the module they had paid for whilst at the same time stating that they would not continue on to the next module. Interestingly, some universities employ a system of fee retention to aide in the prevention of attrition (Simpson, 2008e). Pragmatically this retention mechanism can be deployed in different ways by individual institutions but generally involves the taking of a large cash deposit at the beginning of a student's course which is then returned to them upon completion.

Aspiration also played a part in the students' initial decision to undertake the course. Around 50%, like JC and AH, wanted the qualification as a means of re-training for another job. AH said *"it would be very good to have a qualification at the end of it"* and JC talked about her "inkling" for teaching. Others simply wanted to improve their skill levels or prove to themselves that they could study to the required level. CA stated that she liked the feeling of *"self-achievement that I can actually do it"* and JC wanted to *"be able to create something that is mine"*. With some it was a mixture of the two, a hope to improve their skills for now and also perhaps have a qualification 'banked' for the future, should they need it.

Both JC and JL initially suggested that the successful completion of the course would boost their confidence. JL says that she wants to *"get a qualification at the end, you know, to be proud of, that I'd actually achieved something"*. Neither completed the first module, so could the converse be true and by failing to complete had their confidence therefore been reduced? Simpson (2010b) discusses this in relation to retention at the UKOU and suggests that, as the level of commitment to a part-time course may well be less than that

of a full-time course, therefore the damage to self-esteem may also be considered to be less; however currently this is an under researched area and there is no recent data to refer to review. Simpson goes on to recommend that there should be further investigation into this area, as the UKOU's main output at the moment is not graduates but dropouts; with an average 45% of students lost on the first module and over 80% prior to graduation (Simpson, 2010a).

5.6.2 Persistence - Belief

Completion of the first module appeared to depend upon the amount of belief participants had in their skills and abilities. A fine balance existed between how much time and effort participants were able to put into the course versus how much satisfaction and enjoyment they were able to obtain from it in return for their input. Self Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002) focuses on the degree to which an individual's behaviour is self-motivated and self-determined and concludes that gaining pleasure from an activity or achievement lends intrinsic motivation towards repeating the activity in the future, in effect forming a creative loop of activity. CW comments that *"the sense of achievement when you finally think 'I did it, I didn't give in'there's a great satisfaction in that"*. PH also says *"there's a spin off benefit for me, in that having that if I buckle down to things....I can actually get on with it pretty efficiently"*.

The self-belief required when making a start on the coursework and their continuing persistence appeared to be much greater in some participants than others and tended to manifest itself early on in the course. Some participants appeared to have much greater fortitude and, after initially taking a leap of faith and beginning the coursework when they were perhaps still uncertain about what was being asked of them, they were rewarded with achievements above and beyond their expectations. This in turn appeared to add to their determination to continue and improve, thus creating the creative loop of activity discussed by Deci & Ryan (2002). Kahu et al. (2015) indicate that mature students make strong emotional connections with their course content, thereby making the learning and creation process easier for themselves. This love of the learning process appeared to provide a key continuation motivator for the minority of the study participants who were able to foster it. However not all positive emotions are useful to continuation; whilst pleasant activating emotions such as enjoyment and pride tend to have a positive impact on motivation and performance, pleasant deactivating emotions such as relief and relaxation tend to have a potentially negative effect (Kahu et al., 2015). They also link emotions in mature university students with their engagement to their course and remark that;

“emotions are the point of intersection between university influences, such as teaching practice and course design, and student influences, such as academic skills and self-efficacy” Kahu et al. (2015).

Those participants who initially understood that learning the techniques and methods involved was not a quick or easy process and did not expect instant results did better overall. CW likens it to learning a language *“you’ve got to get the grammar right before you can start writing the poetry”*. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), creating is a flow activity which we do for sheer enjoyment or intellectual satisfaction, rather than to gain an extrinsic reward. Nearly all elements of the course module called for participants to exhibit their creativity in order to succeed and as ‘flow’ is also associated with the experiencing of a euphoric type state whilst working creatively, this creates a self fulfilling loop for those participants who managed to experience it. However the question remains; is it possible for providers or tutors to foster this self-fulfilling creative loop of activity or are its origins purely intrinsic in nature?

To conclude, the findings contained within this discussion chapter, their importance, relation to the extant literature and implications for future practice are further considered in the next chapter.

6 Conclusion

This final chapter will discuss the way in which the research has met its [stated aims](#), review how it relates to the extant literature and then consider what the implications may be for practice. It will give a brief synopsis of the most interesting aspects of the research which emerged for further consideration or future study and discuss areas of particular interest in depth. Having discussed the results of the study in the previous chapter, the conclusion will consider what further research may be indicated, the original contribution to knowledge obtained and finally, the ongoing implications for the researcher’s own practice.

6.1 Recapitulation of study purpose and findings

This research was designed to meet [3 study aims](#), referred to in the Introduction chapter, in order to ascertain the efficacy of the completed research. To recap the aims are listed below:

1. Compilation of data into individual learner voice to provide individual learner experience stories.
2. Data coded, extrapolated into recurrent group themes and shared experiences and examined against current literature.

