A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION EXAMINING THE ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENTS' PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AN EMPLOYABILITY FOCUSED CURRICULUM

JENNIFER BRADFORD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

February 2013

THESIS CONTAINS

CD

UNIVERSITY HAVE REQUESTED THE
FOLLOWING FIGURES BE REDACTED

FIG 1. PG 11

FIG 2. PG 17

FIG 4. PG 25

Abstract

A strong higher education (HE) system plays an important role in a successful nation's economy and society (Browne 2010). The Leitch Report (2006) emphasised the role of HE in developing the world class skills required to achieve prosperity in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving global economy. However, literature suggests that HE institutions (HEIs) are not sufficiently preparing their students for the world of work, and that more needs to be done to better equip students for the requirements of employment (Adecco Group 2012, Blair 2006, Gillinson and O'Leary 2006, Nguyen *et al.* 2005, The Institute of Directors (IoD) 2007). Despite the requirements of the government and employers regarding graduate employability being well documented, the perceived needs of students and graduates are less well researched (Barnett 2007, Crebert *et al.* 2004, Mason *et al.* 2003, Sleap and Reed 2006, Yorke 2006). The HE employability agenda should understand students' perceptions of their HE experience to better design programmes that adequately prepare them for the requirements of the labour market (Burgess 2007, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, Nguyen *et al.* 2005, UKCES 2009). Utilising the perceptions of HE students and graduates, this research programme aimed to identify what more can be done to prepare students for the world of work and diminish the apparent skills gap that exists between HE graduates and the world of work requirements. To do justice to the complexity of these issues an in-depth qualitative research approach was utilised (Johnston 2003, Tod *et al.* 2007). The research programme broadly consisted of three phases:

1. Phase 1 involved interviewing 17 Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) School of Sport & Exercise Sciences (SSES) alumni about their attitudes regarding the purpose of HE, the impact their HE experience had in preparing them for the requirements of the world of work, and what more can be done to prepare students for their post HE lives.

2. Phase 2 utilised an ethnographic research approach and was conducted in two parts. Part 1 involved participant observation within the SSES student learning and teaching (L&T) environment and culture, and aimed to determine what the SSES curriculum provides in preparing students for the post HE world. Part 2 involved conducting focus groups with final year SSES undergraduate students regarding their experiences and perceptions of the employability focused L&T opportunities provided.

3. Phase three involved interviewing 11 SSES graduates at the end of their undergraduate university experience about their attitudes regarding the purpose of HE, and their evaluative perceptions of the SSES course from the perspective of L&T and post HE preparation.

Phase 2 found that the SSES had responded to the demand of the competitive graduate job market and developed a three stage employability model that involved opportunities to prepare students for post HE. This included personal development planning (PDP), careers sessions, guest speakers, a placement and reflective practice. The SSES were perceived to be proactive in providing

opportunities, advice and encouragement to help students develop personally and professionally. However, the research also demonstrated that students are not engaging sufficiently with these aspects of the curriculum. Yorke (2006) notes that the provision of opportunities to develop employment prerequisites does not guarantee that such development occurs, and that it cannot be assumed that students are employable on the basis of curricular provision alone. Students' lack of engagement was explored through phases 1, 2 and 3 by gaining a better understanding of students' attitudes to L&T within their university culture. This understanding and the subsequent recommendations can be utilised to diminish the dissonance between SSES provision and students' engagement, and determine how the SSES can promote effective learning and post HE preparation within the SSES curriculum.

Phase 1 and 3 of this research programme demonstrated that students generally envisage that HE will develop them personally and result in them feeling more prepared for their lives post HE. Since students are orientated to pursue their degrees and post HE preparations in different ways, HEIs need to ensure that they understand and meet the aspirations and needs of the broader student population (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009). Understanding the individual needs of students and providing them with the post HE nurturing and support they require will result in them being better prepared to meet the requirements of the working world, which will in turn lead to a more skilled workforce that can enhance the economy and society (Barrie 2007, Brennan *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010, O'Regan 2009). Critically, such student support needs to be orientated around an enhanced student awareness of the relevance and value of what they are learning and how it relates to the post HE world. Specifically, students need to be engaged with an effective support network that is grounded in the competitive reality of the world of work, the reality and outcome of their degree, the world of work requirements, and the importance of engaging in curriculum interventions that prepare students for the world of work. Alongside enhancing awareness, students need to be supported and guided through the process of determining and appropriately preparing for their individual post HE aspirations. This process should involve gaining an awareness of the wide range of post HE opportunities that are available, consideration of how these options fit students' individual needs, and gaining some experience of those opportunities.

To better prepare students for post HE and diminish the gap that exists between the skills graduates gain from the curriculum and the requirements of the world of work, there needs to be a closer fit between the two. In essence, the world of work realities and requirements need to feature more centrally within HE L&T culture and content to enhance the employability relevance and value students attach to their degree programme.

Acknowledgments

Contents

Index of Tables

Index of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction, literature review and research design

1.1 Introduction

This PhD thesis discusses the research programme that has being conducted in association with Liverpool John Moores University's (LJMU) Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) project; *'Developing Learning and Assessment Opportunities for a Complex World'* (appendix 1).

http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ntf/index.htm

With a subject focus on sport, exercise, dance and physical activity, the NTF project spans programmes in the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences (SSES) and the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure (ECL) (Thompson *et al.* 2008). This PhD thesis focuses on the research programme conducted by the named researcher within the SSES.

A strong higher education (HE) system plays an important role in a successful nation's economy and society (Browne 2010). The Leitch Report (2006) emphasised the role of HE in developing the world class skills required to achieve world class prosperity in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving global economy. However, literature suggests that HE institutions (HEIs) are not sufficiently preparing HE students for the world of work, and that more needs to be done to better prepare students for the requirements of employment (Adecco Group 2012, Blair 2006, Gillinson and O'Leary 2006, Nguyen *et al.* 2005, The Institute of Directors (IoD) 2007). According to Rae (2009), many HE courses offer a sound preparation for employability, but students and graduates are often not well prepared to enter the job market, suggesting that such employability and careers related provisos are inadequately accounting for the aspirations of the skills agenda and the demands of the economy. It is vital that HE produces graduates that the economy needs, with the skills that employers value (Universities UK 2006). As stated by the Dearing report (The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) 1997), HE needs to adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing world and to new challenges. Denholm (2011) advised that HEIs should develop their curricula and learning and teaching (L&T) in order to account for students' future employment needs. It is recommended throughout the literature that student learning, the student experience and student engagement are put at the heart of all planning, teaching and review within HE (Browne 2010, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2011, Hadfield *et al.* 2012, HEFCE 2010, NSF 2010). Despite the perceptions and needs of the government and employers regarding graduate employability being well documented and established, less well researched are the perceptions and needs of students and graduates (Barnett 2007, Crebert *et al.* 2004, Mason *et al.* 2003, Sleap and Reed 2006, Yorke 2006). Debates on the HE employability agenda should utilise students' needs and perceptions regarding their HE experience, in order to better design programmes that adequately prepare students for the requirements of the labour market and meet the needs of students' (Burgess 2007, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, Nguyen *et al.* 2005, UKCES 2009).

As a result of the stated issues, this research programme aimed to identify what more can be done to prepare students for the world of work requirements and students' post HE aspirations, in order to diminish the apparent skills gap that exists between HE graduates and the world of work. Since the post HE preparation and employability of students are complex phenomena, assessments about such complexities cannot be made using simplistic, quantitatively gathered data (Johnston 2003, Sleap and Reed 2006). In order to do justice to the complexity of graduate employability and provide a more detailed insight, an in-depth qualitative research approach is required (Johnston 2003, Tod *et al.* 2007).

1.2 Literature Review

This literature review will provide a background and rationale for the work that has been undertaken as part of this PhD research programme. The literature review will start by providing a brief overview of the relationship between HE and the economy, making reference to relevant government agendas. The apparent skills gap between the requirements of the world of work and the skills graduates possess will be highlighted. This skills gap has been the focus of government agendas. From here, the literature review will give an overview of factors that have impacted on such a skills gap in order to explore what more can be done to prepare graduates for the world of work. The factors discussed are:

- The Rapidly Changing World
- An Assessment Driven Culture
- A Degree is not enough
- An Economy of Experience
- The Need for a Real World Curriculum
- Marketability requires Self-Awareness
- A Lack of Engagement
    - Teaching and Learning
    - Community
    - Staff
    - Cohort Size
    - One Size DOES NOT Fit all
- Student Experience
    - Students at the Heart of the System

The literature review will be concluded with the overall aims and objectives of this PhD research programme.

1.2.1 Higher Education and the Economy

A strong HE system plays an important role in a successful nation's economy and society (Browne 2010). The Leitch Report (2006) emphasised the role of HE in developing the world class skills required to achieve world class prosperity in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving global economy. In 1999, Prime Minister Tony Blair called for a HE participation rate of at least 50% of young people aged below 30 (Thompson 1999). Subsequent widening participation agendas have resulted in the number of HE students in the UK rising from 1.5 million in the academic year 1994/1995 to 2.5 million in the academic year 2010/2011 (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2012). The expectation was that this increased number of graduates will result in the development of a highly skilled workforce that will enhance the nation's economy. HEIs responded to the skills agenda and subsequent emphasis on employability by creating either optional or compulsory employability and careers related curriculum opportunities (O'Regan 2010). As stated by the HEA (2006), the goals of HE programmes are wider than academic achievements alone; enhancing employability is a key objective. The Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) defined employability as:

"A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation(s), which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (Yorke 2006: 8).

According to Rae (2009), many HE courses offer a sound preparation for employability, but students and graduates are often not well prepared to enter the job market, suggesting that such employability and careers related provisos are inadequately accounting for the aspirations of the skills agenda and the demands of the economy. This notion is discussed below.

1.2.2 The Skills Gap

Fifty four percent of employers reported that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find graduates with the required skills set (Gillinson and O'Leary 2006). Adecco Group (2012) found that 46% of employees and 53% of employers did not think that HEIs equip graduates with the world of work requirements. Nguyen *et al.* (2005) found that students themselves tended to have lower assessments of their own skills than their perceived importance of the same skills for their future employment. The Adecco Group (2012) and Nguyen *et al.* (2005) concluded that HEIs are not sufficiently preparing students for the world of work. The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) (2010: 5) feel that HEIs do not help students to develop 'vital core work skills', and as a result, students are being let down by HE (Blair 2006). The IoD (2007) stated that HE needs to better prepare students for the requirements of employment. In order to better prepare students for the world of work, factors that impact negatively on the HE employability curriculum and the subsequent skills gap between HE and the world of work need to be identified.

1.2.3 What has impacted on the apparent skills gap?

1.2.4 The Rapidly Changing World

As highlighted above by the IoD, the responsibility to resolve and overcome graduate labour market issues is often placed on HEIs (Tomlinson 2005). HE is fundamental in the development and deliverance of the well prepared, highly skilled workforce that is required by the labour market (Norton and Thomas 2009, Thompson *et al.* 2008, Tomlinson 2005). However, according to Browne (2010), HE is not responsive to the changing requirements of the economy. As stated by the AGR (2010: 3), the workplace that current day graduates enter into will be unrecognisable to the one experienced by their parents. In order to effectively prepare students, HE has to evolve in response to the changing needs of the job market. As stated by the Dearing report, HE needs to adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing world and to new challenges (NCIHE 1997). As a result, this research programme will aim to illuminate what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work.

1.2.5 An Assessment Driven Culture

It has been suggested that within HE, more emphasis is placed on academic achievement and gaining qualifications than preparation for the world of work (Roberts 2009). According to Brown and Knight (1994), at the centre of the student experience is assessment. Ainley and Allen (2010) argue that for HE students, the goal is to pass the degree rather than to learn, resulting in what Ainley (cited in Fearne 2008) described as a 'culture of instrumentalism', causing students to learn what they need, when they need it, disregarding information that they do not perceive a 'need' to engage with. As demonstrated in the quotation below, this preoccupation with 'passing' can be detrimental to student engagement:

"The persistence of a system that concentrates on a single summative judgement results in a fixation on achieving a number that is considered 'good'. This drives the behaviours of academic staff and students and works to the detriment of the currency of other information" Burgess (2007: 5).

The notion of 'spoon-feeding', as explored by Smith (2008), suggests that some students want to be told exactly what to do; the facts, the right answers, instead of independently pursuing knowledge and learning. Smith (2008) suggested that spoon-feeding in HE students could be the result of the assessment driven culture that exists within education. Students' past assessment driven educational experiences combined with students' overwhelming anxiety to succeed and achieve academically, results in the desire to be told exactly what to learn (Smith 2008). As stated by Brown *et al.* (1997: 7), *'assessment defines what students regard as important'*. According to Burgess (2007), the assessment driven culture is due to the increasingly competitive graduate job market caused by widening participation agendas, and the fact that many employers initially sift applications based on degree classification. 75% of the AGR members use a 2.1 as their primary screening tool (Snowdon 2012).

As a result, attaining a 2.1 degree classification has become the priority of many students (Burgess 2007, Snowdon 2012). For 19% of students in the UNITE 2007 student experience report, degree results topped their list of concerns, above factors such as safety (8%) and student debt (6%).

1.2.6 A Degree is not enough

However, it appears that the assessment driven culture may be futile, since it has been suggested that the academic knowledge base of graduates is overemphasised (Brown *et al.* 2003). Employers take for granted that graduates offer academic qualities, as this comes as a given in conjunction with any named degree, as stated in the below quote from a Human Resources manager:

> *"Academic qualifications are the first tick in the box and then we move on. Today, we simply take them for granted"* (Brown *et al.* 2003: 120).

Although a degree is a prerequisite for many careers, it is no longer a distinguishing factor in many cases, and there is a growing emphasis on the need for wider employability skills (Kay *et al.* 2007). Research has shown that employers view factors such as a potential employee's soft skills, awareness of the wider world, general employability and positive attitude as more important than degree subject and result (CBI 2008, Think Global and British Council 2011). The IoD (2007) highlighted that generic employability skills are perceived by employers as more important than subject specific skills. In order to overcome the assessment driven culture discussed, more needs to be done to enhance awareness of the reality and requirements of the world of work within HE:

> *"Much more effort needs to be made.....to get the message across that going to university and coming out with a 2.1....is not enough to land a graduate level job. You have to develop your skills and experience"* (Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007).

1.2.7 An Economy of Experience

Gilleard further discussed the 'skills and experience' students are required to develop in order to be world of work ready:

> *"21st century graduates need to demonstrate to employers that they can 'hit the ground running'. In addition to working hard to gain a good degree, students should engage in extracurricular activities and obtain work experience in order to develop skills that will make them better prepared for the world of work"* (Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007).

At the University UK 2009 annual lecture, Stephen Green, the chief executive of HSBC, revealed that globally HSBC receives 100,000 applications each year for graduate training programmes, of which only 1500 are recruited. 90% of applicants meet the selection criteria by having a degree classification of 2.2 or a 2.1. Graduates therefore require something 'extra', over and above their academic qualifications, in order to be successfully recruited. Green gave examples of graduate recruits and the 'extra, over and above' qualities that they possess:

"One graduate had taught English and Spanish in Guatemala; one had ran a restaurant; another worked at the Beijing Paralympics; a Punjabi singer who had been on TV; a graduate from Cameroon who had published a book and set up a small business selling second hand clothes from New York to Africa" (Green 2009: 4).

Employers argue that qualifications do not provide them with enough information about graduates. Brown (2007) stated, *'if first-class minds do not necessarily make first-class managers, everything that individuals do outside of the lecture theatre becomes part of an "economy of experience" that must be packaged as the productive self'.* 'Relevant work experience' is something that the HSBC chief executive suggested graduates should have in order to demonstrate to employers that they can offer something extra over and above their academic qualification:

"Relevant work experience – internships for example, rather than working in the union bar" (Green 2009: 4).

Gilleard supported this notion:

"If [students] concentrate purely on academic studies and have no work experience, they are not going to impress the employer" (Blair 2006).

According to High Fliers (2011), irrelevant of degree classification, without work experience it is hard for graduates to demonstrate to employers the skills and competencies that are required in the world of work. Jewell (2008) found that students' who work for experience reasons during term time receive higher post HE salaries. Jewell (2008) felt that employers are potentially attracted to students who have worked during term time for experience reasons, because it demonstrates that they were able to effectively manage their academic work alongside work experience, implying a high level of motivation and organisational skills. Other reasons why employers place such high value on work experience, as stated in the literature, are presented below:

- Experience develops students' awareness of the realities, cultures and disciplines of the world of work (Crebert *et al.* 2004, GEES 2008, Graduate Prospects 2011, Harvey *et al* 1997, Higson 2012, Hogarth *et al.* 2007).
- Experience develops or enhances world of work required skills (for example, team-working, communication, interpersonal skills, confidence, independence, life skills, maturity) (GEES 2008, Graduate Prospects 2011, Harvey *et al* 1997, Higson 2012, Kay *et al.* 2007, Leitch 2006).
- Experience contextualises learning, allowing students to better apply their knowledge and skills (GEES 2008, Kay *et al.* 2007, Pegg *et al.* 2012).

As stated in the Wilson (2012) review, a lack of work experience is a key barrier in the gaining of employment. High Fliers (2012) revealed that 52% of employers reported not considering graduates unless they have gained relevant work experience. Furthermore, 36% of graduate vacancies in 2012 will be filled by graduates who have previously worked with the organisations in question (High Fliers 2012). Due to the importance of experience, the Wilson (2012) review recommended that every

full-time undergraduate student should have the opportunity to experience a structured, university-approved undergraduate internship during their period of study. According to Graduate Prospects (2011) and GEES (2008), the importance and benefit of engaging with work experience needs to be highlighted to HE students. Many students do not realise the importance of experience until they begin applying for jobs (Graduate Prospects 2011). Graduates feel that HEIs need to do more to ensure that students are aware of the need to undertake some form of work experience in order to compete in the competitive graduate labor market (Graduate Prospects 2011).

1.2.8 The Need for a Real World Curriculum

Browne (2010) reported that the evident skills gap between HE and the workplace suggests that there needs to be a closer fit between what is taught in HE and the skills required in the economy. The Leitch report (2006: 14) highlighted that improving economic prosperity will involve responding to the needs of employers: *'economic benefits can only be delivered if ambitions are based on economically valuable skills that are effectively used in the workplace'*. It is vital that HE produces graduates that the economy needs, with the skills that employers value (Universities UK 2006). However, currently the HE curriculum does not adequately prepare students for the world of work. Students are often expected to learn what they have been prescribed, work alone and competitively, with taught subject content compartmentalised (Yorke 2006). As demonstrated in the below quotation, such L&T is ineffective in preparing graduates for post HE:

> *"University education is focused on writing essays, passing exams and doing practical exercises in conditions that graduates rarely find in industry. When these "qualified" graduates enter the workforce, they still need to be trained to do the work"* (Wilkins, cited in Schwartz 2011).