3. Examination of what the data may mean for student experience and retention

In fulfillment of aim 1, the researcher did indeed achieve the compilation of data into individual learner voice and subsequently amassed individual learner experience stories as primary evidence documents within ATLAS.ti, as evidenced by the [Results](#) chapter. This data was collected by the researcher via phone on 2 separate occasions from study participants, employing an open ended interview method and concentrating on those aspects of the course phenomena and student experience that the participants felt they wished to raise as being the most important to them.

In fulfillment of aim 2, data was then coded, extrapolated into themes and examined against current literature. The coding system was discussed at length in the [Methodology](#) chapter and thematic analysis was subsequently carried out in the Results chapter, with both [Macro](#) (group) and individual areas of commonality between participant experiences within the code areas of [Support](#), [Confidence](#), [Timing](#) and [Persistence](#) further reviewed within the [Discussion](#) chapter.

This study employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, which aimed to discover more about the study participants' lived experience of undertaking the first module of a City & Guilds TEL textile course over a 12-week period. The course was delivered by a private educational provider, DesignEd, and the researcher also held the role of company director for the educational establishment, so a method for researcher reflexivity also had to be evolved in order to prevent possible bias or conflict of interest arising.

In fulfillment of aim 3, student experience and retention data and further interpretation of findings was discussed within each code outcome area in the [Discussion](#) chapter, however the key findings to emerge from the study were;

1. Participant positivity regarding online versus FTF interaction prior to commencement, which was unsubstantiated by the study findings.
2. The perceived lack of social contact and its effect on course engagement, which was particularly prevalent in non-completers.
3. The need for formal advice at the beginning of the course on planning and time – management.
4. Lack of appreciation or engagement with the opportunities offered for personal creativity and experimentation.
5. The importance of reading, compartmentalizing and planning employed by successful participants when interacting with their course materials.

6. The need and appropriateness of limiting the amount of design in the first module, or even removing it completely until later on in the course.
7. Ambiguity identified between the way participants initially rated and then subsequently interacted with their course materials.
8. The accuracy of pre-course information and the participant's engagement and understanding of it.
9. The lack of apparent correlation between early tutor/student support and retention.

6.2 Relationship with Previous Research

This section will give an overview of the study findings and their relationship to previous work in the relevant areas.

Finding 1 references participant's feelings of initial positivity regarding online versus FTF interactions prior to commencement, which were not substantiated later in the study. This study's findings were broadly in agreement with researchers such as Gilbert (2006) who suggest that a failure to accurately self-anticipate future feelings or outcomes can lead to later disillusionment. Gilbert (2006) discusses the failure of people to predict how they will feel at a given time in the future about a particular event and notes that they are invariably poor at anticipating their emotions in this way, thus if they are inclined to feel enthusiastic at the time they try to make this prediction, they may assume this is how they will feel at a future point as well. In general, students will never feel as enthusiastic and motivated as they do when considering and then enrolling upon a course, so their prediction for their course experience would be expected to be very positive. This study's results indicate that assisting students to manage and channel this initial enthusiasm but also accept that there will be times when they will feel low and their confidence will ebb, appears to play a vital part in helping students negotiate their first module.

Finding 2 references the perceived lack of opportunity for social contact with peers and its effect on course engagement, which was particularly prevalent in non-completers, although whether this speaks to causality is unclear. This study's findings broadly agree with Poellhuber et al (2011) that interest in collaboration with other students via the use of social media increased with age, but that interest was not necessarily matched by experience in using social media, thus suggesting it may be the idea of collaboration that appealed to participants rather than the methods utilized by the course for doing so and that social interaction with one's peers is not necessarily helpful to distance learners (Smith, 2010, Poellhuber, Roy and Anderson, 2011).

Finding 3 references the need for formalized advice on planning and time-management at the beginning of the course. The findings of this study broadly agree with Bjork,

Dunlosky and Kornell (2013), who suggest that becoming a sophisticated and effective learner requires the ability to accurately assess the current state of one's learning. This skill set includes estimating the type of learning required and the time it should take, thus concurring with Ariely and Wertenbroch's (2002) study which suggested students experience difficulties meeting self-imposed deadlines and also reported that their study participants, despite exhibiting some understanding of their own procrastination problems, still did not set binding personal deadlines, which appeared to echo the approach of the participants in this study.

Finding 4 references a lack of appreciation or engagement with the opportunities offered for personal creativity and experimentation. This study concurs with Huber et al (2012) that all aspects of the creative process need to be present in order for creativity to flourish and Amabile and Pillimar's (2012) study that intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation provides the best creative results. However the creative process is typified by experiential learning, which involves making errors and mistakes in order to learn from them. Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013) suggest that the making of errors appears to create opportunities for learning, introducing desirable difficulties for students to overcome and learn from, however these were frequently viewed by this study's participants as something to be avoided for fear of 'wasting time'.