In 1979, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) published the Education for Capability Manifesto, which encouraged education providers to relate education to the world of work:

> *"Young people in secondary or HE.......acquire knowledge of particular subjects, but are not equipped to use knowledge in ways which are relevant to the world outside the education system. This imbalance is harmful to individuals, to industry and to society. A well balanced education should, of course, embrace analysis and the acquisition of knowledge. But it must also include the exercise of creative*
> *skills, the competence to undertake and complete tasks and the ability to cope with everyday life; and also doing all these things in co-operation with others........Educators should spend more time preparing people in this way for a life outside the education system"* (RSA 1979).

Since employability and preparing students for their post HE lives is a complex phenomenon, an innovative L&T approach is required (Barnett 2000, Tatlow 2012, Yorke 2006). As will be discussed below, it appears that the development of employability promoting L&T requires a cultural shift as opposed to a technical challenge (Hadfield *et al.* 2012, UKCES 2009). The Wilson (2012) review into university-business collaboration highlights that the HE and business sectors must work more closely together to provide students with the opportunities to enhance their post HE preparation. Employer

groups feel that HE students should have more opportunities to engage with real-world, quality experience (AGR 2010, Adecco Group 2012). Adecco Group (2012: 41) stated that current work experience is inadequate and should be replaced by *'a broader programme of employability training that goes beyond a two week placement'*. Denholm (2011) advised that HEIs should develop their curriculums and L&T in order to account for students' future employment needs. It has been recommended that HEIs should contextualise learning and familiarise students with the realities of the world of work (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, NCIHE 1997, Universities UK 2006). Numerous authors have recommended that employability skills should be embedded within the curriculum (for example, AGR 2010, Knight and Yorke 2004, O'Regan 2009, Wright *et al.* 2010).

1.2.9 Marketability requires Self-Awareness

In 2006, Leitch stated that qualifications would allow people to demonstrate their skills in the job market. However, based on the evidence from employers that graduates do not have the adequate skill sets for the workplace (the skills gap), it does not appear that demonstrating skills can be taken for granted. Research reported in the Burgess (2007) review found that employers were concerned by graduates' inability to articulate and relate their experience and achievements to the job role in question. According to Lexmond and Bradley (2010: 33), graduates are confident that they have the necessary skills for the world of work, but are unsure how to sell those skills to employers. The HEA (2006) advised that there should be a focus on students' ability to communicate with employers the personal and professional employability aspects that have developed as a result of their HE experience. It is essential that students are able to demonstrate their acquired skill sets to potential employers (Leitch 2006). As stated by the UKCES (2009: 7), *'one of the most valuable transferable skills is the ability to transfer one's skills'*. The below quotation from Templeman, Director-General of the IoD expands on this notion:

> *"Employers greatly value the knowledge and skills that graduates develop whilst studying at university, along with the skills and experience they gain from undertaking activities beyond the curriculum. The most employable graduates are those who not only have this blend of skills, but who are able to demonstrate and articulate how they have developed their skills and why they are important"* (Norton and Thomas 2009: 1).

In many cases, students will have gained the skills they require for the workplace, but they need to be made aware of the skills they possess and can offer to potential employers (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Leitch 2006). The students in a study by Glover *et al.* (2002) demonstrated that they did not recognise how their experiences at university were applicable to the working world. Glover *et al.* (2002) found that only 14% of HE students in their final term at university thought that they had been given an understanding of the needs of the workplace, and only 18% felt that they had been made aware of the links between their academic learning and the working world. Glover *et al.* (2002)

stated that students did not *'recognise the gains from the wholeness of the university experience'*, a notion which was concurred in a study by Sambell *et al.* (1997). Sambell *et al.* (1997) showed that students who experienced a variety of alternative assessment interventions did not perceive many of the features educators considered beneficial. In a similar manner to the findings from Glover *et al.* (2002), Leggott and Stapleford (2004) found that HE students had a low awareness of the skills that they were intended to develop, and an unawareness of the skills required by employers. One year after graduation however, most of the now graduates had become aware of skills they had developed at university and how they were required and applicable in their work place. As previously discussed, there is an apparent skills gap between the requirements of the world of work and the skills graduates possess.

Harvey (2003: 39) proposes that whilst HE can appear unable to adequately prepare graduates with the requirements of the world of work, similarities between the abilities developed in HE and those required by the world of work have been reported. Harvey (2003) argues that the skills gap tends to only be apparent in the first few months of work, when employers expect more from graduates. In relation to the findings from Leggott and Stapleford (2004), the first few months that Harvey referred to may reflect the time that graduates are adjusting to the world of work and becoming aware of their skill sets and the applicability of such skills. This contradicts the claim that universities are not equipping students with the skills required for the working world, by implying that universities may be successfully equipping graduates with such skills, but that students are not aware that such skills are being developed (Knight and Page 2007).

HE needs to facilitate the development of students' awareness of the understandings, skills and attributes that will help them have successful careers (Yorke 2006). Harvey (2003) states that students' transition from HE to the world of work is enhanced if students' tacit knowledge is developed. Yorke and Knight (2006) stated that students need to repeatedly hear and be aware of what is intended for them to learn, in order to be aware of the skills they are gaining. It is also important to ensure that students are aware of the requirements of the world of work, and how the skills they are gaining at university relate and are important to the world of work (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Brewer 2009, Leitch 2006). According to Brewer (2009), students are at a disadvantage if they are unaware of the requirements of the world of work, since they will be unable to utilise requirements that they are unaware of. As a result, ensuring students are aware of the skills they possess and how such skills can relate and be applied post HE will enhance students' ability to market such skills to potential employers, put such skills into action as soon as they enter the workplace, and account for the requirements of employers and the world of work (Burgess 2007).

Yorke and Knight's (2006) USEM account of employability supports the need to develop students' self-awareness with regard to their learning and ability to reflect on their learning. Yorke and Knight (2006) created the understanding, skills, efficacy, metacognition (USEM) account of employability (see Figure 1), which suggests that employability is influenced by four main factors:

- Understanding
- Skills
- Efficacy beliefs, students' self-theories and personal qualities
- Metacognition: a student's self-awareness regarding their learning and their ability to reflect on their learning.

Figure 1: The USEM account of employability, which suggests that employability is influenced by four main factors, with the pervasiveness of 'E' (Yorke and Knight 2006: 5).

Marzano (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of educational interventions which found particularly high effects of interventions in the 'E' areas of the USEM account of employability. Personal effectiveness can be contributed to by self-esteem and self-efficacy (Yorke 2004). These factors may be of delicate composition and require cultivating for some students entering the higher education system (Yorke 2004). Placing particular significance on those students who may not have completely settled in higher education, Bandura (1997) stated that it can be demoralising for students not to be aware of their progress towards a given goal:

'the less individuals believe in themselves, the more they need explicit, proximal, and frequent feedback of progress that provides repeated affirmations of their growing capabilities' (Bandura 1997 p. 217).

As stated by Yorke and Knight (2006), students need to repeatedly hear what it is intended that they will learn. This will help them to understand what it means, to know ways of judging what they have achieved, and to see how to improve.

As a final thought on the notion of awareness, Tomlinson (2008) found that students' feel the need to develop aspects such as 'soft credentials' or employability skills in order to compete in the labour market. However, based on the literature discussed above, it may be that such aspects have already developed, and increasing students' awareness of the skills they possess will aid in their ability to compete (Knight and Page 2007).

1.2.10 A Lack of Engagement

As stated, Tomlinson (2008) highlighted that students are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of 'soft credentials', and the need to differentiate themselves in a competitive graduate job market. The students in Tomlinson's (2008) study saw the need to add value to their HE credentials in order to gain an advantage in the labour market. Whilst academic credentials were viewed by the students in Tomlinson's study as important for employability, there was a growing sense among students that they had to 'do all they can' to give themselves a positional advantage in the competitive graduate labour market. Barrie (2007) also identified that students perceive the need to develop a broader employability narrative, involving additional skills, achievements, social and personal credentials. The students in the study by Glover *et al.* (2002) highlighted that they expected to attend courses that would guarantee them a secure and profitable future, causing Glover *et al.* (2002) to conclude that HE students are increasingly expecting HE courses directed towards employment. Whilst an awareness of the need to develop employability and 'soft credentials' should result in an enhanced student engagement in employability opportunities offered by HE, this is not always the case (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2006). Yorke (2006) notes that the provision of opportunities to develop employment prerequisites does not guarantee that such development occurs; instead employability derives from the ways in which students learn from their experiences. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that students are employable on the basis of curricular provision alone (Yorke 2006). Part of achieving a high level of performance in employability provision is ensuring learner engagement (Astin 1999, Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2006). Furthermore, as stated by Knight (2007), student engagement is central to the development of complex achievements, such as employability related attributes. Student engagement is therefore central to successful employability curricula. Student engagement is a priority for HE at the present time. The 2011 White Paper listed student engagement as the key to the government's agenda of 'putting students at the heart of the system', and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) have developed a United Kingdom (UK) code of practice on student engagement (QAA 2012). The Research, Advancing and

Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) group collated the following definition of student engagement:

"Student engagement (SE) is about what a student brings to HE in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. SE is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions. As players in and shapers of the educational context, educators need to foster educationally purposeful student engagement to support and enable students to learn in constructive and powerful ways and realise their potential in education and society" (RAISE 2010).

Since government agendas and policies for 'skilling up' students will be futile if students do not engage, it is important to determine potential reasons why students are not engaging with the opportunities they are being provided, in order to determine how to enhance engagement, and in turn enhance students' preparation for post HE (Cooper 2011). Factors that may impact on students' engagement with employability curricula and considerations for diminishing the skills gap are presented below.

1.2.10.1 Teaching and Learning

According to Rae (2009), students do not perceive employability and post HE preparation as a priority. This is supported by the students involved with O'Regan's (2009) study, who demonstrated little concern with the labour market and only a few has begun to consider skills development as they approached the end of their second year. A big challenge is getting students to engage with personal and career development, which is often perceived as less important and an 'add-on' to the degree subject (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2006, Rae 2009). Rae (2007) suggests that a lack of student engagement with employability related L&T content is due to the disjointed way in which employability is delivered to students, resulting in students being unable to perceive the relevance and subsequent need to engage with such content. Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2006) highlighted the need to develop employability curricula that is valued by students and in turn promotes student engagement.

1.2.10.2 Community

The literature suggests that community impacts on students' engagement and learning. The social, community aspect of university can be just as important to students as the academic side, but Yorke feels it is sometimes given insufficient attention:

"Students can feel very isolated in a HE environment, and become discouraged. Many....... students are living away from home for the first time, and sometimes in environments that are unfamiliar and perhaps threatening. Local students may be particularly disadvantaged if they are....'commuter students', who come in for timetabled activities but then go back home or to part-time employment"
(Yorke, cited in Cunnane 2012).

Astin (1999) argues that students need to be involved or engaged with their HE programme of study and student life in order to have a good student experience. According to Astin's (1999) student development theory, the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater the amount of student learning and personal development. Zhao and Kuh (2004) and Kember *et al.* (2001) found that participation in some form of learning community promotes a sense of belonging and contributes to better quality learning outcomes and student success. However, Delaney (2004) surveyed alumni who reported that they were not satisfied with the sense of community, social life, and personal preparation for post graduation they had experienced at HE. Results revealed that those who feel a sense of community are more satisfied with their overall educational experience. As a result of such findings, Delaney (2004) suggested that there needs to be a balance between academic demands and social opportunities, with extra-curricular opportunities expanded, and investment in resources and staff to enrich students' social lives. Kay *et al.* (2007) reported that there is a clear link between the sense of community and support. Bloxham and Campbell (2010) demonstrated that students' who are not comfortable taking part and engaging with their academic community, will be unable to engage with staff and gain support when it is required. According to Astin (1997) and Hill *et al.* (2003), the most significant factor in student academic success is student involvement fostered by student-staff and student-student interactions. As such, developing ways to encourage greater student involvement with their programmes (and vice versa) is highly productive (Astin 1999). It is therefore important to ensure that a sense of community resides within HEIs to ensure that students engage with staff and gain the necessary academic, personal and professional support that they require. The National Student Forum (NSF) (2010) felt that HE should establish and promote a sense of community within programmes.

1.2.10.3 Staff

Since employability derives from the ways in which students learn from their experiences (Yorke 2006), HE staff play a key role in creating a sense of engagement amongst students with regard to their studies (Cunnane 2012), as demonstrated in the below quote:

> *"If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes.........It is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does"* (Shuell 1986: 429).

Cunnane (2012) cites a 2009 Australian study, which recommends that all students should have the opportunity for close personal interactions with academic staff, because teacher empathy, demonstrated interest in students as individuals, and respect for students are important factors in students' academic and social engagement. Kay *et al.* (2007) advise that staff need to ensure that the enthusiasm they have for their research is balanced by a real commitment to excellent L&T, since this can enhance the students experience and graduate employability.

1.2.10.4 Cohort Size

Bowles (2011) reported that basic HE resourcing issues, such as staff-student ratios has the biggest impact on student engagement. As Bowles (2011) stated, *"it is hard to feel authentically engaged with your learning if your lecturers do not know your name"*. Gibbs (2012) feels that the widening participation agendas have resulted in class sizes going up and 'close contact' between staff and students going down. This in turn has negatively impacted on engagement and learning gains. Lexmond and Bradley (2010) found that students were concerned about staff-student contact time. The University of Buckingham demonstrated how cohort size can impact on graduate employability. 100% of the universities 2007/2008 cohort went into work or further study. The university attributed this success to the small nature of the university allowing for support to be tailored individually to students (Fearne 2009). Smaller cohorts foster a more inclusive environment (Wilson and Tong 2009). Cunnane (2012) cited Harvey's research findings that demonstrate students' learning is best nurtured through small, supportive groups, taught by trained teachers using interactive L&T, formative feedback and one-to-one engagement. However, Harvey stated:

> *"What do students get? Large, impersonal lectures, poor lecturing, no interactivity, seminars run by untrained or barely trained and inexperienced postgraduates or teaching assistants, no one-to-ones and no formative feedback. Frankly, it is a disgrace"* (Cunnane 2012).

1.2.10.5 One Size DOES NOT Fit All

Regarding employability, Yorke and Knight (2006) stated that one size does not fit all. Widening participation agendas have resulted in an increasingly diverse student population with differing post HE expectations and needs (O'Regan 2009). As a result, employability means different things to different students, and students develop employability based on their personal circumstances (Barrie 2007, Yorke 2006). However, employability related agendas have tended to homogenise students (Barrie 2007). Government policies have given little attention to the needs and aspirations of graduates regarding employability, both prior to work and once in work (Minten 2010, Sleap and Reed 2006). O'Regan (2009) and Jewell (2008ₐ) highlighted that students are expected to engage with HEI imposed employability agendas and opportunities regardless of whether this is appropriate to their individual needs or not. Numerous studies have aimed to explore students' reasons for going to university. The students in the UNITE (2007) student experience report stated that their top three motivations for going to university were:

1. To gain qualifications (73%)
2. To improve chances of getting a job (66%)
3. To improve earning potential (44%)

The National Union of Students (NUS) (2008) student experience report revealed similar results. When students were asked the main reasons why they wanted to go to university, the most popular responses were:

1. To gain qualifications (68%)
2. To improve chances of getting a job (53%)
3. To improve earning potential (44%)

The NUS (2008) reported comparable responses again when school leavers were asked for their main reasons for wanting to go to university:

1. To gain qualifications (68%)
2. To improve chances of getting a job (44%)
3. To improve earning potential (45%)

The 2009 Division of Undergraduate Studies at Penn State educational planning survey asked students to select one reason out of a list of nine for attending college. Almost 50% of students selected, *'to prepare for a vocation, learn what I have to know in order to enter a particular career'* (The Pennsylvania State University 2009). The Robbins report proposed that not many individuals who enter HE do so without a focus towards post HE employment (Committee on Higher Education 1963). Burns, the NUS president stated that hard evidence shows that the vast majority of students go to university to get a better job and have a successful career (Swain 2011). It appears that post HE career is a major driver for students pursuing university. According to Ainley (cited in Fearne 2008), students perceive university as a hoop to jump through on the way to getting a job. However, the NUS 2008 student experience report revealed that graduates view university as preparation for life more so than preparation for work (65% and 35% respectively). The report concluded that overall, graduates views on the purpose of HE are broader than employability alone. Furthermore, the UNITE 2007 report demonstrated that whilst career related reasons may represent students' top motivations for going to university, there are many other reasons why students decide to go university (see UNITE 2007, page 9). Anderson and Marsh (2011) cited a NUS/CBI survey which found that students have a variety of reasons for going to university, as presented below:

1. To improve job opportunities (79%)
2. Personal interest – I love learning new things (60%)
3. It seemed logical to go to university after school/college (45%)
4. To help develop/change my current job/career (40%)
5. To get away from home and live my own life (23%)
6. I was expected to go (19%)
7. Other reasons (5%)

Brennan *et al.* (2005) argued that individuals have a variety of reasons for going to university, and a variety of hopes and dreams for their lives post HE. This notion is summarised in the quotation below:

"Students choose their degree courses for many reasons. Some will be particularly interested in one course and decide to pursue it with relatively little concern about what it will do for their employment prospects. Others choose a course because it will improve their employment prospects" (Browne 2010: 31).

The NUS (2008) concurred with this notion, stating that students choose their degrees based on academic interest in the subject as opposed to perceiving it as a direct route into a career. Lexmond and Bradley (2010) found that 61% of students and graduates reported choosing their degree subject based on academic interest in the subject. Only 21% reported choosing their degree subject because they wanted a related job, and 12% stated that they wanted to equip themselves with the necessary skills for work (Lexmond and Bradley 2010). It is important to note that students may not chose their degree subject because they want to work in that given industry, but they do expect to gain a series of transferable skills than can be used in a variety of different post HE options (NUS 2008). In this sense, students appear to pursue a degree in order to prepare for their post HE lives and career in general, as opposed to a career in specific. It is important to understand students' reasons for going to university, in order to make sense of the employability needs and aspirations of students, and assess the effectiveness of their HE experience in accounting for such needs and aspirations (Brennan *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010). O'Regan (2010) feels that employability opportunities provided by HEIs only account for the needs and aspirations of a small proportion of the student body. O'Regan (2010) found four ways in which undergraduates are orientated towards post HE preparations, as demonstrated in the figure below. The figure shows a 'focus' axis which extends from the present into the future and a 'relevance' axis indicating how much significance students placed on pursuing their careers (O'Regan 2010).

Figure 2: Undergraduates' orientations towards their future and their prospective career (O'Regan 2010: 21)

O'Regan (2010) suggests that employability related opportunities provide for instrumental students, but not students orientated to learning, hesitation and introspection. O'Regan (2010) highlights a need to consider how to accommodate and account for all students through the HE employability framework. For example, students orientated towards introspection may need to be provided with one to one guidance and support to help them overcome any stress or anxiety. Career hesitators, who may procrastinate, need help to focus and goal set. Since students are orientated to pursue their education and post HE preparation in different ways, HEIs need to ensure that they meet the needs of the broader student population, and avoid the use of a 'blanket employability agenda' (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009). This research programme aims to further explore factors that impact on engagement and in turn negatively affect students' preparation for post HE.