Finding 5 references the importance of reading, compartmentalizing and planning strategies employed by successful participants whilst interacting with their course materials. These findings run counter to those of Schraw et al's (2007) study, where participants unanimously reported a high level of satisfaction and achievement during the last 2 weeks of their course, in part, we are told, because they accomplished a great deal of work in a short period of time. However they are consistent with Steel's (2007) findings that self-regulatory failure correlates with diminished overall efficacy, in terms of both mood and performance

Finding 6 references the need and appropriateness of limiting the amount of design in the first module, or even removing it completely until later on in the course in order to possibly make the design requirement easier for participants. However, according to Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013) the assumption that just because something is hard it is best avoided may be erroneous. They suggest that it can be counterproductive to assume that learning can be, and should be, easy, which creates a tension between this study's findings and what may be best for students in the longer term.

Finding 7 references the ambiguity identified between the way participants initially rated and then subsequently interacted with their course materials. This remains a contentious

area of research, with some data suggesting that difficulty with course material interpretation may be gender (Lim and Kim, 2003, Ausburn, 2004) or learning style related (Coffield et al., 2009) or that materials may require matching to individual students (Pashler et al., 2009). Participants appeared to be unaware of any incongruities between their individual learning style and the course materials until they began to work intimately with them. Whilst this is certainly interesting, learning styles are a very large, separate and contentious field of research, which is to a great extent outside the remit of this study.

Finding 8 references the accuracy of pre-course information and the participant's engagement and understanding of it, however there appears to be no extant literature in this area which would provide contrast with that garnered by this study, so the reason for this remains unclear and needs further research to determine why this could be.

Finding 9 references the apparent lack of correlation between early tutor/student support and retention. This study's results run somewhat counter to those of Inkelaar and Simpson's, (2015) in which they advocate front loaded tutor support as the best means of achieving maximum retention. Simpson (2006), cites a UKOU study's findings that a single phone call prior to the course commencement averaged a 5% improvement in retention, which he estimates may represent around a third of the possible retention impact that institutional activity alone is able to achieve (Simpson, 2008e). In the case of DesignEd, the levels of completion for study participants were no greater than historical student retention levels for DesignEd, so whilst tutor/student communication was substantially increased from an early stage in the course, it does not appear to have directly impacted module completion rates.

6.3 Limitations of this study

It is important to stress that this study has been primarily concerned with the collection of data that is particular to DesignEd's student demographic and consequently not necessarily aggregable to other courses. It would therefore require interested providers to utilize this study as a starting point for conducting their own research into their particular niche and demographic. In these circumstances it is important to note that many niche providers would be in a similar position to DesignEd in that they would not necessarily consider research to be a normal part of their functionality and may have to require members of academic and administration staff to multi-task in order to undertake it. The methodology developed for this study to allow for role separation to take place whilst ensuring researcher reflexivity would be a useful contribution to this small-scale emergent research.

6.4 Implication of Findings

This study offers suggestive evidence for re-consideration of a number of factors for DesignEd's particular demographic of TEL learner. It would appear that participants may benefit from the addition of several extra features early on in their course; greater direction on assessing and directing their own learning, a way of managing their own course expectations and preparation for the impact of limited social contact from their peers. Whilst this should, to an extent, be covered by pre-course information, it would appear that a majority of participants failed to read or assimilate this information to a great enough extent to furnish them with the necessary knowledge prior to commencement. The question then arises, how best to impart this information to them in a format that they would be more certain to interact with and at a suitable time to be maximally utilized?

One interesting aspect of the findings suggest that the tutor, during early email or phone contact with participants, did not consider further discussion of some of these areas. This may be because she was not specifically asked about pertinent aspects of the course or because she or the participant did not see them as important at that time or because she considered that participants would already be familiar with them after reading pre-course information. Also a further consideration; is it actually the appropriate function of a tutor to impart all of this information or should some of it come from another source? In any case, the findings of this study indicate that to be optimally effective this information would be best conveyed prior to enrolment taking place or immediately afterwards whilst student expectation/engagement remain at their peak. It also suggests that, contrary to Inkelaar and Simpson's (2015) findings implying that motivational emails positively impact student retention, simply sending a motivational email/s is insufficient in itself to influence retention for DesignEd courses. Indeed, even the additional aspect of tutor instigated phone contact appeared not to decrease dropout rates for this study. Additionally, it is also likely that post-enrolment contacts, however early they take place, would be too late for aspects such as the management of course expectations, as these are likely to be formed pre-enrolment.

6.5 Recommendations

6.5.1 For future research;

As a result of this study, further research may be indicated for supplementary evaluation of pivotal moments for students, particularly focusing on immediately pre and post commencement. The researcher considers that contacts for collection of data would ideally need to be brought chronologically closer together than those in this study, so that the vital early pre and post course experience could be studied in greater detail. In addition to this, a review of pre-course information and student engagement and

understanding with it requires further research to ensure course attrition is kept to a minimum.

6.5.2 For future policy;

It is important to stress that there is no independent information regarding private and public educational providers that would furnish a prospective student with sufficient pertinent information regarding performance prior to making a course choice. Government could require basic, standardized information such as completion and attrition rates for publishing in the public domain. However, in this case, it would be important to ensure that all data was compiled to a prescribed formula so that an honest comparison was possible.