1.2.11 Student Experience

Since there is a need to consider and account for the needs of all students, the HE student experience needs to be prioritised (O'Regan 2010). Barnett (2007) makes a call for putting students at the centre of educational thinking in HE. It is recommended throughout the literature that student learning, the student experience and student engagement are put at the heart of all planning, teaching and review (Browne 2010, BIS 2011, Hadfield *et al.* 2012, HEFCE 2010, NSF 2010). The student experience was the focus of the 2011 government White Paper, entitled 'Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System':

"Institutions must deliver a better student experience; improving the quality of teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work" (BIS 2011: 4.3).

1.2.11.1 Students at the Heart of the System

As Yorke (2004) highlighted, much work is still to be done on students' experience of HE. Leitch (2006) reported the nation's prosperity is a shared responsibility between the government, employers and individuals. As demonstrated, the perceptions and needs of the government and employers regarding graduate employability have been well documented and established, but less well researched are the perceptions and needs of students and graduates (Barnett 2007, Crebert *et al.* 2004, Mason *et al.* 2003, Sleap and Reed 2006, Yorke 2006). This lack of understanding of the perceptions and needs of students may explain why HE is not adequately preparing students for the world of work:

"One of the basic reasons why planning fails is that the planners or decision makers of change are unaware of the situations faced by potential implementers. They introduce changes without....attempting to understand the values, ideas or experiences of those who are essential for implementing any changes" (Fullan 2001: 65).

Barnett (2007) proposes that debates about HE are not logical without considering and gaining input from students. Discussing issues and challenges with students is an extremely important approach

which has not been utilised enough (Kay *et al.* 2007). Students know how they want to be taught and have ideas about how techniques can be improved to enhance learning (Kay *et al.* 2007). The important need for accessing the student voice, feedback, views and opinions as a basis for enhancement and change of HE has been highlighted (QAA 2010, Dunne and Zandstra 2011). Furthermore, no HE stakeholder group has been more affected by the significant changes HE and the economy has undergone than students and graduates (Brown 2007, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Ramsden stated:

"It is now time to move beyond simply collecting and responding to students' views. We should embed the student perspective in all aspects of teaching, quality enhancement and quality assurance"
(Ramsden, cited in NSF 2009: 20).

Therefore, debates on the HE employability agenda should utilise students' needs and perceptions regarding their HE experience in order to better design programmes that adequately prepare students for the requirements of the labour market and meet the needs of students (Burgess 2007, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, Nguyen *et al.* 2005, UKCES 2009). As the NUS (2010) stated, if we want to positively impact on students' lives, we need to better understand the needs of students; we need to be the experts on students.

1.2.12 A need for qualitative research

As stated by Tomlinson (2007), the majority of research around the graduate labour market and employability development has been conducted in a large-scale quantitative manner. Brennan *et al.* (2005) reported that student feedback is most frequently collected in the form of surveys, and such research has been heavily orientated towards what Sleap and Reed (2006: 59) termed a 'skills based approach', which focuses on the impact HE has had on the development of graduate or world of work skills (for example, Crebert *et al.* 2004, Dacre-Pool and Sewell 2007, Maher 2004, Quek 2005, Sleap and Reed 2006, Tomkins 2005, Wickramasinghe and Perera 2010, Yorke and Knight 2006). However, as stated by the AGR (1995), different employers have vastly different requirements, and therefore generic graduate 'skills' are hard to identify. Maher stated:

"Despite clear consensus in government and HE about the importance of graduate employability, there appears to be a lack of clarity about what specific skills or attributes are required for successful employment" (Maher 2004: 7).

There is much debate about the priorities, focus and emphasis for any given employer regarding employability skills (Talabi 2012). Bennett *et al.* (1999) stated that the skills demanded of graduates lack consistency and clarity, and therefore the skills based approach fails to explain key facts about graduate employment. Furthermore, Johnston (2003) highlighted that the terms used in relation to graduate employability research are vogue e.g. 'employability' and the terms given to skills, making it difficult to ascertain whether graduates are interpreting such terms in the manner intended by the researcher. Since skill development and employability are complex phenomenon, assessments about

such complexities cannot be made using simplistic survey data (Johnston 2003, Sleap and Reed 2006). As a result, the majority of the existent work examining students' perceptions is descriptive and lacks in-depth knowledge (Seale 2009). Maher (2004) concluded that it is difficult to determine skill development and graduate employability through quantitative data alone, and that qualitative data is required to supplement survey data. Survey data can only ever make suggestions about what issues there are with regard to a given phenomenon, highlighting potential areas for research (Johnston 2003). In order to do justice to the complexity of graduate employability and provide a more detailed insight, an in-depth qualitative research approach is required (Johnston 2003, Tod *et al.* 2007). Such illumination could extend and contextualise the current findings from surveys (Johnston 2003, Tod *et al.* 2007). An overview of the qualitative research design involved in this research programme is presented below, subsequent to the statement of the research programme's overarching aims.

1.3 The overarching aims of the research programme

Widening participation agendas have resulted in an increasingly diverse student population with differing post HE expectations and needs (O'Regan 2009). O'Regan (2010) feels that employability related opportunities provided by HEIs only account for the needs of a small proportion of the student body, highlighting a need to consider how to accommodate and account for the broader student population through the HE employability curriculum. This research programme therefore aims to:

a. Gain a better understanding of students' needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

There is a need to better understand students and what motivates and engages them, in order to develop L&T and create an employability curriculum that is valued by students (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2006). Furthermore, Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2006) stated that a HEI's employability potential can be determined by the student experience of the employability opportunities offered within the institution, and particularly their engagement with such opportunities. This research programme therefore aims to:

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

The apparent skills gap between the world of work requirements and the skills that graduates possess highlights that the current HE employability curricula and career related provisions are not adequately accounting for the aspirations of the skills agenda and the demands of the economy, highlighting a need to research and further develop HE employability related curricula. Since there is a need for HE to contribute to the delivery of a labour force that will ensure our national economy is capable of flourishing in the current economic climate (Leitch 2006, Browne 2010), the findings from the research will be used to illuminate aspects of the employability curriculum that can better develop and prepare graduates for the requirements of the working world. This research programme aims to:

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

1.4 Research Design

This research programme addressed its aims utilising a qualitative research design.

"Not everything that can be counted counts; and not everything that counts can be counted"
(Einstein, cited in Patton 2002)

There are areas of social reality which quantitative methods cannot measure. Qualitative research methods provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than quantitative methods (Silverman 2001). Qualitative research allows for the study of issues in depth and detail (Patton 2002). The example below highlights the difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods:

"If you want to know how much people weigh, use a scale. If you want to know if they're obese, measure body fat in relation to height and weight and compare the results to population norms. If you want to know what their weight means to them, how it affects them, how they think about it, and what they do about it, you need to ask them questions, find out about their experiences, and hear their stories" (Patton 2002: 13).

Qualitative data collection is usually derived from fieldwork, which involves the researcher spending time in the setting being studied, observing, conducting interviews and analysing any relevant documents (Silverman 2001). This qualitative research programme was conducted in three phases. An outline of the qualitative data collection approach adopted by each phase is presented in Figure 2. Table 1 highlights when the data collection for each of the three phases took place.

Table 1: Research programme data collection timetable

	Year 1 – 2009												Year 2 – 2010												Year 3 – 2011											
	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
Phase 1								▓	▓																											
Phase 2.1			▓							▓	▓	▓	▓								▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	▓	▓							
Phase 2.2																										▓			▓							
Phase 3																			▓	▓		▓														

21

Phase 1

Interviews with alumni from the SSES.

Phase 2: Ethnographic Research Approach

Part 1 involved participant observation within the SSES student L&T environment and culture.

Part 2 involved focus groups with SSES students regarding their experiences and perceptions of the L&T experience.

Phase 3

Interviews with immediate graduates.

Figure 3: Overview of phases and structure of research

Each phase of the research programme had specific sub aims relevant to both the phase and the overarching aims of the research programme. As demonstrated in Table 1, phase 1 was conducted in the early stages of this research programme. Phase 2 occurred progressively throughout all years of this research programme, and phase 3 was conducted at the same time as the final portion of phase 2. The research adopted an emergent research design, whereby the findings and knowledge gained from each phase informed and directed the focus of inquiry of the subsequent phases (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). As a result, the phase 2 part 2 focus groups and the phase 3 interviews pursued issues that had arisen from the researcher's engagement within the SSES student L&T culture (phase 2 part 1) and the alumni interviews (phase 1). A vast amount of raw data was collected as a result of the three phases' interviews, focus groups and participant observation. This data was organised and presented into readable formats and descriptions with major themes extracted via content analysis (Silverman 2001). More detail will be provided about the methods of data collection, analysis and representation involved with each of the three phases in the subsequent correlating chapters.

1.4.1 The Role of the Qualitative Researcher

In quantitative methods, validity depends on the standardisation of the measuring research instrument (Patton 2002). In qualitative research, the researcher makes the observations, scribes the field notes, asks the interview questions and analyses and interprets the data; the researcher is effectively the measuring research instrument (Patton 2002). Researcher self awareness, termed as reflexivity, which

encompasses a consciousness and ownership of one's own political and cultural perspective, can therefore be a benefit to the research and analysis process (Patton 2002).

"Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 183).

Reflexivity engages the researcher in critically analysing the research process and discovering and interpreting their data (Krane and Baird 2005). Reflexivity is an awareness of how the researchers' own involvement influences and informs the research. The named researcher who conducted this research programme felt that it was important to acknowledge and describe their beliefs and biases in relation to the research topic prior to the presentation and discussion of the findings, in an attempt to allow the reader to understand the positionality of the researcher, and the social, cultural and historical factors that may have impacted on their interpretations of the research data (Creswell and Miller 2000). As stated by Krane and Baird:

"Researchers do not approach a field setting as a blank slate or from an objective position; they bring into the setting personal histories, conceptual dispositions, and epistemological perspectives. Researchers socially construct the data (i.e., interpretations of what is important will guide data collected and how it is analysed)" (Krane and Baird 2005: 100).

As such, the researcher's influence on the research and data should be considered (Krane and Baird 2005). This will allow the reader to understand the perspective from which the researcher interpreted the data, enabling them to evaluate and determine the trustworthiness of the research for themselves (Krane and Baird 2005). The presentation of the researcher's past experiences and orientations in the self-criticality section below provides insight into the researcher's positioning, assisting the reader in understanding any assumptions that may have impacted on the interpretations of the research data (Cresswell 2007). The first person will be used in order to do justice to the personal nature of 'self-criticality' (section 1.4.2), 'the researcher's epistemological and ontological views' (1.4.3) and 'a need for ethnography' (1.4.4). It would be unjust to represent such personal and subjective information in the objective third person form (Webb 1992). Subsequently, the researcher will return to using the third person from section 1.4.5 'dual role'.

1.4.2 Self Criticality - 'My Research Vision'

The initial notion for my research came from my own personal experiences. These experiences led me to identify certain issues that I felt required researching and resulted in the creation of what I now term 'my research vision'. My research vision underpins the philosophy and content of this thesis. It is therefore important that the reader is aware of my experiences, as they are integral to my research journey and how I arrived at 'my research vision'.

When I was approaching the end of my sixth form education, I decided to apply for university. I did not feel that I was ready to enter the working world; I did not know specifically what job I wanted to

enter into. I was under the apprehension that I could go to university whilst in pursuit of determining what job I wanted to do. Choosing to do a Sports & Exercise Sciences degree at university was a hard decision. I had to choose between my two favourite 'A' levels: Physical Education (PE) and Psychology. I decided to do Sports Science, because I came to the conclusion that I would still be able to study some psychology content within that degree. Upon completing my BSc Sport & Exercise Science degree from Coventry University in 2008, I was very excited and optimistic about the prospect of entering the working world and getting a job. I was under the illusion that I would continue to pursue what I had enjoyed at university, in the same manner I had done at university after my 'A' levels. I believed that a degree was some form of 'key' to the post HE phase of my life. It appeared that this attitude was shared by others; upon telling family and friends that I was awarded a first degree classification, their response was very much based around, *'you will be able to do whatever you want now; the world is your oyster!'* This attitude from my friends and family along with my optimism towards job hunting was inevitably too good to be true. I became aware of my naivety when I began researching the person specifications for the types of jobs I had envisaged myself entering into; alongside a Sports Science degree, employers wanted attributes such as:

'Clinical Physiologist Specialism'
'3 years worth of relevant work experience'
'Gym instructor qualifications'
'First aid qualified'
'Liability insurance'

Unfortunately, I did not meet the requirements for the kinds of careers I was hoping to pursue. The process of job hunting had suddenly changed from being exciting and full of optimism to depressing and de-motivating. I was unaware and unprepared for the reality of the working world. I began to feel let down by my university for inadequately preparing me for the working world and my post HE life. I also felt regretful that I had not invested more time in the development of my personal and professional self whilst I was at university. However, as I reflected over the three years I had spent at university, I realised that my only real priority whilst I was at university was to achieve the best final grade that I possibly could. I had come out of university unprepared for my post HE life, since my attitude whilst at university was to focus on my degree, and then worry about post HE post HE. I began to feel confused as I contemplated these ideas further. I was plagued by questions such as:

'How was I so uneducated about the reality of the working world?'
'Was I wrong to only focus on my degree whilst I was at university?'
'Did I choose the wrong degree subject?'
'Whose responsibility is it to be educating students about the working world?'

As I continued with the job hunting process, I came across an advert for the NTF project at LJMU. Amongst other things, the NTF project was focusing on:

"Identifying the similarities and differences between the perceptions, understandings and expectations of staff, students and employers in relation to 21st century employability" (Thompson *et al.* 2008ₐ).

Figure 4: The NTF Spheres, depicting the narrowing of 'gaps' in stakeholder perceptions (Thompson *et al.* 2008$_A$)

The idea was that the project would draw together information from these HE stakeholders in order to create curriculum interventions that would better prepare students for employability. I was immediately drawn to the NTF project. There was a strong synergy between the issues that I had in relation to HE and the issues that the project wanted to address. The NTF project was the stepping stone that I needed to tackle some of the employability issues that I felt so desperately needed addressing within the HE sector. Upon gaining a PhD researcher position within the NTF project team in November 2008, my initial reading and research highlighted that little work had been conducted on students' perceptions of HE. The literature provided me with the justification and analytical foundation to focus my research on the perceptions, understandings and expectations of students in relation to 21st century employability (Thompson *et al.* 2008$_A$). By this point in time, I had developed what I now term, 'My Research Vision'. That being:

Students are at the heart of the HE process. Therefore, if we truly want to develop and enhance the employability of HE students', we need to involve those who are really affected: the students.

My own experience at university led me to perceive a need to research the undergraduate student experience, which I believe to be key in the plight of enhancing employability. I wanted to provide an avenue for the student voice to be heard. I was therefore very keen to focus on and do justice to the perceptions of the students.

1.4.3 The researcher's epistemological and ontological views

I perceive that the HE culture involves multiple realities between and within the different stakeholder HE groups (e.g. students, staff, employers, government, parents). As a result of these multiple realities, there will also be multiple perceptions within and between the stakeholder groups. As previously stated, this research programme is focusing on the perceptions of students. I wanted to ensure that this research programme and subsequent data and knowledge produced accounted for the multiple realities and multiple perceptions of the students. Such ontological and epistemological views impacted on the subsequent choice of qualitative data collection methods, as I wanted to ensure that I did justice to the multiple perceptions of students.

1.4.4 A Need for Ethnography

Since I came to the researcher role with an awareness of my own university culture, I was very keen to try and minimise the chance of making conclusions and assumptions about the SSES based on my own experiences. Furthermore, my own experiences of the inner-workings of the HE student culture meant that I was aware of the importance of going into the SSES students' culture in order to gain insight and understanding of students' perceptions. This is where the initial idea for utilising an ethnographic research approach came from. Ethnography involves the researcher immersing themselves within a given cultural group, collecting data through field work over a prolonged period of time (Cresswell 2007). I was very keen to represent the student culture in all its complexity, and felt that the only way to do this was to gain data through participation. I wanted to be immersed within the LJMU SSES's culture in an attempt to gain as true an insight as possible into the perceptions and experiences of SSES students. The use of an ethnographic research approach will be explained in more detail in phase 2 part 1.

1.4.5 Dual Role

A limitation to this research programme is that the focus of the research is HE, which is a culture familiar to the researcher, creating the potential for the researcher to overlook the taken for granted assumptions and the simple ideas that occur within the student culture (Alvesson 1993). This would create issues for the trustworthiness of the research (Coffey 1996). However, the researcher can be described as having a dual role, due to being an insider/outsider of the HE research culture in question, as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: The dual role of the researcher

Insider Perspective	Outsider Perspective
A recent BSc Sports Science graduate	Did not study BSc Sports Science at the SSES
A member of the SSES as a postgraduate student	Not a member of the SSES undergraduate student body being researched

This dual role is beneficial, since an insider alone would be so immersed in their culture that they would be unaware of the aspects that are an ingrained part of their society, and an outsider would simply be unaware of such aspects. From a dual perspective however, the researcher can recognise and describe cultural aspects that an insider to the culture would take for granted, and an outsider would be unaware of (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). As Patton stated:

"To understand a world you must become part of that world while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from" (Patton 2002: 259).

The researcher felt that their insider/outsider perspective was beneficial for the following reasons:

- Having recently completed a BSc Sport & Exercise Sciences degree meant that what the Sports Science discipline entails did not present any obstacles (for example, terminology, scientific procedures).

- Being a recent Sports Science graduate meant that the researcher was able to empathise and relate to the culture and experiences of the SSES students' and alumni.

- Whilst prestigious, tenured researchers are often desirable for conducting research, a recent graduate was more appropriate for the nature of this research. Being a recent Sports Science graduate meant that the SSES students and alumni were able to relate to and feel comfortable interacting with the researcher.

- The researcher did not complete their Sports Science degree at LJMU SSES. This meant that they had a reference of Sports Science university student culture, but not a familiarity with the SSES student culture specifically. The researcher was able to recognise factors that the SSES students may not be aware of or take for granted. The researcher could make explicit what was implicit and tacit to SSES students or alumni (Cresswell 2007).

- The researcher was able to fit comfortably within the student L&T environment and culture, and easily adopted the ethnographic research approach.

The researcher understood that it would be impossible to truly understand the students' L&T culture and university experience, as they would never be a member of the student cohort being researched and therefore always be an outsider looking in. The researcher's experience of being a student meant that they understood and respected this phenomenon.

1.4.6 Trustworthiness

Quantitative research concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in same manner in qualitative research (Shenton 2004). Regardless of this, qualitative researchers need to demonstrate that their research is credible (Creswell and Miller 2000). Coming from a predominantly quantitative research background, the researcher was keen to ensure the trustworthiness of this research programme, and attempts were made throughout the research programme to enforce such trustworthiness. An overview of the efforts made to ensure the trustworthiness of the research is provided with further detail being presented within the body of the thesis where appropriate. The criteria for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research have been drawn from numerous authors, as cited below.

Thick Description

Providing a thick, rich, detailed description of the setting, the subjects, and the themes of qualitative research can help establish credibility (Creswell and Miller 2000).

- *The Setting:* Thick description has been provided regarding the L&T setting that formed the focus of the ethnographic immersion.

- *The Subjects:* Demographic information has been provided for the subjects involved in interviewing and focus groups, and pen profiles have been provided for the phase 1 alumni.

- *The Themes:* The researcher has presented large amounts of raw data within the presentation and discussion of the findings to allow the reader to make their own interpretations and not have to rely on the interpretations of the researcher (Krane *et al.* 1997). Furthermore, raw data sources can be located in the appendices. The provision of documented raw data sources such as transcripts, allows the reader to formulate their own interpretations about the outcomes of the research programme (Silverman 2001). The presentation of large amounts of data prevents anecdotalism by providing data that is representative of the range of data (Silverman 2001). Where feasible, the level of support, intensity and dominance of analysis themes will be presented (Smith and Fletcher 2001). Smith and Fletcher (2001) stated that the weight, power and direction of qualitative research data should be considered in order to determine the trustworthiness of analysis output.

Prolonged engagement in the field

Engaging with the research site for a prolonged period of time is a validity enhancing procedure (Creswell and Miller 2000). The researcher was immersed within the SSES undergraduate L&T culture for two academic years (see Table 1, page 21), and was a member of the SSES postgraduate research community for the duration of the research programme.

Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants

During interview scenarios it was stressed to subjects that there was no right or wrong answer and that the purpose of the research was to gain students' perceptions regarding the topic in question. The fact that the researcher did not study at LJMU SSES and wanted to learn about the SSES Sports Science courses meant that the researcher was able to treat the subjects as collaborators and place them in a position of power. As stated by Creswell and Miller (2000: 128), *'credible data comes from close collaboration with subjects'*. During focus groups, the subjects controlled the content and direction of the conversation, shifting the power from the researcher to the subjects (Wilkinson 1999).

Member checking

Subjects that were interviewed were asked to read a full copy of their interview transcripts to ascertain the accuracy and authenticity of the interview data (Creswell and Miller 2000, Shenton 2004).

Triangulating: data, method and analyst

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe triangulation as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to enquiry. The researcher collected data from different subjects, at different times, in different locations, which is known as data triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The use of two or more qualitative data collection methods is methodological triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln

2000). This research programme utilised interviews, participant observation (which included documenting, informal conversations and document collecting) and focus groups. Methodological and data triangulation ensures that the researched phenomenon is being understood from various points of view and ways of knowing (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Analyst triangulation was used to test for consistency between two analysts' review of the interview and focus group findings (Patton 1999). The named researcher and another researcher familiar with the research programme were involved with analyst triangulation of the interview and focus group data.

Providing relevant background on the researcher: reflexivity
Presented and discussed in the 'The Role of the Qualitative Researcher' and the 'Self Criticality' sections above.

Audit trail
Clear, raw documentation of all research activities is provided in the appendices that accompany this thesis, to ensure that the process along with the product of this research programme can be examined by the reader (Creswell and Miller 2000). The provision of raw data sources allows the reader to effectively 'walk' through the research programme from beginning to end, gaining an understanding of the path the researcher took and gaining the ability to determine the trustworthiness of the outcomes (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Transcriptions and ethnographically gathered data can be found in the appendices.

Peer debriefing
Peer debriefing enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of a qualitative research project (Janesick 2007). Peer debriefing was employed whereby a review of the data and research process was undertaken by someone familiar with the research, in the form of the researchers PhD supervisor (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). This procedure was used throughout the duration of the entire research programme, as is recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). Peer debriefing allows a peer to review and assess data, emerging categories from data, and the final report. The peer may detect whether the researcher has over or under emphasised a point, or missed a 'rival legitimate hypothesis' (Janesick 2007).

Phase 1

Interviews with alumni from the SSES.

Phase 2: Ethnographic Research Approach

Part 1 involved participant observation within the SSES student L&T environment and culture.

Part 2 involved focus groups with SSES students regarding their experiences and perceptions of the L&T experience.

Phase 3

Interviews with immediate graduates.
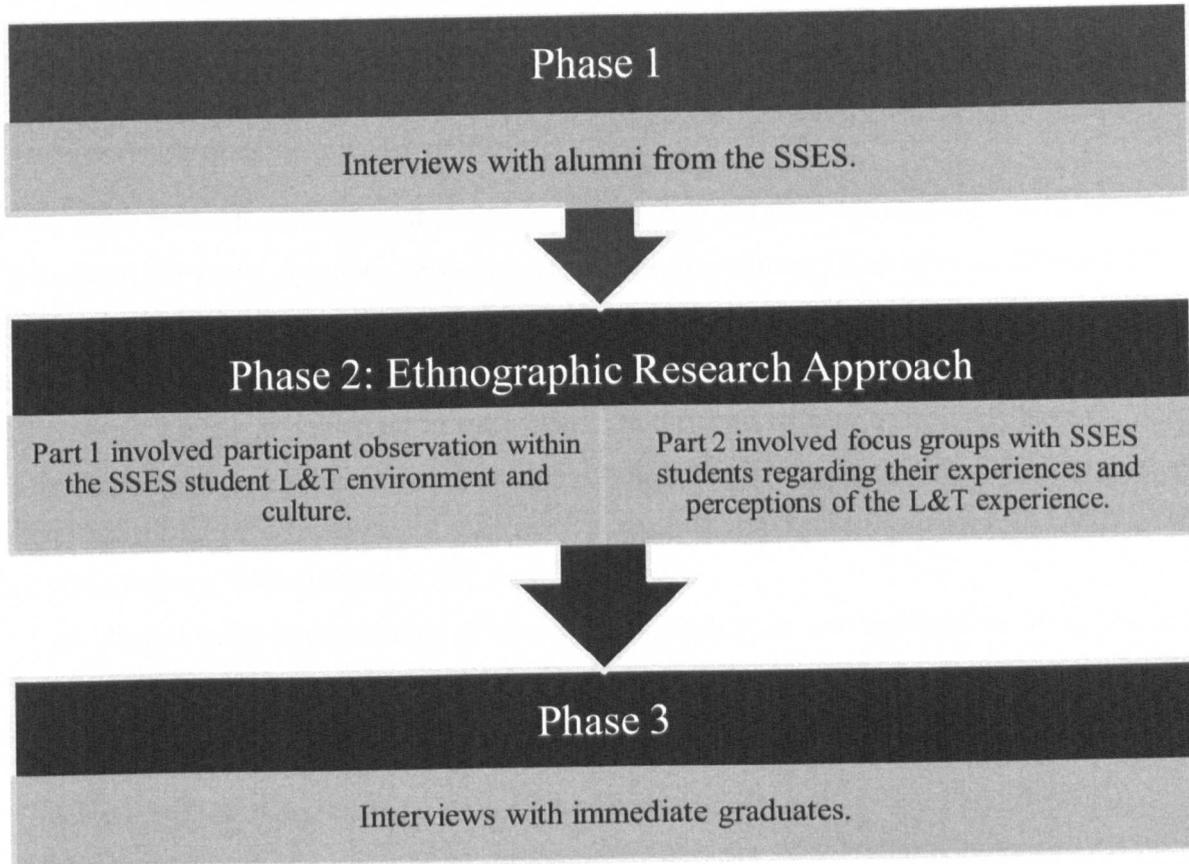
2.1 Phase 1 Rationale & Study Aims

For HE graduates, the transition from HE to post HE has been drastically impacted on by the rapidly changing economy (Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Research into alumni perceptions of HE and the world of work is essential for HE to develop in relation to the increasingly competitive economy (Weerts and Ronca 2007). This research programme will therefore address the following research question:

What are alumni perceptions of the HE experience in relation to post HE preparation?

This research question will be addressed through the following aims.

Attitudes regarding the purpose of HE

Very little research regarding the turbulent relationship between HE and the world of work has considered the views, opinions, needs and aspirations of graduates (Crebert *et al.* 2004, Mason *et al.* 2003, Minten 2010, Sleap and Reed 2006). As previously stated, widening participation agendas have resulted in an increasingly diverse student population with differing post HE expectations and needs (O'Regan 2009). It is important to understand the different reasons individuals have for going to university, in order to make sense of the employability needs and aspirations of students, and assess the effectiveness of their university experience in meeting such needs (Brennan *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010). Therefore, this study aims to:

    a. Gain a better understanding of alumni needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

This phase 1 aim addressed overarching research programme aim 'a' (see page 20).

The impact of HE in preparing graduates for the world of work

As discussed, the apparent skills gap between graduates skill sets and the requirements of the world of work suggests that HE is not sufficiently preparing students for the world of work (Adecco Group 2012, Blair 2006, Gillinson and Leary 2006, Nguyen *et al.* 2005). Studies gaining feedback from alumni assessing their HE experience are scarce, and there has been little feedback from graduates regarding the impact of the HE experience on their post HE lives (Brennan *et al.* 2005, Sleap and Reed 2006). Alumni can be utilised to assess the effectiveness of HE in preparing students for post HE (Graduate Prospects 2011, Johnston 2003, Pettit and Litten 1999, cited in Bauer and Bennett 2003). Martin *et al.* (2000) makes a call to investigate graduates employment preparation when they are in the world of work and in a position to effectively assess their preparation for employment. As a result, this study aims to:

    b. Investigate the impact of the university experience on preparing graduates for their post HE lives.

This phase 1 aim addressed overarching research programme aim 'c' (see page 21).

The Requirements of the world of work

As previously stated, different employers have vastly different requirements, and therefore generic graduate 'skills' are hard to identify (AGR 1995). However, since graduates can be at a disadvantage if they do not understand the requirements of the world of work, it is important to determine what the world of work and employers require from graduates (Brewer 2009). Johnston (2003) recommended that research into graduates' perceptions should be utilised to determine how employee reality relates to employers perceptions of the apparent skills gap. Do the demands of employers relate to the reality of the workplace (Johnston 2003)? Crebert *et al.* (2004) suggested that alumni feedback should be utilised in relation to integrating world of work requirements into the curriculum. Since alumni have a dual perspective on the student experience and the employee experience, they can effectively bridge the gap between the world of work requirements and the skills that graduates have on graduation (Allen *et al.* 2005, GEES 2008). As a result, this study aims to:

c. Determine what the world of work and employers require from graduates, from the perspective of the alumni.

This phase 1 aim addressed overarching research programme aim 'c' (see page 21).

What more can be done to prepare graduates for their post HE lives?

Alumni perceptions are considered an accurate measure of teaching effectiveness and perceived employment preparation (Berk 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000). As such, alumni feedback can be used to evaluate, develop and contribute to HEI's curriculum and programme design (Brennan *et al.* 2005, Crebert *et al.* 2004, GEES 2008, Volkwein 2010, Weerts and Ronca 2007). Furthermore, since there is a need for HE to contribute to the delivery of a labour force that will ensure our national economy is capable of flourishing in the current economic climate (Browne 2010, Leitch 2006), this study aims to:

d. Identify what more can be done in order to better prepare graduates for employability - from an alumni perspective.

This phase 1 aim addressed overarching research programme aim 'c' (see page 21).

Phase 1 of this research programme addressed overarching research programme aims 'a' and 'c':

a. Gain a better understanding of students' needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

2.2 Phase 1 Methods

2.2.1 Subjects

Methods for this research programme were approved by LJMU Research Ethics Committee before the recruiting of any subjects began. A sample range of 17 SSES alumni volunteered for interviewing. 11 were male and 6 were female. 3 of the male alumni had entered HE as mature students*. Contact details of alumni from the SSES were gathered via three methods:

1.   From the SSES internal alumni database

2.   Via personal contacts

2.   A snowball sampling technique

The alumni were initially recruited either through email addresses obtained from the SSES internal database or through the personal contacts of members of the SSES. After this method of recruitment had been saturated, the sample was built through a process of snowballing, which involved the recruited alumni leading to other potential volunteers (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). This was achieved by asking the alumni at the end of being interviewed:

Are you still in touch with anyone else from your course, or any other alumni from the SSES that may be interested in being interviewed?

Random, maximum variation sampling was used in an attempt to represent the range of experiences of the SSES's alumni (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The heterogeneous nature of the alumni sample is represented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Key demographic information of the alumni

Alumnus No.	Degree Title	Employment Status	Gender	Graduation Year
1	Sport Science (Development and Economics)	Not in Sports Science	Male	2007
2*	Science & Football	Not in Sports Science	Male	2005
3	Sport Science (Development and Economics)	Not in Sports Science	Male	2007
4	Science & Football	In Sports Science	Male	2002
5*	Sports Science (Physiology)	Unemployed	Male	2008
6	Sports Science (Physiology)	Unemployed	Female	2007
7	Sports Science (Physiology)	Postgraduate	Female	2006
8	Sports Science (Physiology)	Not in Sports Science	Female	2008
9	Sports Science (Physiology)	Not in Sports Science	Male	2007
10	Science & Football	Postgraduate	Male	2008
11	Sports Science (Biomechanics)	In Sports Science	Male	2007
12	Sports Science (Physiology)	In Sports Science	Female	2001
13	Sports Science (Biomechanics)	Postgrad./Sp. Sci.	Male	2007
14	Sport Science (Exercise and Health)	Postgraduate	Male	2006
15	Sports Science (Physiology)	Postgraduate	Female	2008
16	Sports Science (Psychology)	Postgrad./Not Sp. Sci.	Female	2007
17*	Science & Football	In Sports Science	Male	2008

* Mature student

Table 3 presents relevant demographic information that will assist the reader in understanding more about the experiences of each individual alumnus. A system was employed to give each individual alumnus a number, so that the demographic details of the alumni and aspects of interest could be discussed anonymously. Table 3 highlights the degree title, employment status, gender and graduation year of each alumnus. Alumni from the SSES who had undertaken Sport Sciences related BSc undergraduate degrees were the focus of this study. All of the alumni completed their degree on a full time basis. The alumni graduated between the years of 2001 and 2008. There are various different undergraduate degree courses and route ways that are encompassed in the SSES. It was considered important to represent alumni that have engaged in the range of degree options that have been available within the school. Table 3 shows the different degree titles that the alumni graduated with. Table 3 represents the employment status of the alumni at the time they were interviewed. To represent the non-vocational nature of the Sports and Exercise Sciences discipline, alumni employed both within and outside of the Sport and Exercise Sciences industry were interviewed. Unemployed alumni were also included, in order to represent the state of the economic climate at the time the study was conducted (see Table 1, page 21 for month and year of interviewing). There is a large postgraduate cohort in the SSES at LJMU due to the research institute status of the school (70 PhD and 10 MPhil students at the time of interviewing). Many of this postgraduate cohort is made up of alumni from the SSES's undergraduate courses. To ensure that this group of alumni from the SSES were represented, postgraduate students were included in the study. One of the postgraduate alumni was employed within Sport and Exercise Sciences as a research assistant at the time of the interview (Postgrad./Sp. Sci.), and one of the postgraduate alumni was employed outside of the Sport and Exercise Science as a project coordinator at the time of the interview (Postgrad./Not Sp. Sci).

Table 4: The employment statuses of 2009 Sports Science graduates 6 months after completing university (HECSU/AGCAS 2010) and the phase 1 alumni

Employment Statuses	2009 Sports Science graduates in HESA survey	Alumni involved in phase 1 of this research programme
In paid employment	66%	68%
In sports related professional roles	Over 20%	26%
Studying	17%	26%
Combining work with study	9%	11%
Unemployed	8%	11%

A 2010 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) survey of 2009 UK-domiciled first degree and Foundation degree graduates indicates their employment statuses six months after finishing their course (6110 out of 7420 Sports graduates responded) (HECSU/AGCAS 2010). As demonstrated in table 4, the employment statuses of the Sports graduates in the HESA survey are comparable to the employment statuses of the alumni involved in this study. The percentage of studying Sports Science

alumni included in this study is higher than the HESA percentage(26%, 17% respectively), which is reflective of the large postgraduate cohort within the SSES.

2.2.2 Data collection methods

The researcher decided to interview the alumni in an attempt to appreciate and learn about their perceptions of HE and preparing students for the world of work. The advantage of talking to people to get insight into their perceptions has been stressed in the qualitative research world (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Spoken language can be used to gain peoples' personal accounts in various different descriptions, explanations and evaluations (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The researcher decided that an in-depth interview method would be most appropriate way to get a true insight into the perceptions of the subjects.

"In depth interviews involve open-ended questions and probes which yield in-depth responses about peoples' experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge" (Patton 2002: 4).

In-depth interviews are often described as a conversation with a purpose (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The researcher felt that conducting the interviews in a relaxed, comfortable, conversation type manner would help the subjects to feel at ease and comfortable discussing their personal perspectives. The researcher wanted the subjects to feel free to define the content and direction of the interview based on issues that were important and relevant to them, accounting for tactics to ensure honesty in informants (Krane and Baird 2005). However, the researcher developed an interview guide with some general themes and questions that they wanted to explore with the subjects across the interviews (Patton 2002). The interview was structured but not governed by this guide (Krane and Baird 2005). This flexibility allows the researcher's themes of interest to be discussed, whilst permitting the interviewee to lead the interview in various directions, potentially providing information of relevance and interest that the researcher had not previously considered (Krane and Baird 2005).

2.2.3 Measurements – The Interview Guide

The guide was created to act as a reminder and checklist of the key aspects the researcher wanted to be covered across the interviews (appendix 2). The researcher learned and internalised the interview guide, so it could be used as an 'aide memoir'. The guide enabled the researcher to direct the flow of the interview to relevant subjects as necessary. The researcher attempted to keep the guide simplistic, as it was considered that overly detailed or lengthy guide could hamper the quality of the interviews (Spencer 2009).

Table 5: Summation of the Phase 1 interview guide. Questions for the interview were constructed under five different themes

Theme 1:
Questions were created in order to get to know and understand the alumni being interviewed; their perceptions of the purpose of university, their career journey, their experiences of the world of work and their current job role (current at the time of being interviewed).
Theme 2:
Questions were created in order to examine the transition from HE into the working world. Did the alumni feel confident and prepared? Were there any challenges?
Theme 3:
Questions were created to identify what the alumni perceived to be the requirements of the working world, and how they felt their university experience prepared them for such requirements.
Theme 4:
Questions were devised to assess the impact of HE on the personal and professional development of the alumni.
Theme 5:
The fifth interview theme was developed to provide the alumni with the opportunity to evaluate the curriculum that they underwent, and highlight ways to better prepare HE students for the working world.