6.6 This study's contribution to research

As TEL courses are frequently targeted at niche markets; whilst a small town or region would be unlikely to support a course on, for example, advanced patchwork techniques, it is likely that enough students could be regularly recruited from a larger area to make it a worthwhile undertaking. As more tertiary colleges limit the scope of their offerings to accommodate government funding, the opportunity for private providers to evolve TEL courses to fill a gap in the market increases. This scarcity of local subject breadth, together with the doubling of private education providers in the UK since 2000 and their increasing utilization of online delivery methods (Simpson, 2009a), which Simpson forecasts will grow 30% over the next few years (Simpson *ibid*) have meant that students who would usually prefer to study the course by attending a local college have been left with little choice but to move to a TEL alternative. This area of research, therefore, has a growing audience among commercial providers of technical education to adults studying at a distance; an increasing and relatively new area of provision.

This study aimed to extend the research Simpson had already undertaken in this area during his 2003 UKOU study by applying the same tutor contact phone call at the beginning of the course in order "to explore the student's feelings and issues about study and offer reassurance and support" (Simpson, 2004a:89). Simpson's work identified the early danger period for the highest attrition rates, formulated cost comparison data for retention methods and gives data on the Proactive Motivational Support Models (PaMS) employed by the UKOU to aid student retention and documented by Simpson in several cited studies. The PaMS model front loads tutor contact to support students through the first few weeks of their course assignment, which is known to be when around 38% of attrition occurs from OU courses (Simpson, 2004, 2010a). His data also provided a benchmark figure for the impact these interventions may have on attrition rates: - typically between 4% and 5% (Simpson, 2008b). This study has contributed to the literature on

retention and attrition by reporting individual stories rather than Simpson's more statistical analyses, thus highlighting the participant's personal experiences rather than the quantitative retention data. It has also considered a very particular demographic of student and course. The initial indications of this study suggest that quite minor organisational changes that are well within the capabilities of the majority of providers to instigate could improve student experience exponentially. It has demonstrated that interventions intended to decrease course attrition levels may be required at an earlier stage than previously thought and also across a wider subject range than previously recognised.

6.7 Autobiographical reflection

It became apparent early in the data collection process that conflicts of interest may be present when considering a commercial providers' role, especially when considering contentious areas such as pre-course testing or pre-course information. With regard to this study, a separate report will be prepared for DesignEd with regard to what the finding may mean from a business perspective. However, it will always be the case that in business, the main requirement is to take money and make profit. Unfortunately, this aim frequently does not accord with fully informing and thereby necessarily deterring some students from embarking on a course that they may find difficult or taxing. Commercial provider business models would have to change significantly if students were encouraged to stay on courses for longer periods of time and completion rates subsequently rose. This would lead to course providers paying for more assessment or tutor contact time, which would, in turn, be reflected in the course price to students or as lowered profit margins. Therefore, the business imperative is frequently diametrically opposed to the supply of appropriate pre-course information and substantial levels of on-going tutor support. The researcher would speculate that the only way to impact this conflict of interest is to 'level the playing field' and legislate for all providers, commercial or non-profit, to provide attrition figures to the prospective student, as suggested in the recommendations for future policy. However, manipulation of the supplied figures is an issue in the United States and how it could be avoided here remains unclear at this time.

7 Reference

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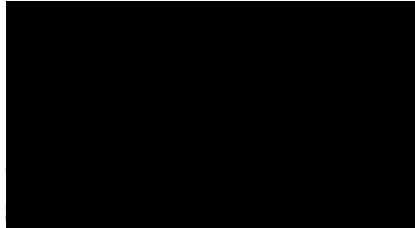
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Appendices

Appendix 1




Dear **Error! No document variable supplied.**

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project we are about to undertake. This involves us recruiting just 20 students for our City & Guilds Certificate in Patchwork and Quilting to undertake the first module of the course at a **25% REDUCTION** from the usual fee rate in exchange for giving us feedback on course experience. This will allow us to collect data from participants in order to further advance our course delivery methods. The study will cover the first module over a specified three month timeframe, providing us with the data we need. To help out even more, we won't take any C&G registration fees in your first module payment, so you have the opportunity to try out just the **first course module at only £131.25 instead of £240**. If you wish to continue on with the course and progress on to the second module this is entirely up to you and you are under no obligation to do so, neither is there a time frame, but we will suggest a completion date to you to help you pace your studies. The complete course is made up of 12 modules in total if you wish to continue with it and you can check out the costs involved at

 If you choose not to continue on with the course we will still give you an DESIGNED certificate for completing module 1.

We will be splitting students into two groups of ten, both of which will have increased tutor and support staff access, but only one of which will be required to contribute to a collaborative learning area on Facebook as an integral part of their course.

To be considered for this research project, please drop us a line at  and head your email Interest in Research Project. We will enrol strictly in timed application order.

Best regards,



Dear **Error! No document variable supplied.**

Thank you so much for your interest in our Research Project. We really appreciate your support and would like to extend the offer of a place to you. Attached are in-depth details of how and why the research project is being undertaken for your further information. If you decide you would like to go ahead and enrol on the course, we ask that you do the following during the next 7 days:

1. Send us an email to [REDACTED] to confirm you agree to participate in the course and study.
2. Make payment for the first module either by paying by card over the phone on [REDACTED] or securely online at [REDACTED]. The cost will be £131.25. The amount online is set for 1p, but we will alter to the correct amount when payment details are sent through to us. This payment method will also collect your contact details for us, but if you wish to phone the office to make payment instead, then our contact details are below.