The interview guide was designed to address the aims and objectives of the research study:

a. Provide insight into the alumni needs, aspirations and expectations regarding their HE experience.

b. Investigate the impact of the university experience on preparing graduates for their post HE lives.

c. Determine what the world of work and employers require from graduates, from the perspective of the alumni.

d. Identify what more can be done in order to better prepare graduates for employability - from an alumni perspective

The construction of the interview guide was based on a review of employability related research that has been conducted within the SSES (Drust 2007, Drust *et al.* In submission, LJMU 2007, LJMU 2010, LJMU 2010$_A$, Mitchell *et al.* 2007, Mitchell *et al.* 2008, Morton *et al.* 2008, Murphy and Scott 2008, Zaitseva *et al.* 2007, Zaitseva *et al.* 2008, Zaitseva and Mitchell 2007). To provide support and context, the review of the research internal to the SSES was supplemented by a review of external information (British Association of Sports and Exercise Sciences (BASES) 2008, Knight and Yorke 2006).

2.2.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to develop the researcher's interviewing competence. The study provided the researcher with the valuable opportunity to practice the process of interviewing, evaluate their interviewing technique and test the effectiveness of the interview guide. Two interviews were conducted as part of the pilot study. The first interview was with a BSc (Hons) Sport & Exercise Sciences Coventry University alumnus. The second interview was with a research assistant from

LJMU. The pilot interviewees provided invaluable feedback regarding the researcher's interviewing technique and the effectiveness of the interview guide. The pilot interviews were recorded, which allowed the researcher to personally evaluate their interview competence and determine how the interview guide could be used more effectively. The researcher felt that she was relying on the guide too much in the pilot interviews. As a result of the pilot study, the researcher decided that she had to be more relaxed with the interview guide. In order to reflect the true nature of in-depth interview methodology, the direction of the interviews had to be determined more by the interviewees than the interviewer or the interview guide. The researcher wanted the subjects to feel free to define the content and direction of the interview based on issues that were important and relevant to them. The researcher learnt that the interview guide should be adapted to meet the needs of each individual interviewee. For example, the wording of the interview questions could be adapted, and some of the questions on the guide may not be relevant to all of the alumni. To conclude, the pilot interviews greatly enhanced the researcher's confidence, and prepared her for conducting the phase 1 data collection interviews.

2.2.5 Procedure

A meeting was set up to the convenience of the alumni who volunteered to take part in the study. The alumni were sent an email copy of the interview guide and the participant information prior to the meeting (appendix 3 and 4 respectively). Upon meeting, the alumni were informed that there was some structure to the content that was going to be covered during the interview, but that the interview would take a conversational type form. The alumni were informed that the interview did not have to be based around the questions that the researcher asked, and that they had the freedom to 'chip in' to the 'conversation' at any point if they feel like they have something to add. From the beginning of the interview the alumni were encouraged to be truthful (Shenton 2004). It was stressed to alumni that there is no right or wrong answer, so they should answer the questions based on their own feelings and be as honest as possible (Shenton 2004). Being supportive and reassuring in this manner can help any alumni who are contending in a self-efficacy manner that they have nothing important to say (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). As previously mentioned (page 27), the fact that the researcher was a recent Sports Science graduate meant that the alumni were able to relate to the researcher, establishing rapport between the alumni and the researcher and assisting the alumni in feeling comfortable disclosing information about their perceptions and experiences (Creswell and Miller 2000). The researcher endeavoured to make each alumnus feel that they were 'collaborators' in the research process, as opposed to 'subjects' being interviewed by the 'researcher' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The researcher felt that placing the alumni in such a position of power would further assist them in being able to talk openly and confidently about their perceptions and experiences (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). That fact that the researcher did not study for their Sports Science degree at the

SSES (see page 27) meant that the researcher was able to place the alumni in a position of power, as exemplified in the below interview extracts as stated by the researcher:

I studied Sports Science, but not at LJMU. Part of my research is to get a better understanding of the undergraduate courses here, which is what I am hoping you can tell me about.

This accounts for the 'tactics to help ensure honesty in informants' trustworthiness criteria discussed on page 28. Probing questions were used during the interview if the initial responses to interview questions did not provide the depth and detail that the researcher desired. Probing questions were used as a tool to expand on the responses of interviewees (Patton 2002). The alumni were encouraged to talk about the outlined themes of interest (Table 5), and then probed more deeply regarding the topics and issues they initiated. The probing questions were short, open, follow-up questions. It was important that the researcher made sure they probed fully; they did not accept a passing mention and they did not assume they knew the context or motivation of something that had been said (Spencer 2009). The use of probes can add to the richness of the data, creating a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Probing questions were used to clarify and elaborate (Patton 2002).

Alumni were interviewed individually and anonymity of responses was ensured. The interviews were completed in one session. The interviews took place either on the premises of LJMU (as specified by 12 of the alumni) or over the telephone (as specified by 5 of the alumni). It was ensured that the interviews were conducted in a quiet and private location. Written informed consent was obtained from all the alumni being interviewed on the premises of LJMU (appendix 5), and verbal informed consent was obtained from all of the alumni being interviewed over the phone. Written informed consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the possession of the researcher. Verbal informed consent was stored as Dictaphone files on a password protected laptop in the possession of the researcher. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour 45 minutes (average interview time = 1 hour 32 minutes). Times were rounded to the nearest minute. When on LJMU premises, it was ensured that a member of the project team knew where the interviews were taking place and what time they were expected to finish, adhering to LJMU risk assessment requirements.

2.2.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Content analysis was used to analyse the interviews. Content analysis refers to the reduction and sense making of a volume of qualitative data in order to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton 2002). Content analysis helps researchers to distil information from large amounts of qualitative data in order to identify themes within the data (Biddle *et al.* 2001). Content analysis allows researchers to present qualitative data in a concise and efficient manner, such as in figures, tables or a discussion (Biddle *et al.* 2001, Creswell 2007).

It should be noted that QSR NVivo 8 (computer assisted qualitative analysis software) was initially used to assist the researcher with analysis. Using NVivo, a deductive and inductive analysis process was conducted on all of the alumni transcriptions. The result was a list of 81 deductive and inductive analysis themes. Due to the enormity of this analysis data set, the researcher decided that for the purpose of this study, the results presented and discussed should be refocused around the intended aims of the study. The focus of the results and discussion section will therefore be orientated around the general dimensions represented in Table 6.

Table 6: Deductive Analysis Themes

Attitudes regarding the purpose of HE
The impact of HE on preparation for the working world
The requirements of the world of work
What more can be done to prepare graduates for their post HE lives?

Below is a summary of the process that was used to analyse the alumni interview transcript data.

1. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts can be located in appendix 6. A blank space was left down the right hand side of the transcriptions to allow for note taking.

2. The analysis was orientated around the four themes in Table 6. These deductive analysis themes were based on the aims and objectives of the study.

3. The researcher worked through the hard copies of the transcriptions looking for any responses in the interview data that related to the deductive analysis themes in Table 6 (such responses could consist of phrases, sentences, paragraphs or sequences of paragraphs).

4. Each time a response was identified, the researcher physically cut the response from the hard copy of the transcription. After all of the transcripts had been analysed in this way, the researcher had created four piles of raw data responses that had been cut from the transcriptions, one pile for each of the themes in Table 6.

5. The researcher then worked through each of these four raw data piles, inductively identifying responses of interest and relevance that immerged from the data. This resulted in the four deductive analysis themes being broken down into smaller themes. These smaller themes are termed 1st order themes.

   a. This inductive approach to analysis means that the themes most meaningful to the producers of each message are being identified, therefore presenting the perceptions of the alumni in the most forthright manner.

6. These 1st order themes could then be clustered into units of similar meaning to form higher order, 2nd and 3rd order themes, representing the similarities in the responses of the alumni. This process created summary analysis tables, which are presented and discussed below (Tables 10, 12, 14 and 16).

The finalised analysis product resulted in clustering responses from the alumni that were similar and separating responses that were different (Scanlan *et al.* 1989, cited in Biddle *et al.* 2001). This has effectively highlighted the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, theories and mindsets the alumni have in relation HE and the world of work.

Throughout this manual analysis process, NVivo acted as a useful data storage and retrieval device for the data themes. However, the researcher decided that they preferred the manual process of preparing data for data analysis, rather than using NVivo. The hands on approach allowed the large amount of data to be simultaneously considered by the researcher, both visually and manually. Due to the enormity of the volume of data produced from the alumni interviews, the researcher felt that this manual analysis approach was required in order to get a true understanding of the data.

Member checking was used to check the accuracy and authenticity of the transcribed interview data, accounting for the 'member checking' trustworthiness criteria discussed on page 27 (Shenton 2004). The alumni were contacted by email to ask if they would be willing to read the full transcription of their interview. Those alumni that were willing were then emailed a copy of their interview transcription and asked to consider whether the content of their transcript accurately represented their perceptions in relation to the issues that were discussed (Shenton 2004) (see appendix 7, for instruction email). Did the messages that were conveyed in the transcripts match what the alumni actually intended? This member checking process was conducted in order to ensure that the transcriptions accurately represented and did justice to the perceptions of the alumni. The alumni could clarify, add or withdraw data to better reflect their views. This provided the opportunity to account for any triggered memories that may have occurred, where by the alumni considered aspects of interest and relevance after the interview. 12 out of the 17 alumni responded to the researcher's member checking request, and confirmed the accuracy of their transcriptions. The alumni member checking emailed responses can be found in appendix 8. The member checking proved to be useful not only in terms of asserting the authenticity of the data, but to determine the progress of the alumni almost two years after being interviewed (this information is included in appendix 8). In order to test the trustworthiness of the results from the interview analysis, analyst triangulation was employed; accounting for the 'analyst triangulation' trustworthiness criteria cited on page 28. Analyst triangulation involves using multiple as opposed to singular analysts:

"Having two or more researchers independently analyse the same qualitative data set and then compare their findings provides an important check on selective perception and blind interpretive bias" (Patton 1999: 1195).

Analyst triangulation was used to test for consistency between two analysts' review of the phase 1 alumni interview findings (Patton 1999). As part of this process, the NTF project coordinator analysed five of the alumni transcriptions (appendix 9). The researcher and the project coordinator then

discussed and compared their interpretations and key findings. Due to consistency between the two analysts, the triangulation process ensured the researcher that the analysis and interpretations of the research findings were credible.

2.3 Phase 1 Results and Discussion

2.3.1 Alumni Demographics

Career pen profiles of the alumni have been created in order to provide the reader with more information regarding the career journeys of the alumni and details of any other points of interest (appendix 8). The presentation of the in-depth interview data consists of verbatim quotations, with sufficient context provided by Table 3 and the pen profiles to allow the data to be interpreted by the reader (Silverman 2001). Providing demographic context details for the alumni will allow the reader to identify if the perceptions of the alumni differ based on factors such as degree studied, year of graduation, employment status and gender. It is hoped that this will bring more dimensions to the analysis, and enable the representation of findings in a manner that reflects the in-depth and rich nature of the interviews.

2.3.2 Results and Discussion overview

The deductive analysis themes presented in Table 6 will form the basis of the results and discussion section:

Attitudes regarding the purpose of HE (section 2.3.2.1)	The impact of HE on preparation for the working world (section 2.3.2.3)	The requirements of the world of work (section 2.3.2.5)	What more can be done to prepare graduates for their post HE lives? (section 2.3.2.7)
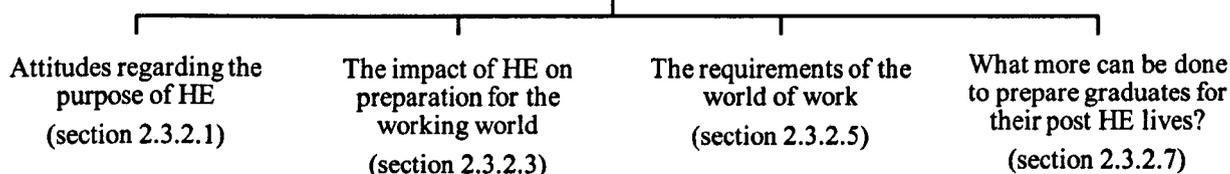
The results from each of these themes will be presented and discussed in the order the dimensions appear in Table 6. A summary analysis table will be presented for each of the deductive analysis themes which will demonstrate how the themes have been organised into the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and higher order themes (similar to the process outlined in Biddle *et al.* 2001, figure 2, page 797). In order to demonstrate the level of support for each of the 1st order themes, alumnus numbers of the alumni that contributed to that theme will be included (Smith and Fletcher 2001). For the first three themes included in the above figure, a table will represent the frequency of mentions and the numbers of people that contributed to the major inductive themes within each four deductive analysis themes after each summary analysis table. This demonstrates the dominance and level of support for the themes within the alumni interview data (Smith and Fletcher 2001). The summary analysis tables will then be discussed using raw quotations from the alumni interview data to demonstrate and do justice to the complexity of the data. Presenting material in its raw form allows the reader to make their own interpretations and not have to rely on the interpretations of the researcher (Krane *et al.* 1997). A selection of quotes will be used to highlight the range and intensity of the findings (Smith and

Fletcher 2001). This will help to prevent an 'anecdotal approach', whereby only a limited range of subject perceptions are presented, which would hinder the soundness of the research (Silverman 2001). Any alumni quotations will be written in italics, so that they can be easily distinguished from the researcher's analysis and discussion commentary. After each quote, a subscript number will appear to represent the corresponding alumnus number of the alumnus that stated that quote. Presenting the alumnus numbers of the alumni that contributed to each theme alongside the frequency tables and a selection of quotes to demonstrate the intensity of the findings from each theme will help to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Smith and Fletcher 2001). Smith and Fletcher (2001) stated that the weight, power, direction of qualitative research data should be considered in order to determine the trustworthiness of analysis output.

This phase of the research programme is orientated in the post positivist qualitative research paradigm. Within post positivism, the apparent divide that exists between quantitative and qualitative research is silenced by the need to employ a research approach that is most appropriate to the phenomenon in question (Krauss 2005). According to Cresswell (2007), post positivism has elements of being reductionist, representing qualitative research using quantitative reporting structures, perceiving inquiry as a series of logically related steps, and believing that subjects have multiple perspectives, which reflects phase 1 of this research programme.

Table 7: 2.3.2.1 Summary analysis table – Attitudes Regarding the Purpose of HE

1st Order Themes	2nd Order Themes	3rd Order Themes	Deductive Analysis Theme

To facilitate a career 1 2 3 4 9 12 13 17

To find out career options 7 11 15

It was the next step 4 8 11 15 16

Wanted to make a change 2 5 17

— Career reasons

Drilled into you at college to go 13

The done/expected thing 7 12 14

— Outside influences

— Personal reasons for going to university

To experience moving out 3 10 15 17

To further education 4 8 9 10 15

To gain a qualification 6 9

Not ready for the working world 8 12 15

To develop personally 3 15 17

To make a change 2 5 17

— Personal development reasons

To enjoy that period of my life 13

To experience different things 3

Exciting living 3 10 17

To meet new people 3

— Social reasons

'I wanted to work in sport' 1 10 13 17

Enjoyment factors 4 5 6 8 9 12 14 16

'I was streamlined for a Sports Science degree' 3

— Personal reasons for choosing Sports Science

Universities are businesses as well as academic institutions 4 5

— **Attitudes regarding the purpose of university**

Develop discipline specific skills and knowledge for a desired area of work 1 3 4 5 8 10 13 15 16

Gain more experience and speciality in a specific subject that you want to pursue as a career 4 6 7

To ensure the necessary qualification is gained 2

To enhance employability, and prepare people for work 3 7 17

It is about finding oneself 8

It is about trailing a vocation 8

Pursuing a desired career 8

Develop the general personal and life skills and qualities that are essential for any work 1 2 5 7 15 16

To bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood 11 15

Give opportunity to achieve a better job in the future 4 5 17

— Preparation for the world of work and post university life — General purpose of HE

43

2.3.2.1 Deductive Analysis Theme 1: 'Attitudes Regarding the Purpose of HE'

This section will discuss the following 3rd order themes that are presented in Table 7:
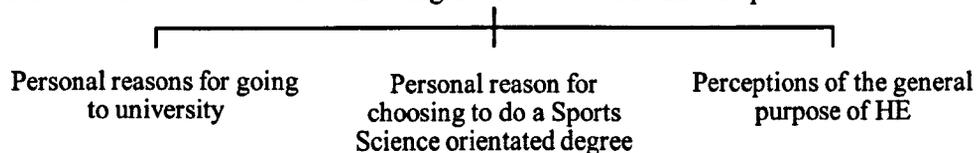
| Personal reasons for going to university | Personal reason for choosing to do a Sports Science orientated degree | Perceptions of the general purpose of HE |

This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

   a. Gain a better understanding of alumni needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

3rd Order Theme: Personal reasons for going to university

The reasons that the alumni gave when they were asked 'what was your personal reason for going to university?' could be grouped into four 2nd order themes, as represented in Table 7.

Table 8: The frequency of mentions and the number of people that referred to each of the four personal reasons for going to university

Reasons	Frequency of Mentions	Number of People
Personal Development	20	13
Career Reasons	19	14
Social Reasons	6	4
Outside Influences	4	4

Table 8 shows that 'careers reasons' and 'personal development' reasons were the two most dominant reasons the alumni gave for going to university. From the perspective of frequency of mentions, more mentions were given to 'personal development' reasons than 'career reasons' (20 and 19 respectively). From the perspective of number of alumni who referenced the reasons, more referred to 'careers reasons' than 'personal development' reasons (14 and 13 respectively). Both the themes 'outside influences' and 'social reasons' were referred to by 4 alumni. 'Social reasons' received 6 mentions, and 'outside influences' 4. Due to the apparent dominance of 'personal development' and 'career reasons', the subsequent discussion of Table 7 utilising raw data will focus solely on these two themes.

2nd Order Theme: Personal Development

As demonstrated in Table 8, personal development was an important part of the university experience for the alumni. They stressed the benefits involved in moving away from home [3 10 15 17], which for 13 of the alumni was their first time living away from their families [1 3 4 6 7 8 9 10 11 13 15 16 17]. The alumni had aspirations that university would further their education [4 8 9 10 15], provide them with a qualification [6 9,]

better prepare them for the working world [8 12 15] and develop them personally [3 15 17], as reflected in the two quotes below:

Mainly I wanted to increase a specific knowledge base and get to know a specific area in detail..... I also wanted to get the experience out of it, get a bit more independence, move away from home but not straight into the world of work, and maybe get a better idea of what I wanted to do, find out what the options were......I didn't feel ready to go into work, I didn't feel like I could travel and meet people quite as easily as I should have been able to, so I was quite looking forward to getting better at that at uni [15]

I was hoping to become a bit more confident in how I approach people, I knew friends that had been to university, and at university you were put in a lot of scenarios where you were out of your comfort zone, whether it be through presenting in front of a large group of people or working in a team of people that you haven't met before, I knew that in the long run, that would be beneficial [3]

All three of the mature alumni reported going to university because they wanted to 'make a change' to their lives [2 5 17].

I just got a bit fed up, my long term relationship ended, and I just thought it was a great opportunity for a fresh start and to get away [17]

2nd Order Theme: Career Reasons

Eight of the alumni went to university in order 'to facilitate a career' [1 2 3 4 9 12 13 17].

I knew that gaining a degree would certainly open more doors once I graduated [3]

I went to hopefully get myself in a position to get myself a decent job at the end of it [9]

I thought that university would just pretty much get me into the working world afterwards [13]

I thought it was in the best interest of my career to get a degree [1]

Six alumni went to university because they felt that it was 'the next step' [4 8 11 15 16] and they wanted 'to find out career options' [7 11 15].

Going to university seemed to be the next natural progression, and with not having a particular career in mind it was a self investigation of what everyone else was doing [11]

I was trying to find out what I wanted to do later on in life because I didn't really know leaving school [7]

It wasn't a case of, 'I want to be this when I'm older', for me it was like the next progression [8]

Ten of the alumni reported that they did not have a particular career in mind when going through university [3 4 6 7 8 9 11 12 15 16].

I cannot say that I knew what I wanted to be, it was more I had never considered not going to university, so in a way I probably didn't really look at my options, the next logical step was always to come to university, get a degree, and then worry about my future ambitions at the end of it [16]

The three mature alumni came to university in order 'to make a change' to their careers [2 5 17].

Alumnus numbers 2 and 17 wanted to progress their careers:

I had been in leisure management for a while, and I got to the top and I needed to progress further, where I wanted to go, you need a degree [2]

Alumni 5 became 'disillusioned' with his pre-university career and wanted to make a complete change:

I took a career change, things weren't working for me in that field, I wanted to go back and do something that I felt I enjoyed [5]

3rd Order Theme: Reasons for choosing Sport Science

The reasons that the alumni gave for choosing to study a Sports Science related degree at university will now be discussed. Eight alumni choose to do a Sports Science degree based on enjoyment factors [4 5 6 8 9 12 14 16].

I didn't have a particular career in mind, I knew I wanted to go to uni to get a degree and then I just decided Sports Science because I loved sport and was good at science, so it just seemed like the perfect course [9]

I didn't go to uni to find a career at the end of it, I did Sports Science as an extension of what I had already enjoyed, not because I wanted to be a Sports Scientist [6]

I chose Sports Science because the main things I was interested in at 'A' level were PE and biology, so I put them together and came up with Sports Science [12]

This reiterates the statement from Browne (2010) and the findings from the NUS (2008) and Lexmond and Bradley (2010) that students choose their degree subject based on interest as opposed to perceiving it as a direct career route (see page 15). Four alumni chose to do a Sports Science orientated degree because they aspired to work in sport [1 10 13 17].

I knew I wanted to work in sport, I grew up wanting to work in football, which is why I chose my course, Science and Football [10]

I did Sports Science thinking I would be a physiologist, so that was my aim when I applied for university, become a Sports Scientist in physiology and work in sport, either with a team or a company [13]

As reported on the previous page, ten of the alumni reported that they did not have a particular career in mind when going through university [3 4 6 7 8 9 11 12 15 16]. Alumnus 17, who went to university knowing that he wanted to work in sport, feels that going to university without having a particular career in mind is a mistake:

I think it's a society thing, it's not just people in sport, people go to university because they don't know what else to do, and I think if you go to uni and don't have a clue what you want to do, the whole process of university, as harsh as it sounds, is a pointless one [17]

A 2010 survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that 59% of employed graduates who graduated between 2008 and 2010 were not working in an area related to their degree. Since so many graduates appear to enter jobs that have no direct relation to their degree subject, HE must ensure that students widen their post HE horizons (Yorke 2004).

3rd Order Theme: General Purpose of HE

The responses of the alumni to the question: *'What do you believe is the general purpose or role of HE?'* will now be discussed. Fourteen of the alumni articulated that they feel that the general purpose of HE is to 'prepare people for the working world and post HE life' [1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 10 11 13 15 16 17].

I think the purpose of gaining a degree is purely from a career perspective, I think that is why they are there [3]

Twelve of the alumni felt that the purpose of university is to 'develop discipline specific skills, knowledge, experience and speciality for a desired area of work' [1 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 13 15 16].

On a general term, I'd say HE provides a platform for individuals to improve their knowledge of certain areas, whatever areas they are looking to go into ₄

It's to teach you skills in a certain area that will take you closer possibly to the job that you want ₁₀

However, alumnus 10 and 16 highlight that graduates do not always pursue a career related to their specific degree subject:

It's to teach you skills in a certain area or choice of subject that will take you closer to the job that you want, or to teach you more about that certain subject that you're interested in, not necessarily meaning that you will get a job at the end of it in that area ₁₀

The main aim of why you are there is to study and be educated in your chosen discipline and get more specific knowledge in that area, hopefully to the point where you can use it in a career, but then not necessarily because you have people that go on and don't have careers in the area that you learn in, so there must be a certain amount of generic stuff ₁₆

Alumnus 9 believes that university:

Generally just skills you up, it teaches you how to learn and how to take in information at a higher level, so that you can go for more general skilled jobs ₉

He goes on to say:

I don't think all students realise that just with a degree you can do so many different jobs ₉

Six of the alumni felt that the purpose of HE is to 'develop the general personal and life skills and qualities that are essential for any work' ₁ ₂ ₅ ₇ ₁₅ ₁₆.

It's to gain specific skills for work but also more generic ones like communication and self motivation, skills that can be used in any job, the life skills and things that are essential for any work that you might not have gained from school ₁₅

It's got two main roles, the first main role being getting students qualified, getting them graduating with the results that they require, and secondly it's to get the personal skills and become educated in social skills to enable them to gain a job at the end of it, because you might be the most intelligent person in the world with all the grades, but if you haven't got the social skills to make it through the interview, you're not going to get there, so that's what I think university is all about, it's got to deliver the whole package, not just the academic grades, it's got to also have the social aspect to be able to communicate what you think out to others, to be able to get on with people, to enable you to get a job or go into further education or whatever you want ₇

Alumnus 11 articulated that:

HE, for me, is to bridge the gap between school and childhood and adulthood, it tends to be the most common pathway between going out and having a career ₁₁

However, alumnus 17 does not believe that HE achieves in preparing students for the world of work and post HE life:

HE is supposed to be out to increase your chances of 1, getting employed 2, the level you can go into employment at, and 3, the money you can earn, whereas I'm not sure that that is always the case, I think a lot of the structure is set up for you to pass exams, and then when you go into the real world people are a bit like, 'what experience have you got?' 'None.....I've been studying' ₁₇

Alumnus numbers 5, 10, 12, 14 and 15 also expressed concerns that 'a degree isn't enough':

There are so many people doing degrees that it almost feels like having a degree isn't enough ₁₅

When I was coming through, there was this thing that a degree wasn't enough to get you the jobs you'd have wanted, so there had to be more within or around the course, so that people were properly ready for work ₅

In the research conducted by Lexmond and Bradley (2010), students were also aware that a degree is not enough to impress potential employers. This concurs with Redmond (2010), who stated that a degree is no longer enough, and that employers want graduates to have more. The literature review discussed the need for to focus less on assessment and more on world of work preparation, and the need students to build around their degrees in order to be prepared for post HE (page 6).

2.3.2.2 Conclusion Deductive Analysis Theme 1: Attitudes regarding the purpose of university?

This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

a. Gain a better understanding of alumni needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

As stated in the introduction to this study, there is a need for HE to contribute to the delivery of a labour force that will ensure our national economy is capable of flourishing in an economic climate that is becoming increasingly competitive (Browne 2010, HEFCE 2007, Leitch 2006, Thompson *et al.* 2008). It is important to understand the different reasons individuals have for going to university in order to make sense of the employability needs and aspirations of students and assess the effectiveness of their university experience in meeting such needs (Brennan *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010). Denholm (2011) advised that HEIs should develop curricula and L&T to account for students' individual employment needs. Accounting for the employability needs and aspirations of students and ensuring that students are effectively prepared for post HE, will result in them being better prepared to meet the requirements of the working world, which will in turn lead to a more skilled workforce that can enhance the economy and society (Burgess 2007).

Personal Reasons

The reasons that the alumni gave for going to university could be grouped into four themes.
1.   Career Reasons
2.   Personal Development
3.   Social Reasons
4.   Outside Influences

The alumni in this study support the notion suggested by Brennan *et al.* (2005), the NUS (2008), the CBI/NUS (cited in Anderson and Marsh 2011) and Unite (2007) that different students have different reasons for going to university and choosing their degree course, and a variety of hopes and dreams for their life post HE. Such factors need to be accounted for in order to make sense of the employability needs and aspirations of students, to ensure that these needs are met and students are effectively prepared for post HE. For the alumni in this study, 'personal development reasons' and 'career reasons' were the most dominant reasons for going to university (n=13 and n=14 respectively). The alumni envisaged that university would develop them personally and result in them

feeling more prepared for their post HE lives. As demonstrated in the literature review, the current research suggests that students' attitudes regarding the purpose of university are career related (Committee on Higher Education 1963, Fearne 2008, NUS 2008, Swain 2011, The Pennsylvania State University 2009, UNITE 2007). The alumni involved in this study demonstrate that whilst career reasons are important in relation to attending university, personal development is just as important. This reflects the NUS (2008) finding that graduates regard university as preparation for life more than preparation for work (65% and 35% respectively). In essence, graduates view the purpose of HE as broader than employability alone (NUS 2008).

Despite 'career reasons' being the joint most dominant reason the alumni gave for going to university, ten out of the seventeen alumni interviewed said that they did not have a particular career in mind whilst at university:

I cannot say that I knew what I wanted to be, it was more I had never considered not going to university, so in a way I probably didn't really look at my options, the next logical step was always to come to university, get a degree, and then worry about my future ambitions at the end of it [16]

There was a sense among the alumni that they went to university because it was the only option, with some of the alumni describing university as being 'the next step' (n=5); and others stating that they felt like they were 'expected' (n=4) to go to university. Despite this, eleven of the alumni went to university in the hope of 'facilitating a career' (n=8) and 'finding out career options' (n=3). The alumni may not have gone to university with a particular career in mind, but they certainly wanted to pursue the facilitation of a career whilst they were there. It appeared that going to university for career reasons was related to career in general as opposed to career in specific:

I thought that university would get me into the working world afterwards [13]

However, alumnus 17 feels that not having an end goal in mind can be a detrimental:

If you go to uni and don't have a clue what you want to do, the whole process of university...is a pointless one [17]

The above quote adds further credence to the importance of understanding students' aspirations, to ensure that their employability needs are met and that the HE process is not 'pointless'. More needs to be done to assist and nurture students who do not have any post HE plans, to ensure that the process of university is not 'a pointless one'. Since students are orientated to pursue their degrees and post HE preparations in different ways, HEIs need to ensure that they meet the needs of the broader student population (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009). Despite fourteen of the alumni stating that they went to university for 'career reasons', only four of the alumni specified that their decision to do a Sports Science related degree was based on a desire to work in the Sports Science industry, highlighting that Sports Science students do not necessarily pursue a Sports Science degree due to aspirations to work in that given industry. The majority of the alumni chose to study Sports Science at university because

they were interested in that area of study (n=8), supporting the below statement:

"Some students will be particularly interested in one course and decide to pursue it with relatively little concern about what it will do for their employment prospects. Others choose a course because it will improve their employment prospects" Browne (2010: 31).

The alumni in this research programme reiterated the findings from the NUS (2008) and Lexmond and Bradley (2010), which suggested that students choose their degree subjects based on interest as opposed to perceiving it as a direct career route.

<u>The Purpose of University</u>

14 of the alumni felt that the general purpose of HE is to *'prepare people for the working world and post HE life'*. This preparation does not have to be degree specific. Six of the alumni felt that the purpose of HE is to *'develop the general personal and life skills and qualities that are essential for any work'*. This supports the suggestion from the NUS (2008) that students may not pursue a degree subject because they want to work in that industry, but they do expect to gain a series of transferable skills that can be used in a variety of different post HE options. Since only 4 out of the 17 alumni ended up working in the Sports Science industry (Table 3, page 33), it is important that students are prepared for the general world of work:

The purpose of HE is to gain specific skills for work but also more generic ones like communication and self motivation, skills that can be used in any job, the life skills that are essential for any work that you might not have gained from school [15]

However, six of the alumni were concerned that 'a degree is not enough', and more needs to be done to prepare students for their post HE lives:

HE is supposed to be out to increase your chances of 1, getting employed 2, the level you can go into employment at, and 3, the money you can earn, whereas I'm not sure that that is always the case, I think a lot of the structure is set up for you to pass exams, and then when you go into the real world people are a bit like, 'what experience have you got?' 'None.....I've been studying' [17]

Burgess reflected on this notion of an assessment orientated HE system in the chairs foreword of the 2007 Burgess report:

"The persistence of a system that concentrates on a single summative judgement results in a fixation on achieving a number that is considered 'good'. This drives the behaviours of academic staff and students and works to the detriment of the currency of other information" (Burgess 2007: 5).

Furthermore, Ainley and Allen (2010) believe that for HE students, the goal is to pass the degree, rather than to learn. Ainley described a HE system that diminishes a learning culture, and instead creates a culture where by students only learn what they need, when they need it (Fearne 2008). This assessment driven culture prevents students from gaining from the totality of the learning experience. The curriculum structure needs to be more orientated around preparing students for post HE and less around passing exams, supporting 'the need for a real world curriculum' and 'an economy of experience' sections discussed in the literature review (page 8 and 6).

In summary:

- 'Careers reasons' and 'personal development' reasons were the two most dominant reasons the alumni gave for going to university.

- The alumni wanted to develop personally in preparation for post HE.

- The alumni hoped to facilitate a career whilst at university (n=8), but did not have a particular career in mind (n = 10).

- Since going through university without having a particular career in mind is 'pointless', there is a need to prepare students for post HE whilst they are at university.

- 8 of the alumni choosing to study Sports Science for enjoyment factors and 4 because they aspired to work in sport, demonstrating that Sports Science students do not necessarily pursue a Sports Science degree due to aspirations to work in that given industry.

- Fourteen of the alumni perceived that the general purpose of HE is to 'prepare people for the working world and post HE life'. However, the alumni felt that HE was not adequately accounting for this purpose or preparing students for the requirements of the world of work (n=6). It is important to understand the employability needs and aspirations of students, to ensure that these needs are met and students are effectively prepared for post HE.

Recommendations:

- Students need to be prepared for post HE whilst they are at university.

- It is important to gain an understanding of students' aspirations regarding university, in order to enhance the effectiveness of HE in preparing graduates for a competitive job market .

- HE needs to cater for those students who are unsure of what they want to do post HE.

- HE needs to cater for the large proportion of Sports Science graduates who do not end up working in the Sports Science industry (it cannot be assumed that all Sports Science graduates want to work in Sports Science).

- The HE structure needs to be more orientated around preparing students for post HE and less around assessments.

The alumni make suggestions for what more can be done to prepare students for their post HE lives and diminish the assessment driven culture in general dimension 4. General dimension 2 will go on to discuss the impact HE had in preparing the alumni for the world of work, and general dimension 3 will look in more depth at the requirements of the world of work.

1ˢᵗ Order Themes — **Higher Order Themes** — **Deductive Analysis Theme**

The motivation and discipline to work independently without relying on other people 1 2 3 7 8 9 13 15 16

Time management – 'You learn the hard way not to leave everything until the last minute' 1 2 6 7 8 13 15

Research – 'You learn where and how to get information' 3 4 7 9 10

The ability to critically analyse 5 9 17

Information Technology skills 8 15

Adaptability – 'You learn how to apply yourself to different areas, it makes you a bit more rounded' 3 7

Self management

Confidence in professional potential 3 4 17

Confidence in leadership ability and gaining respect from others 2

Confidence in public speaking 3 12 15

Confidence in communicating with a range of people 1 6 13

Confidence in ability to work independently 13

More confident and independent on a personal level 8 15

Confidence

Talking to people, social skills 1 6

Leadership skills - the role of taking charge 2 15

Adaptability – knowing how to behave around different people in different situations 3 7 11 13 14 15

Team work – get used to working with other people 7 8 11 15

Literacy 2 6 15

Public speaking and presenting 3 7 12 15 17

Verbal communication, developed through dealings with major project subjects 8

Ability to communicate and work with others

The experience of living on my own 1 3 6 7 8 11 15 16 17

I learnt about myself 6 8

I interacted with people I wouldn't normally have met 8 12 13

Uni made me grow up 2 3 13 17

Uni taught me life skills, how to deal with different situations 6 8 10 15

Developed, matured, grew as a person

A better understanding of the Sports Science industry 4 5 6 11 12 16

Stemming of careers ideas 6 7 12 16

Foundations for the Sports Science world of work

The impact of HE

52

2.3.2.3 Deductive Analysis Theme 2: 'The impact of HE on preparation for the working world'

This section will discuss the following higher order themes that are presented in table 9:
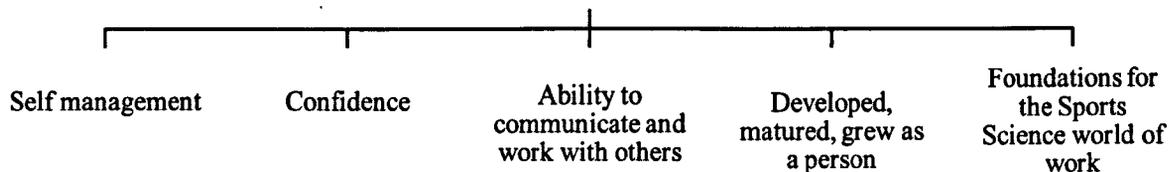
Self management	Confidence	Ability to communicate and work with others	Developed, matured, grew as a person	Foundations for the Sports Science world of work

This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

b. Investigate the impact of the university experience on preparing graduates for their post HE lives.

Table 10: The frequency of mentions and the number of people that referred to each of the five higher order themes in Table 9

Reasons	Frequency of Mentions	Number of People
Self management	46	13
Developed, matured, grew as a person	16	13
Ability to communicate and work with others	29	12
Confidence	12	10
Foundations for the Sports Science world of work	10	7

From the perspective of the number of people, Table 10 shows that 'self management' and 'developed, matured, grew as a person' were the most dominant themes, both being referred to by 13 people. From the perspective of frequency of mentions, 'self management' was given the most mentions (46), making it the most dominant theme. 'Developed, matured, grew as a person' was mentioned 16 times, and the 'ability to communicate and work with others' was mentioned 29 times by 12 people. 'Confidence' was referred to by 10 alumni and mentioned 12 times. 'Foundations for the Sports Science world of work' was referred to by 7 alumni and mentioned 10 times, making it the least dominant theme. The subsequent discussion of Table 9 utilising raw data will not include the least dominant theme.

Higher Order Theme: Self Management

As demonstrated in Tables 9 and 10, 13 of the alumni felt that they developed aspects related to self management as a result of their university experience [1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 13 15 17]. Nine of the alumni felt their experiences at university helped them develop the ability 'to work independently, without having to rely on other people' [1 2 3 7 8 9 13 15 16].

53

Using your initiative and not relying on other people like you might have done at school, you have got that little bit more independence; you have to take responsibility for your own work 15

You have to manage your time a lot better, you have to motivate yourself a lot better, because you haven't got anyone telling you to do your work like at school, so the main skill I gained was motivating myself to work without having to rely on teachers and parents pressurising you to do it 1

At 'A' levels, you have to be motivated, but at the same time you still have a teacher going, 'have you done this? Have you done your coursework?' Whereas at uni, if you didn't meet the deadline you got a zero, there was nobody chasing you up 8

Seven of the alumni felt that university helped them to develop their 'time management' capabilities 1

2 6 7 8 13 15.