When we receive both of the above from you, we will then send out your course materials to you during the week of the 27th June 2011. We will enrol participants on the basis of the first to get completed email and payment details to us, as this seems to be the fairest way of dealing with what early indications suggest will be a very oversubscribed course intake.

Best regards,

The Office Team
DesignEd

Project Information – Data collection from Certificate C&G Patchwork and Quilting students

Plain Language Statement and Consent Request

Study Purpose

Participation in this research project provides us with the student's perspective and views on the content, support and delivery of the Certificate in Patchwork and Quilting Level 3 delivered via online distance learning. Information gained from this study will be used to evaluate and improve DESIGNED's course delivery and student support methods.

Participant Requirements

By choosing to participate in this research project, you agree to undertake module 1 of the course only. You are under no obligation to continue or complete the course if you choose not to. You are also under no obligation to make any further purchases of modules if you do not wish to. You will be expected to pay for the course fee minus 25% before commencing the study. During the three month duration of the study (this is the recommended timescale to complete one module), you will be expected to have regular contact with your tutor by phone and also with members of the research team with the purpose of obtaining your impressions and also providing the support you may need during your studies. It is anticipated that phone calls would last no longer than 10 minutes or so, but this will of course vary from person to person. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences or adverse effects by contacting the office or [REDACTED]. You need to have internet and pc access and basic IT knowledge and a willingness to participate in the use of Facebook if you are chosen for the peer support area of the study. Instructions for the use of Facebook will be provided for you as part of your course materials and the group is closed to outside participants.

Financial Details

Full module cost is £175, minus 25%=£131.25 due prior to commencing on the course. The £65 C&G registration fee will be waived from the first module. Payment would be by card and can be made securely at [REDACTED]. Please note that we will alter the amount of payment to be made here at the office prior to processing the transaction – at the moment this page on our system is set for 1p.

How to Participate

If you decide you'd like to be considered to participate, the next step is to indicate your consent to the study requirements by sending an e-mail to [REDACTED] to this effect. The fact that you are receiving this statement means you are being offered a place on the study and to secure this you now need to pay for your course using a card online at [REDACTED] prodshow/express.html, or by phoning the DESIGNED office on [REDACTED]. A short period will elapse until everyone who has been invited to participate has had a reasonable chance to return a participation e-mail, had an offer made and then made payment before Friday 24th June 2011. After this time you will be forwarded your course materials –this will be during week commencing 27/06/2011 and a week or so after that your course tutor and a member of our support staff will be in touch via phone.

Data Collection and Usage

Data from this study will be used to make improvements to the courses for subsequent students and to inform future developments and additions to DESIGNED courses. It will be collected by a number of methods, which will include transcripts from recorded phone calls with participants, Facebook discussion areas, email and letter. A final report will be collated and the results submitted for publication as part of a PhD thesis. This study is being conducted by Gail Burton in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Edgehill University PhD and in collaboration with DESIGNED Ltd who are distance learning providers specialising in Textiles education and The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). For more information, you may contact her directly using the following contact details:

Gail Burton, DESIGNED Ltd, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] e-mail ecc3117@tiscali.co.uk




Privacy

All responses to this data collection project will be anonymised. Identifying information will include age and program of study. Individual participants will not be identifiable within the final report. Survey data will only be available to the project researcher and members of the original research team at DESIGNED and UCLan. However the anonymised final PhD is subject to publishing and will be read by academic staff at Edgehill and also by members of the public. Records pertaining to the final report will be stored in locked storage archives in DESIGNED Offices in Lancashire, UK. Certain responses may be quoted in the final report, but participants will not be identified in any manner beyond selected field of interest and educational status. There are no known risks or adverse effects to participating in this study. Any personal information you have already provided or will provide will be used only for the purpose(s) for which it is collected, and not in any other way without your consent.

Risks and Benefits

Participants will have the opportunity to share their opinions and provide valuable feedback that will aid further developments which it is hoped will benefit future students. Risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. ACT!, our contact management software, does capture some information as routine, such as time and date of communication and in the case of email, content. Facebook however, will capture more and it is up to each participant to set their privacy options at a level with which they feel comfortable, whilst at the same time allowing for the fact that tutors, support staff and students do need to have access to certain items in order to provide support.

Security

For site security purposes, DESIGNED employs software programs to monitor network traffic that identifies unauthorized attempts to upload or change information, or otherwise cause damage. For questions or comments regarding this project information or for any additional information you may require please contact  on the above address.

This study has been approved by DESIGNED Ltd and they can be contacted at the address above if required for verification of this statement.

Appendix 3

Disaggregation of course and study design chart

Time	Normal Course Delivery	Intervention	Course Act	Research Act
Week 1	Enrol and pay full price Course material supplied	Financial Inducement to enrol		Recruitment email
Week 2	Commence coursework			Consent obtained
Week 3	Continue c/work	Fee reduction Peer to Peer support setup via Facebook G2	Payment made Send course materials	
Week 4	Continue c/work		Commence coursework	Tutor email sent
Week 5	Continue c/work		Intro on Facebook Group 2 Tutor phone Int. 1	
Week 6	Continue c/work		Uplift to Facebook Group 2 Group 1 continue with c/work	
Week 7	Continue c/work		Uplift to Facebook Group 2 Group 1 continue with c/work	
Week 8	Continue c/work		Uplift to Facebook Group 2 Group 1 continue with c/work	Research phone Int.1
Week 9	Continue c/work		Continue c/work	
Week 10	Continue c/work		Continue c/work	
Week 11	Continue c/work		Continue c/work Tutor phone Int.2	
Week 12	Continue c/work		Continue c/work	
Week 13	Continue c/work		Continue c/work	
Week 14	Continue c/work		Continue c/work	
Week 15	Submit c/work at some point – no set date to do so		Continue c/work	
Week 16	Written assessment by tutor on c/work		Submit c/work at some point – no set date to do so	
Week 17			Written assessment by tutor on c/work	Research phone Int.2
Week 18				

Appendix 4



Dear **Error! No document variable supplied.**

We're delighted to welcome you to your Certificate in Patchwork and Quilting City & Guilds Course with DesignEd.

You have been allocated to **GROUP 1**, who will be supported directly by your tutor and the office team, rather than being required to participate in the closed Facebook group as part of your course requirements.

Attached to this email are the introductory module and module 1 so that you can view them straight away and save them onto disc and your pc. We'll uplift a visual presentation to get you started with the design side of the course via the drop box, so that you can save them at a time to suit you. The link to download these files is below;

https://www.yousendit.com/transfer.php?action=batch_download&batch_id=MFo3c0wzQzNOMUJFQIE9PQ

Your tutor will be in contact with you via email in around a week's time to introduce herself. She will then ring you the week after – the date we have set aside for this is Tuesday 12th June (afternoon and evening). It would be useful if you could find time beforehand to read through the course materials beforehand and jot down any queries you may have. If the tutor can't reach you by phone we will email and check number and times with you before re-trying.

If there is anything at all that you don't understand or are having problems with don't hesitate to contact us.