After uni you are a bit better at the whole working independently and deadline thing, because you have learnt the hard way not to leave everything until the last minute 2

You need to make sure you're aware of what you have to get done, the time scale and making sure you work towards it, so you're not rushing constantly to get things done 15

You have got to be able to manage your time at uni, motivating yourself to work with all the distractions you've got 1

You get to know that you have to be a bit more organised, you have to plan ahead a bit more 6

Independent working and time management capabilities will ensure graduates can self manage themselves in the working world.

The planning, the control, the timing, everything that you have to do with coursework, it gives you those skills to use after uni 6

Time management you have had to do it without realising, and then you go into a position where you realise that you are using skills that you picked up on the way that you were never really conscious of at the time 13

You need the discipline of doing work, so that you don't get the employee saying, 'how do I do that?' And, 'what do I need for that?' And, 'show me!' 7

With this job, I am my own boss, which for some people is hard, but because at uni its up to you if you get up and go to lecturers and do work, I was used to working independently, so I didn't really find it too hard getting out of bed and working, even though I didn't have someone looking over me all the time 3

The quotation below from alumnus 3 demonstrates how the need to adapt to different scenarios whilst at university results in students being more rounded and adaptable, which can better prepare graduates for the world of work:

The different scenarios you get put in throughout university, for example, public speaking, team work, project management, organising an event, those sorts of skills are very relevant and transferable when it comes to certain types of jobs and professions 3

HE should focus on the development of these 'relevant' skills that are 'transferable' and required in the working world. As demonstrated by the alumni in this research programme and by the NUS (2008), students expect and need to be prepared for a variety of different post HE options.

The self management skills referred to by the alumni reflect the 'self reliant' skills that the AGR (1995) defined as being crucial for graduates in the 21st century labour market.

Higher Order Theme: Developed, matured, grew as a person

Thirteen of the alumni felt that their experiences at university caused them to develop, mature and grow as a person 1 2 3 6 7 8 10 11 12 13 15 16 17. The HE experience can be life changing, as it is a time when knowledge, skills, values and personality are developed (HECSU/AGCAS 2011). Nine of the thirteen

alumni described how the experience of moving to university and living away from the parental home caused them to develop, mature and grow as people [1 3 6 7 8 11 15 16 17].

You're thrown in at the deep end and you have to swim, you have no other option, because all of a sudden all the things that you had growing up that you were comfortable with, you suddenly haven't got anymore, you go from being completely not independent to as soon as your parents drive off you're completely relying on yourself from there on in, there's no half way house, you go from one day living at home having all your meals cooked, having someone tell you to do your homework, and then you're at uni, and you have to suddenly do it all yourself, I would say uni is the most important thing without a shadow of a doubt for developing myself [1]

The thing that has developed me most as a person, without a shadow of a doubt, was moving to university, hugely, because I would have been quite happy staying at home getting by, but moving away completely changed me, and I feel it was the best decision I've made, in terms of everything, because obviously I'm happy with the job I'm doing and that kind of thing [17]

The majority of personal development was the process of going to university and living away from home for the first time, it was quite a learning curve in that respect, the socialising and growing and living on your own is an important part of it [16]

Alumnus 3 believes that his experience of moving to university helped him cope with moving away for his first job post HE:

I don't think I would have been able to move to London on my own if it wasn't for university, or cope with the stress and strains of that particular job role, I think university helped prepare me for that because I had almost been there before and had to deal with those sort of situations, maybe subconsciously I was able to deal with them better because of my experience at uni, but I just got my head down, I just thought 'there's no point lying down, you just have to go for it' [3]

The NUS (2008: 6) reported that the living experience at university encompasses valuable aspects including: moving away from home; living independently; meeting new people; building new relationships and networks to potentially support, share and enhance the learning experience. This research programme supports such findings. Alumnus numbers 2, 3, 13 and 17 feel that university 'made them grow up', and 6, 8, 10 and 15 reported developing 'life skills':

I grew up massively, I think just generally living on your own for three years and having to look after yourself, I matured as a person, it's when I grew up and became an adult, before then, I had never really been out of my comfort zone, I had never really tested myself, going to uni made me do that, and you're going to be put out of your comfort zone in the workplace, so uni prepared me for the working world [3]

I developed life skills, getting experience sorting out somewhere to live, doing the shopping, things you take for granted when you're living at home [15]

It develops all the main skills to get through life, communication, writing, social skills, timing skills, you're a bit more mature going through uni, you learn more about yourself, you know how the world works a bit more, because you're living on your own, so you've got to sort yourself out [6]

I feel I changed huge amounts, in terms of day to day life, being able to look after myself, and I started getting good with paying my own rent and stuff like that, because I was living at home up until I was like 21, my parents didn't ask for anything of me, so what I earned, I had, and I would go home and my washing, cooking, everything was done for me, so to come out here was good in terms of independence, I feel I really grew [17]

It is notable that alumnus numbers 2 and 17 both feel that they matured and grew up whilst they were at university despite them entering the HE system as mature students. Yorke (2006) suggested that the employability focus for mature students may be on the development of subject discipline knowledge to supplement what they have already learned about general employability. This research demonstrates that the university experience can encompass a lot more for mature students than gaining subject knowledge.

The maturation and personal development that the alumni reported experiencing whilst at university

highlights that university is a vulnerable and impressionable time for students, and therefore students' requirements include nurturing and guidance. This notio adds credence to the cause for determining what the prospect and process of HE encompasses for students, in order to accordingly provide for students needs and develop and prepare them for the world of work (O'Regan 2009).

Higher Order Theme: Ability to communicate and work with others

Twelve of the alumni felt better equipped to communicate and work with others after their time at university [1 2 3 6 7 8 11 12 13 14 15 17]. Six of the alumni discussed developing the ability to 'adapt' their behaviour based on the given situation and the people that were involved in that situation [3 7 11 13 14 15].

Because lecturers are all so different it's knowing how to be around different people, and different students as well [3]	The confidence and ability to speak to other people, you have to communicate with peers and with staff, and then you go out into the working world and you have companies to deal with, customers, clients.... [13]	I learnt how to communicate in different situations and how to speak to people in different situations and how to act in different settings and places; you have got to act different [14]	Communication is enhanced, you get more opportunities to gain experience in different situations, and higher level communication, like scientific research that you wouldn't have done previously, more complex things, and learning how to convey that to different audiences, like the public or other researchers [15]

It should be noted that in his above quote alumnus 14 describes how he developed his ability to 'communicate in different situations' through a range of experiences he had at university, not all of which were part of the curriculum, for example:

I helped with VO_{2max} testing within the university, and I did physical activity monitoring with kids [14]

~

I ran my own soccer schools, I was with the Cheshire county Football Association (FA) doing bits there, I was working for all different organisations [14]

This supports that students post HE preparedness would benefit from being provided with the opportunity to engage with a range of different experiences whilst at university, as was discussed in the literature review (page 6). As stated by Gilleard (cited in Mail Online 2007), students must engage with additional activities and experience alongside their degree in order to be prepared for the world of work.

Four of the alumni felt that university helped to develop their ability to work as a teams, by getting them 'used to working with other people' [7 8 11 15].

It helped that we did lots of group projects, because that's important for wherever you're working, even if you're predominantly on your own, you've still got to be working as part of a team [15]	You get used to working with people that you don't know, whether it's people on the course or in work related learning (WRL) where you're in a new situation and you're trying to offer them something and also get something back from whoever you're working with, it's interpersonal skills, you learn how to communicate with people on different levels [7]	Alumnus 11 describes how he learnt that working as a team can be 'more resourceful': *It helps you be a lot more resourceful in your studies, I think every student would probably say that they didn't do everything on their own, they utilised friends, friends of friends, lecturers, every sort of resource available to help you or guide you in trying to pursue your academic aims, it opened my eyes a bit to not shouldering everything yourself, developing communication skills in order to share knowledge and get the right end result* [11]

Five alumni developed in their ability to 'present and speak publicly' 3 7 12 15 17.

Uni prepared me well for presentations at work 17

When I first started doing presentations at uni I used to be so nervous, but after doing a few you realise it's not that bad, and now after finishing uni, I have to do quite a lot of presentations, and I actually look forward to doing them 3

The course has helped with doing presentations, which employers look for because you may have to present to your target audience and be confident speaking in front of people by communicating your product or ideas of whatever it is 15

Higher Order Theme: Confidence

Ten of the alumni mentioned that their experiences at university made them more confident 1 2 3 4 6 8 12 13 15 17.

Alumnus 3 was pleasantly surprised by his confident approach when he entered the world of work:
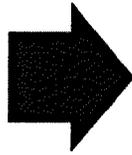
I became a lot more confident having gone to university, I was put out of my comfort zone and had to meet new people and had to do things which might make you nervous or might make you stressed, for example, public speaking, team work, project management, organise an event, but ultimately if you achieve them, confidence comes with it, and for me, I had most of the skills in place and it was just a massive confidence thing, if I have the confidence then these skills can flourish, if not then they won't really develop, I think university helped me build confidence, and then that sort of followed 3

The university experience gave alumnus 4 so much confidence that he felt as though he 'was equipped to do whatever he wanted':
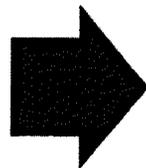
I went to university not being confident in me as an educated person, I felt myself lucky to be going to university, so I was quite surprised when I then actually finished my university degree and actually done ok, which gave me a lot more confidence, and because of that I then thought, 'I will stay on and do a masters', so I was quite made up really after uni, I felt as though I was more equipped to do whatever I wanted 4

Alumnus 1 describes how being confident in his ability to communicate with people, positively impacted on him in the working world:

Sales is all about being confident and being good at talking to people and building rapport, which is all stuff that I developed through uni, despite the fact that you don't get lectures on rapport building, but you have to be able to build rapport to get through uni 1

Alumnus 15 described how her confidence grew in her ability to be more independent:
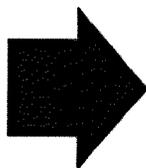
I was a lot more independent, I think that was the one thing that scared me about coming to university, even just travelling on the train on my own seemed daunting at the time, and yet now it seems ridiculously simple, so I have definitely got more confident and more independent and feel a lot more relaxed and less stressed about little things 15

Knight and Yorke's (2006) USEM account of employability highlighted in the important impact self-efficacy has on employability. Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004) commented that not only is the development of self-esteem of benefit to the individual, but to the community as a whole.

2.3.2.4 Conclusion Deductive Analysis Theme 2: 'The impact of HE on preparation for the working world'

This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

b. Investigate the impact of the university experience on preparing graduates for their post HE lives.

There has been little feedback from graduates regarding the impact of the HE experience on their post HE lives (Sleap and Reed 2006). Alumni can be used to assess the effectiveness of HE in preparing students for successful and fulfilling lives after HE (Pettit and Litten 1999, cited in Bauer and Bennett 2003).

The factors that the alumni developed which helped prepare them for the working world can be grouped into the following five themes:

Self management (n=13)	Confidence (n=10)	Ability to communicate and work with others (n = 12)	Developed, matured, grew as a person (n = 13)	Foundations for the Sports Science world of work (n = 7)
The discipline to work independently (n=9)	The alumni felt more confident in their ability to work independently, communicate effectively, and generally succeed and be effective in the world of work	The alumni felt that they were better able to communicate in the following contexts: Socially (n=2)	The experience of moving to university amd living alone (n=9)	A better understanding of the Sports Science industry (n=6)
Effective time management (n=7)		Teams (n=4)	Learnt about self (n=2)	Developed ideas for potential career options to pursue post HE (n=4)
The ability to research (n=5) and critically analyse (n=3) required knowledge and information		Leadership roles (n=2)	Interacted with people wouldn't normally have met (n= 3)	
The variety of university experiences resulted in the alumni being more adaptable and better rounded individuals (n=2)		Presentations (n=5)	'Uni made me grow up' (n= 4)	
NB: The self management orientated attributes that the alumni discussed being developed at university, reflect the 'self-reliance' attributes that the AGR identified as being essentially required by 21st century graduates (The AGR 1995: 18).		Written Communication (n=3)	Uni taught life skills and how to deal with different situations (n=4)	
		Ability to adapt their communication based the requirements of a given situation (n=6)		

It is evident that the SSES had a positive impact on preparing the alumni for the working world. It is notable that the factors that impacted on preparing the alumni for the world of work were related more to the process of the university experience as opposed to the actual technical content of the SSES curriculum:

Uni shapes your life more personally than professionally [12]

~

Sales is all about being confident and being good at talking to people and building rapport, which is all stuff

58

that I developed through uni, despite the fact that you don't get lectures on rapport building, but you have to be able to build rapport to get through uni [1]

~

You learn a whole host of skills, I don't think they are all specific to what you are being taught at university, you build on a load of other skills that are adaptable in any given profession [13]

~

Being educated by your degree course, but being educated by other people for other things as well, you don't just do your degree, you can go and join different clubs, and do things you wouldn't normally do [12]

Ashwin *et al.* (2011) also found that personal development was central to students' perceived value gain from HE. Since employers tend to value generic skills more highly than technical understanding, the alumni university experience will have helped to prepare them in part for the requirements of employers (Harvey *et al.*1997). However, it is also important the following recommendations are accounted for. It is suggested that the ways in which the alumni highlighted their HE experiences prepared them for post HE may demonstrate aspects that students value and require developing. Students' aspirations for the prospect and process of HE needs to be determined in order to accordingly provide for students needs, developing and preparing them for the world of work. This maturation and personal development that the alumni reported experiencing whilst at university highlights the need for providing students with nurture and guidance whilst at university. Students should be provided with the opportunity to engage with a broad range of different experiences whilst at university in order to prepare them for the working world (Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007). This research programme supports the suggestion that 'skills for employment' should be reframed as 'skills for life', including personal development as well as employment (O'Regan 2010). As stated by Barnett (2010), careers units should be renamed 'for life units'.

A lack of awareness

The alumni reported being unaware of the value of employability-focused curriculum interventions they experienced whilst they were at university, supporting the finding from Glover *et al.* (2002) that students do not recognise how their experiences at university are applicable post HE:

A lot of it is quite subtle, the way you are exposed to it at uni, no one says, 'right, we are going to do this because it develops these skills in these areas', it's more a case of its just done as a matter of course and you don't realise until afterwards the benefits, you just think, 'this is just a formality, this must just be how they assess us'[7]

The alumni only began to recognise the benefit of aspects of their university experience, and the attributes that they possessed when they started to put them into practice in the work place:

At uni I certainly had to tendency to think, 'the only thing that I am gaining here is the subject knowledge', but then since I got my current job, you realise that your degree helps in so many other ways as well with all the other things that they are looking at, like time management and motivating yourself to work and that kind of thing, while I was at uni I thought it was all about the knowledge of the subject, then having finished uni I have realised that a degree gives you so much more than just the knowledge in those certain subjects that you look at [1]

~

You realise that you are using skills that you picked up on the way, that at the time you were never really conscious of the fact that that's what you were improving [13]

You don't always notice as you are doing your degree, but then afterwards you do realise you have changed quite a lot from when you started [15]

Uni got me into habits I didn't even realise until I had finished uni, it probably only dropped when I left uni [17]

This supports the findings from Leggott and Stapleford (2004) that students only become aware of the skills they developed at university and the applicability of such skills after entering the workplace. Kay *et al.* (2007) reported that alumni continue to benefit from their university experience post HE through the skills and the knowledge that they acquired at university, which is reiterated by the current findings. There is a need to increase students' awareness of the value of curriculum interventions and the world of work preparing attributes that are being gained and developed whilst at university, supporting recommendations from Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004), Brewer (2009), Leitch (2006) and Yorke and Knight (2006) (page 10). As suggested by GEES (2008), the links between the classroom and the workplace need to be made evident. GEES (2008) highlighted that much of the teaching in HE is relevant to the workplace, but students are not always made aware of it. Increasing students' awareness of the world of work preparing attributes they are gaining from HE will in turn develop graduates ability to market themselves in a competitive economic climate and account for the requirements of the workplace upon entrance (Burgess 2007). There needs to be an increased awareness of the general as opposed to discipline specific impact the HE experience has on preparing students for their post HE lives. HE should be aware of the importance of developing the general factors that the alumni referred to developing that positively impacted on their post HE preparation (see Table 9, page 52).

Deductive analysis theme 4 will further discuss what more can be done as part of the curriculum to prepare students for their post HE lives. Next, deductive analysis theme 3 will examine the requirements of the world of work.

Table 11:   2.3.2.5 Summary analysis table – The Requirements of the World of Work

1st Order Themes	2nd Order Themes	3rd Order Themes	Deductive Analysis Theme

Must be personable 1 2 3 6 8 9 11 12 14 15 16 17
Must fit in comfortably within the workplace 3 4 7 8 9 12 14 17
Must be able to interact with a range of populations 2 4 7 8 9 11 12 13 14 15 17
Must be effective with different types of communication 1 3 4 5 7 8 12 13 14 15 16

→ **The ability to communicate and work with others**

Must have a degree level knowledge base 1 4 5 6 8 9 12 14 15
Must be knowledgeable within the context of their working environment 1 2 4 6 7 8 10 11 12 13 15 16 17
Must have the confidence to apply that knowledge 6 13 15
Must be a certain type of person 1 4 5 6 8 9 12 14 15

→ **The Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'**

Must work hard and always try to do their best 2 3 10 12 15 16
Must do what is required based on the schedule of the employer and the job 1 2 3 4 6 7 8 10 11 15
Must be willing (and able) to learn, adapt and be flexible, based on the demands of the employer and the job 1 2 3 5 7 12 15 16
Must be open and honest 3 12 16

→ **Graduates must 'toe the line'**

Must be independent 1 2 7 10 15 17
Must be organised 2 3 7 10 11 14 15 16
Must be effective at time management 1 2 3 10 11 15
Must be motivated 1 2 15

→ Must have the independence and self discipline to take ownership of their motivation, organisation and time management 1 2 3 7 10 11 14 15 16 17

Must take initiative, and make steps to drive the company in question forward 1 3 6 13

→ **Self management**

Desire 5 11
Passion 2 8 17
Drive 5 9

→ Must have a desire, passion and drive to work in their given industry

Motivated 2 5 11 12 13
Enthusiastic 4 5 13
Committed 2 5 10

→ Must be motivated, enthusiastic and committed regarding their job

→ **A good work ethic/attitude**

Require-ments of the world of work

61

2.3.2.5 Deductive Analysis Theme 3: 'The requirements of the world of work'

After discussing the impact the HE had on preparing the alumni in this study for the working world in analysis theme 2, analysis theme 3 will now look at what is required from graduates in the working world. This will allow for the comparison of analysis themes 2 and 3, in order to identify what more the SSES can do to prepare graduates for the requirements of the world of work. This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

c. Determine what the world of work and employers require from graduates, from the perspective of the alumni.