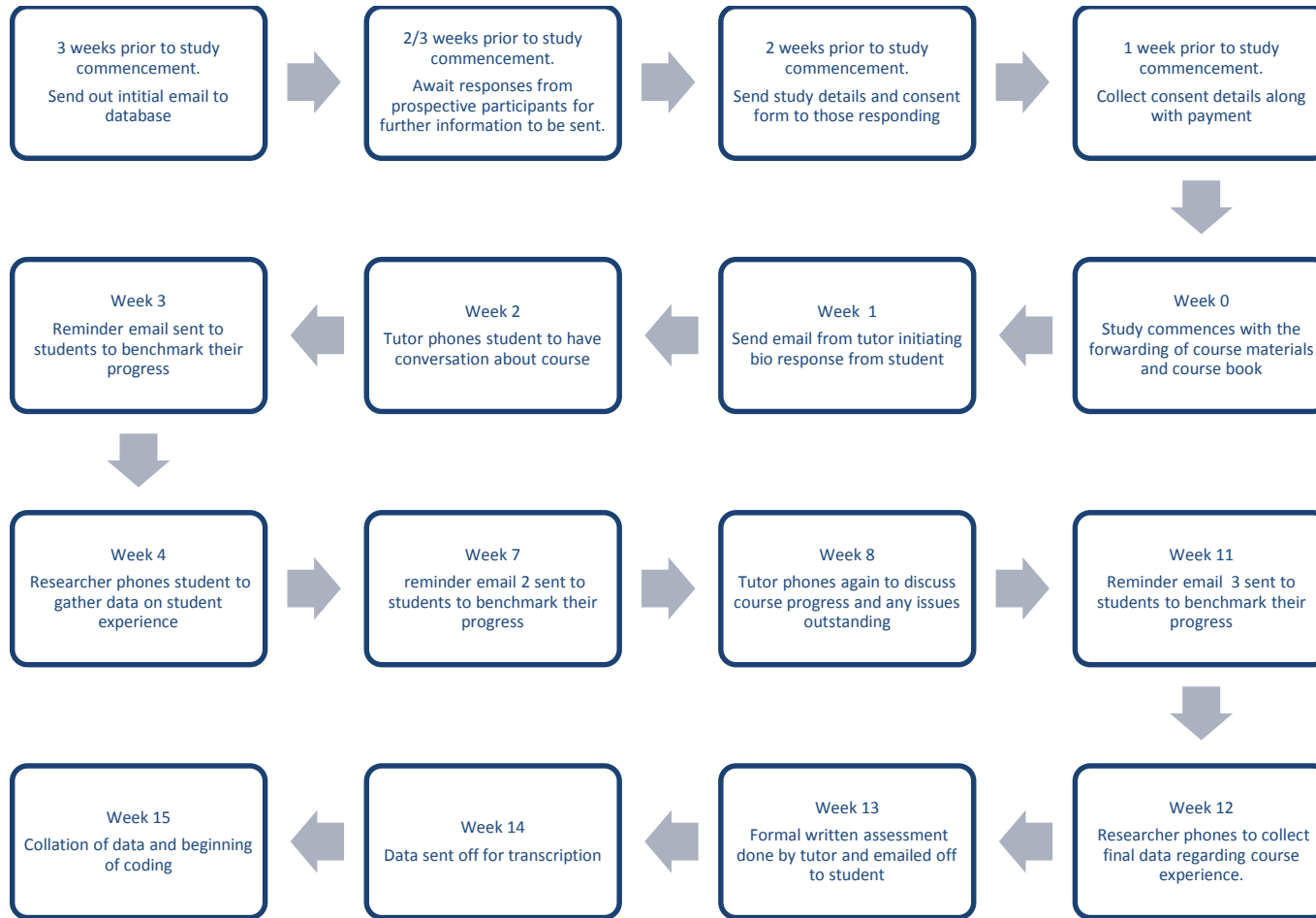
Best regards,

The Office Team

DesignEd

Appendix 5

Data Collection Process



Appendix 6

<u>First Tutor Contact</u> – week 2		
	<u>Areas to Cover in Call</u>	<u>Verbal Prompts</u>
1	Introduction	<p><i>Hello, I'd like to introduce myself as your DESIGNED tutor – my name is Janet G</i></p> <p><i>I'm contacting you to make sure that you have received your course materials and are generally feeling pretty confident about the start you've made on your course?</i></p>
2	Listen and Encourage	<p><i>Listen to response + address any practical issues they may have. e.g. course book hasn't arrived yet and promise action if required.</i></p> <p><i>Encourage them to talk about any aspect of their course – prompt them on the following if needed</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What they hope to gain from the course</i> • <i>Any worries they have about particular areas</i> • <i>Contact with others</i> • <i>Completion times – time management</i> • <i>Facebook if peer supported</i> • <i>What do they feel about their level of study – is it right for them?</i>
3	Praise Effort	<i>Suggest that it is only through making an effort, rather than any inbuilt ability that they will succeed with the course .</i>
4	Future contact	<p><i>Arrange to speak with them again in around 6 weeks to discuss progress</i></p> <p><i>Promise that we will send an email to let them know where they should be up to if they were to complete module 1 in the recommended 12 weeks</i></p>
5	Goodbye	<p>End conversations with something like:</p> <p><i>It's been great chatting with you and getting to know you a little better. It certainly sounds as though you have a variety of abilities, strengths and support networks to help you through the course. You also have a very positive attitude to the course work, which is the most important aspect. I'm sure you'll do very well indeed with the commitment you've displayed so far.</i></p>

9/8/2011 – Researcher Interview outline

The interview questions were left deliberately open to elicit an individual response from participants and are as follows:

Hello – I'm the researcher from your patchwork course at DESIGNED. I wonder if I could chat with you about your experience of the course so far? I'm really interested in how you found the experience, not the specifics of the course content, which can be discussed with your course tutor.

The initial questions

- Can you tell me about how you undertook this module?
- What did you expect to learn from doing the course?

Probing on process/approach

- Can you tell me any more about that?
- When you are doing that, what are you thinking about?
- When you say ... what exactly do you mean?
- Can you give me an example of that?

Probing for conscious decisions about approach


- Did anything make you change your mind about how to do this / that?

Was there anything you found difficult? What did you do then?

Probing for intentions and conceptions

- When you use the word there, what exactly do you mean?
- When you say you want to get more knowledge about this subject what do you mean?
- What counts as understanding?
- Is all learning the same?

Thank you for speaking with me and I'll be in touch again as the course is ending.

<u>Second Tutor Contact – week</u> <u>8/9</u>		
	<u>Areas to Cover in Call</u>	<u>Verbal Prompts</u>
1	Introduction	<p><i>Hello, there..... My name is Janet G and I'm your tutor from DESIGNED. We spoke once before, at the beginning of your course.</i></p> <p><i>Are you ok to talk for a few moments?</i></p> <p><i>How are things going with your coursework?</i></p>
2	Listen, Encourage and help with any course related problems	<p><i>Listen to response + address any practical issues they may have if required.</i></p> <p><i>Encourage them to continue on to completion if needed</i></p>
3	Mention suggested completion date	<i>Friday 16th September is the day that we have SUGGESTED they complete on, however if they can't and need to continue past that date there is nothing to stop them.</i>
5	Last contact	<i>The researcher, Gail, will contact them again during week commencing 19th Sept to complete the data collection and that will be the last contact with them as far as the study is concerned.</i>
6	Goodbye	<i>Close phone call</i>

19/9/2011 – Researcher Interview outline 2

The interview questions were left deliberately open to elicit an individual response from participants and are as follows:

Hello – I'm the researcher from your patchwork course at DESIGNED. We spoke a few weeks ago and you agreed to speak with me again after the 12 week study period just to finalise things. I wonder if I could chat with you about your experience of the course now to see if they have changed? I'm really interested in how you found the experience, not the specifics of the course content, which can be discussed with your course tutor.

The initial questions

- Can you tell me about what has happened since we last spoke?
- Can you tell me more about your personal experience of the course as a whole?

Probing on process/approach

- Can you tell me any more about that?
- When you are doing that, what are you thinking about?
- When you say ... what exactly do you mean?
- Can you give me an example of that?

Probing for conscious decisions about approach

- Did anything make you change your mind about the course at any point?
- Was there one aspect in particular you found more challenging than the rest?

Probing for intentions and conceptions

- When you use the word there, what exactly do you mean?

Thank you for speaking with me – I very much appreciate your time and wish you all the best with your textiles in the future.




Dear **Error! No document variable supplied.**

I'm just dropping you a quick note to say that I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to be your course tutor and also to tell you something about myself.

I've worked for DESIGNED now for nearly 3 years teaching design work, patchwork and quilting and embroidery, and prior to that I have done both Level 3 and Diploma in Patchwork & Quilting as an attending student at DESIGNED.

My interests in textiles are free machine quilting, raw edge appliqué and the use of bright bold fabrics and colours. Least favourite area.....probably hand quilting, if I had to choose!

I love travelling to new countries and experiencing new cultures and taking lots of photographs, you never know when they will come in handy, especially when it comes to design work and ideas. I also enjoy buying books, particularly those associated with patchwork, quilting, embroidery and all its associated projects. Good for inspiration and reference.

I really hope that this has given you a little insight into me as a person and I'd really love to hear a little about you, if you get a chance to drop me an email – just label it FAO Janet and send to the  address.

Best regards,

Janet G

DesignEd

Appendix 8

Dear **Error! No document variable supplied.**

This is just to let you know that, if you're following our twelve week recommended timescale for module completion, you should shortly be around a third/two thirds/a week (x weeks) of the way through your first course module. This will leave you ready to move on to the making up of your portfolio into a digital presentation in 10 days time, on or around the 00/00/2011. If you are using Facebook as part of your coursework, then you should now have uplifted majority of the things you were asked to, but we would still encourage you all to still post images of your work and keep in regular contact with each other via FB, so as to get the full benefit and support from others on your course.

We need to stress that this is only a REMINDER, and you are not obligated to act on it, however past students have said that they find it very useful for us to let them know where they should be up to at strategic times during their first course module to help them allocate their time better – we really hope that this helps you too.

Our next planned contact with you will be from your course tutor, Janet, who will phone all students again to check their progress and see if they need any help on the 22nd August between 3pm and 8.30 pm.

Best regards,

The Office Team
DesignEd

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The initial questions

- Can you tell me about how you undertook this module?
- What did you expect to learn from doing the course?

Probing on process/approach

- Can you tell me any more about that?
- When you are doing that, what are you thinking about?
- When you say ... what exactly do you mean?
- Can you give me an example of that?

Probing for conscious decisions about approach

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- Was there anything you found difficult? What did you do then?

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- Is all learning the same?

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Probing for intentions and conceptions

- When you use the word there, what exactly do you mean?

Thank you for speaking with me – I very much appreciate your time and wish you all the best with your textiles in the future.

Appendix 9

Code neighbors list

Code-Filter: All

HU: 3RD PASS FINAL 17012012

File: [C:\Users\gail\Dropbox\phd\ATLAS AND BIBLIO\stages of data inter...\3RD PASS FINAL 17012012.hpr6]

Edited by: Super

Date/Time: 2012-01-17 11:22:31

Code: ASPIRATIONS {34-0}

Code: aspirations - qualification {14-0}

Code: aspirations - skills {21-0}

Code: COMMENCEMENT {54-0}

Code: commencement - post {44-0}

Code: commencement - pre {9-0}

Code: CONTENT {51-0}

Code: content - negative {36-0}

Code: content - positive {9-0}

Code: content - suggestions {8-0}

Code: COURSE CRITICISM {15-0}

Code: DESIGN ELEMENT {48-0}

Code: design element - negative {41-0}

Code: design element - positive {11-0}

Code: DIFFICULTIES {78-0}

Code: EXCUSES {33-0}

Code: excuses - family {7-0}

Code: excuses - illness {9-0}

Code: excuses - other {4-0}

Code: excuses - time {6-0}

Code: excuses - work {10-0}

Code: FACEBOOK {82-1}

<is associated with> SOCIAL INTERACTION

Code: facebook - negative {40-0}

Code: facebook - postive {27-0}

Code: FINANCIAL {17-2}

financial negative <is part of>

financial positive <is part of>

Code: financial negative {8-1}

<is part of> FINANCIAL

Code: financial positive {11-1}

<is part of> FINANCIAL

Code: INITIAL IMPRESSION {43-0}

Code: IT ISSUES {46-0}

Code: it issues - dropbox {2-0}

Code: it issues - photography {9-0}

Code: it issues - powerpoint {11-0}

Code: PERSISTENCE {35-0}

Code: persistence- pro {19-0}

Code: persistence - con {6-0}

Code: POSITIVES {82-0}

Code: SOCIAL INTERACTION {28-1}

FACEBOOK <is associated with>

Code: social interaction - negative {12-0}



Code: social interaction - positive {17-0}

Code: TIMING {65-0}

Code: timing - personal {52-0}

Code: timing - DESIGNED {7-0}

Code: TUTOR {76-0}

Code: tutor - elsewhere {5-0}

Code: tutor - general contact {39-0}

Code: tutor - janet specifically {29-0}

Appendix 10