The requirements of the world of work that are discussed in general dimension 3 are based on the perceptions of the alumni interviewed. The alumni perceptions have been informed by their experiences in the world of work, their job roles and duties, and what they think are the most important skills to have in order to be effective in such job roles. The alumni experiences in the world of work meant that they could articulate what they perceive employers to want from graduates. Based on the alumni experiences in the world of work and their perceptions of what employers want, five 'world of work requirements' have been created.

Table 12: The frequency of mentions and the number of alumni that referred to each of the world of work requirements

World of Work Requirements	Frequency of Mentions	Number of Alumni
The ability to communicate and work with others	76	16
The Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'	43	16
Graduates must 'toe the line'	38	13
Self management	32	12
A good work ethic	25	10

With regard to the number of alumni, Table 12 shows that the most dominant requirements for the world of work were 'the Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'', and 'the ability to work with others', both of which were referred to by 16 alumni. From the perspective of the frequency of mentions, more mentions were given to 'the ability to work with others' than 'the Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'' (76 and 43 respectively), making 'the ability to communicate and work with others' the most dominant world of work requirement. 'Graduates must 'toe the line'' was referred to by 13 alumni and mentioned 38 times. 'Self management' was referred to by 12 alumni and mentioned 32 times. 'A good work ethic' was the least dominant world of work requirement, being referred to by 10 alumni and mentioned 25 times. Each of the world of work requirements will be defined and explained using quotations from the alumni.

3rd Order Dimension: The Ability to Communicate and Work with Others

As demonstrated in Tables 11 and 12, working and interacting with others plays a major role in the working environments of the alumni.

Alumnus 14 feels that communication skills are the main requirement in his workplace:

There's so many different people you need to speak to about every little job, I spend all day speaking to people, communication skills are probably the main skill I use, and that covers who you're communicating with, how your communicating, and when you're communicating [14]

Alumnus 4 feels that the ability to communicate with people is the most important part of any job:

The experience that I've had has highlighted how important it is to communicate and interact with people, and it would be the same for any work, it doesn't matter whether it's Sports Science or accountancy, if you can deal with people and communicate with people in the right way then it's probably the most important part [4]

As demonstrated in Table 11, the alumni in this study suggest that 'the ability to communicate and work with others' requires that graduates:

Must be personable	Must fit in comfortably within the workplace	Must be able to interact with a range of populations	Must be effective with different types of communication (e.g. face to face, telephone, group, presentations, written, email)
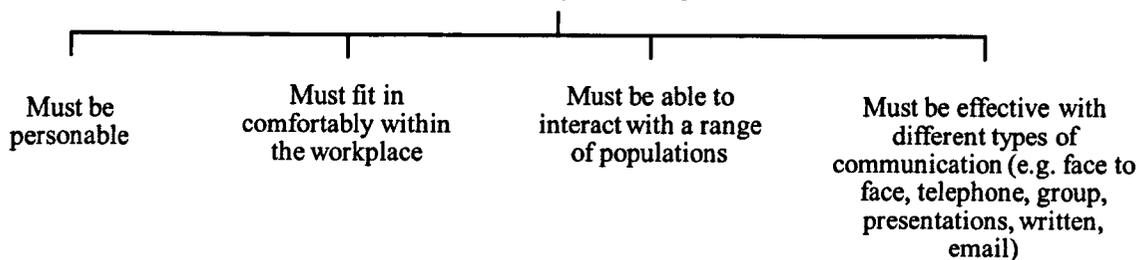
According to twelve of the alumni, it is important that graduates are personable [1 2 3 6 8 9 11 12 14 15 16 17]. They must be able to have positive relationships with the different people that they encounter in their places of work, for example, customers, pupils and colleagues.

Alumnus 1 demonstrates why being personable and able to build rapport is important in the context of effectively dealing with customers:

You have got to be able to build rapport with people in order to set up meetings and that sort of thing, people don't tend to buy things of people if they don't like that person, you have to build rapport effectively with people you are trying to sell to

Alumnus 2 believes that as a teacher it is important to have the 'likeability factor':

You have got to be able to get on with pupils, you have to have the likeability factor, it's important to get to know the kids, you can't forget that every kid is an individual

Alumnus 16 feels that it is important to get on with colleagues in her working environment:

You need to be personable, you need to be able to get on with people and not go into an environment and alienate people, you need to be able to communicate and talk, it's really important to have those getting on with people skills, not just so you don't piss people off, but for your own piece of mind, because you want to enjoy your working environment, you want to get on with people

Alumnus 15 demonstrates why having positive relationships with colleagues in the work place is important:

It's making sure there is no role ambiguity if you're working with other people, so making sure everyone knows their own job to be more effective, so you're not stepping on each others' toes or there's nothing that everyone assumes someone else is going to do so doesn't get done, so being clear with what each persons' task is and just getting used to working alongside other people

Eight of the alumni believe that employers are concerned that graduates will comfortably fit into the workplace [3 4 7 8 9 12 14 17].

Employers want people that can fit into the environment, and that will get on with everybody and not cause too many disruptions at the workplace [17]

63

Alumnus 14, who has had some experience of employing people, provides some interesting insight into what employers want.

Going past the hard qualifications, employers want someone that fits in, when I have looked through applications you don't want someone that has just been to uni and come out of uni and are going for a job, you want someone that has done this done that, you want someone who you can think, 'yeah, I'm going to be able to have a conversation and a laugh with them' [14]

Part of fitting into a working environment involves adhering to the particular traits of the given culture. Below, alumnus numbers 17 and 4 demonstrate that in a football club working environment, employees are required to be 'thick skinned' and 'take things in jest'. This world of work requirement is not limited to sporting sector, alumnus 3 highlighted how he 'can't take things personally' in his job as a recruitment consultant. Talabi (2012) and Graduate Prospects (2011) cited that being employable means being a good fit within the specific role and culture of a given organisation.

You've got to have thick skin, thick skin is the most important one, because the things that get said in our environment will probably be a law suit in any other environment, because it is just constantly taking the Mickey out of each other [17]

There's a lot of joking around where people might say things in jest, and if you're a sensitive person, you have got to be able to take it in jest and realise that they are only joking, if you didn't realise that they're only joking, then you might get your back up, and then almost certainly you'll get a name within the club that you can be wound up really easily [4]

You can't take things personally in recruitment, so you have almost got to be robotic, there is a lot of cold calling involved, there is a lot of negotiating involved, you have to believe in your products and deal with a lot of people who will not want to work with you and not want to deal with you and you have to be able to negotiate that and deal with these people, it's quite tough [3]

Eleven of the alumni discussed being required to interact with and adapt to different populations of people [2 4 7 8 9 11 12 13 14 15 17]. As highlighted in analysis theme 2, the alumni felt that they developed 'adaptability' in relation to 'knowing how to behave around different people in different situations' through university [3 7 11 13 14 15] (page 52). UKCES (2009) cited that employability involves being able to effectively adapt social styles and thinking about how to relate to colleagues.

Alumnus 13 demonstrates how he has to adapt how he communicates with his employer (whom he refers to as 'the university') and other stakeholders involved in his work:

You have to be good at communicating with people like university, but also the general public, and I'm working in a clinical environment and our collaborators are all at hospitals, so I have to speak to staff there, so there is a range of skills that you need to talk to those populations, I will start talking about my project to university staff, but I won't be able to talk like that to the clinicians at the hospitals, and likewise I can't talk about it on that level to the general public, so you have got to be able to know who you are talking to and switch your role [13]

Alumni 11 demonstrated how he was required to adapt his communication techniques within the rugby team that he coached:

Personal skills, people skills are vastly important, certainly with the people I work with, you get massively diverse types of personalities and individuals, so even from a training perspective different people have different thresholds, you have to learn how far can you push people and what gets people motivated and what doesn't [11]

Alumnus 9 highlights how he assesses the needs of each individual that he is working with in order to be effective in his sales role:

I need to be able to listen and to hear what people are saying and then take away from that and use it to sell back to them, you need to be able to ask good, open questions to get information out of them that you can use to sell, and you need to be adaptable, because everyone's totally different, you need to know what people are like, some people will want to chat about their families, and other people will just want to talk about work, so you need to be adaptable and make sure you are the best you can be, and get the most out of people [9]

Eleven of the alumni also demonstrated that it is important to ensure that the manner in which they communicate is appropriate to the working environment [1 3 4 5 7 8 12 13 14 15 16].

64

You need to have good written communication via email and letter, it's not like if you were on MSN messenger or something like that, you've got to keep it quite formal, it's just adapting yourself to the working environment; you can't be a larger lout like you are with your mates [8]

Alumnus 4 demonstrates that it is important to understand the needs of the people that one is working with in order to select an appropriate style of communication and provide an effective service:

The most important skill is being able to interact with people and just adapting to which ever person you are working with and being able to communicate to them, for instance, if the manager wanted to see certain aspects of tactical play, then I can show that in either a graph or some stats or some video, now I know that the manager prefers to look at video where ever possible, not that he's ever come out and said that, but I just know the way that he is that that's what he prefers, so it's understanding the person that you are working with as soon as you can

Alumnus 14 feels that his workplace would not function effectively if members of his working environment were unable to appropriately adapt their communication styles:

You need to know how to speak to people in the different settings that you work, there's formal emails and informal emails, or when we have to call each other from home, or we have to text each other, or we've got to go to a formal meeting, or we may meet just go for a catch up over lunch, but it's being able to do all these types of things, a lot of stuff wouldn't get done if you didn't have the skills to do those kind of things [14]

3rd Order Dimension: The Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'

In reference to the 'The Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'' world of work requirement, the alumni interviewed in this study feel that graduates:

Must have a degree level knowledge base	Must be knowledgeable within the context of their working environment	Must have the confidence to apply that knowledge	Must be a certain type of person
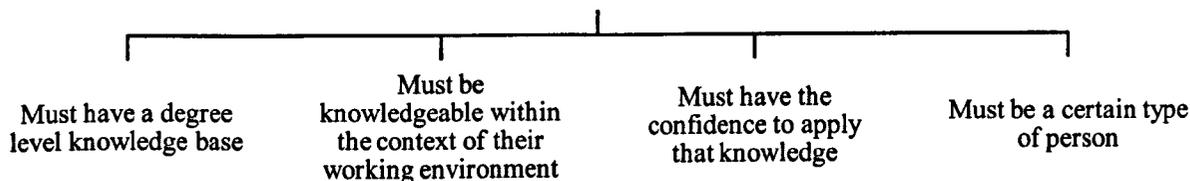
Thirteen of the alumni felt that it is important to have a good job specific knowledge base, in order to be adequately prepared and able to work in an effective and professional manner [1 2 4 6 7 8 10 11 12 13 15 16 17].

You need a good knowledge of the statistical side of things, you have got to make sure you can do the practical side of things properly because you are getting subjects in that are expecting you to know what you are doing [15]

Alumnus 1 has to ensure that he prepares his background knowledge before making contact with potential clients:

I have to research companies that might benefit from online video, and then there's a big cold calling aspect, so when you've researched them, you then approach the companies

Three of the alumni discussed the importance of having confidence in their ability to apply knowledge [6 13 15]. Alumnus 13 highlights how he needed to be confident in his background knowledge so that he could get involved and effectively contribute in his place of work:

Theoretical background knowledge is massive, you have got to know exactly what is going on, for the first few meetings I didn't really know what people were talking about because I didn't know my subject area, so you've got to go away and read, and the next time you have a meeting at least you are clued up on what you are doing, you have got to have confidence in what you are doing so that you can stand on your own two feet

According to nine of the alumni, graduates need a degree level knowledge base [1 4 5 6 8 9 12 14 15]. However, the alumni felt that this degree level knowledge is regarded as a prerequisite by employers who are more interested in the type of person a graduate is:

65

They will obviously be looking for at least a base technical knowledge, but it's my opinion that the majority of graduate recruiters are looking for a type of person as opposed to necessarily a massive technical grounding [5]

The main two things that employers would look for is a degree, the educational side is a prerequisite, but I think the big thing they're looking for is for people to be enthusiastic about what they are doing, and maybe being able to talk to people [4]

It's not all about your actual qualifications on paper nowadays; it's about how you present yourself, how you actually talk in interviews [6]

The quotes below from alumnus numbers 1 and 5 demonstrate that graduates may not always be aware of what employers want from graduates and what options are available to them post HE:

Alumnus 1 recalls how he was surprised that employers look more at the individual than the degree when he initially started working with a graduate sales recruitment agency:

I would have expected that you would have had to have had some sort of business related degree to get in, but it has become evident to me that a degree is not the be-all-and-end-all and it's not so much what they look for, it's more the actual person that you are, it really surprised me that a degree gave me so many different options

Alumnus 5 demonstrated that he shared a similar unawareness when he entered the world of work after completing his first degree:

The company that I worked for was a big management consultancy company, and although I had a business degree, the variety of courses that people had in my start group was enormous, one had a PhD in Chemistry, one had a degree in Theology, a couple had degrees in Maths, some in engineering, some in history, some in modern languages, and you soon learnt that there was a type of person that they were recruiting, nowadays, people are looking for a lot more than your standard academic credentials

Alumnus 6, who is unemployed and has therefore not had the same insights into the working world as the other alumni, demonstrated that she is unaware of the requirements of employers and the world of work:

➡️

The best way to try and find out what employers are actually after skill wise is to go and have an interview and talk through what they are after, because you can't actually tell what they are after from job adverts

➡️

The difference between alumnus 6's knowledge of the requirements of the world of work compared with the knowledge of alumnus 5 and alumnus 1 highlights how little graduates potential know when leaving university regarding the requirements of the world of work and how much they learn from time spent in the world of work.

Alumnus 12 has had some experience of employing people and believes that being employable is more about the type of person than qualifications:

→

We want someone who's able to talk to people, communicate with other members of the team, who can adapt and go away and do a task that you've given them, and I think employability is more about things like that than, 'I've got a BSc Hons, I've got a qualification in this, I've got a qualification in that, I deserve to get this job', that's not the case

↓

Alumnus 14, who has also had some experience employing people, collaborates with the notion that qualifications are not the focus of employers, and suggests why the person is more important than qualifications:

→

If you think they're not going to fit into your organisation, I wouldn't take someone just because they have got their qualifications, it's too risky, it's a massive decision to employ someone [14]

↓

Alumnus 2 has experienced the world of work both with and without a degree. He describes how after gaining a Sports Science degree, employers 'looked at him in a different light':

→

If there's two exactly the same candidates and one has got a degree and one hasn't, I think they would take the degree

↓

Despite this, alumnus 12 feels that employers do not have an understanding of what is involved in the degree courses:

→

They weren't actually looking for specific skills in that degree they just said a degree is essential, a degree in anything it could have been, rather than a specific degree, because they knew that degree course would produce skills in this that and the other, specifically in the exercise science, physical activity and health promotion industry, I don't think most employers realise what actually goes into that degree course and what people get taught

If employers are not conversant with what the taught content of degree courses involves, yet would chose a graduate over a non-graduate, what is it about a degree that makes it a 'prerequisite' for employers? According to Redmond (2010), approximately seven out of ten graduate employers ask for any degree subject when advertising vacancies. The alumni believe that a degree demonstrates certain personal qualities to employers:

As a prospective employer I would think this person has left home, they have lived on their own for a while, they've experienced university, they've learnt on the way, it shows that they have got literacy skills, they know how to structure a sentence, it just shows me that intellectually they might be a little but more worthwhile, that's the way that I would look at it, that they have got an extra experience [2]

Companies look for people with degrees, it doesn't necessarily matter what degree it is in because it shows that you can motivate yourself, you can work to deadlines, you can learn quickly, you can apply your knowledge to a high standard [1]

I don't think all students realise that with a degree you can do many different jobs, I didn't really realise until coming out of uni that a lot of places are quite happy to take you on as long as you have a degree, they don't really care what it is in, because they know that you are obviously smart enough to go to uni and get a degree, so I think that's why certain employers will go for graduates, because they know that they can learn to a higher level, and obviously deal with customers to a higher level as well [9]

When the alumni discussed what the possession of a degree represents to an employer, the focus was on personal attributes. The quote below from alumnus 12, who has had experience working as an employer, demonstrates why employers focus more on the type of person a potential employee is, rather than the knowledge base or qualifications they possess:

When we interviewed people, we had them doing a task specific to the job role, so we'd give them a problem to solve to see how they adapted to that, how they were able to talk to the people interviewing them, and other people in the team, or members of the public that we brought in, but I think that's more important than skills of the trade, because skills of the trade you can teach, and as long as people have the ability to learn and want to learn and are motivated for that, then that's more about employability than a specific, 'I can do, I can show this person how to do ten press ups out there in the gym' [12]

According to the alumni, a degree represents to employers that graduates have the intellectual ability to learn and work independently. This assures employers that graduates will be able to quickly adapt to the requirements and demands of a new job role and employer. Employers are more interested in the type of person a graduate is, because as stated by alumnus 12 in the quote above, *'that's more important than skills of the trade, because skills of the trade you can teach'*. This view concurs with Denholm (2011: 9), who reported that employers *'hire for attitude, and train for skill'*.

3rd Order Theme: Graduates must 'toe the line'

In reference to the 'graduates must 'toe the line'' world of work requirement, the alumni interviewed in this study feel that graduates:

Must work hard and always try to do their best	Must do what is required based on the schedule of the employer and the job	Must be willing (and able) to learn, adapt and be flexible, based on the demands of the employer and the job	Must be open and honest
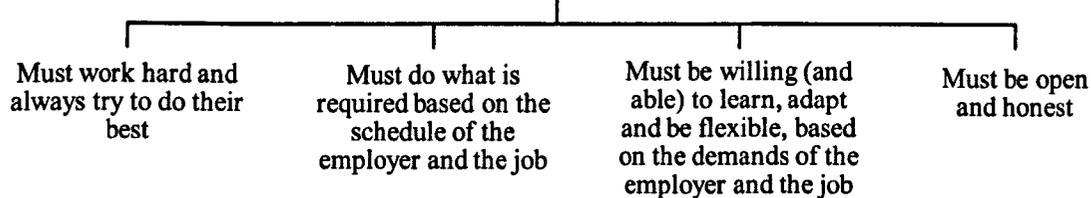
Six of the alumni felt that graduates in the world of work are required to work hard and always try to do their best [2 3 10 12 15 16].

You have got to be really flexible, for instance, if you have got a really good client that you have got a relationship with and you always fill their jobs, and it comes to 2 o'clock on a Friday and you still haven't found that candidate for them, if you are a good consultant and you want to do well in your job, you will probably be in the office until 7 o'clock trying to find that employee for them [3]

Ten of the alumni discussed the importance of doing what is required based on the schedule of the employer and the demands of the job [1 2 3 4 6 7 8 10 11 15]. Five of these alumni talked about having to meet the standards, targets and deadlines that were set by the employers [1 2 6 7 8].

Alumnus 8 discussed how she had regular personal development review meetings with her employer in order to improve her working efficiency:

You're only allowed 2% errors with your work, and they say to you in your personal development reviews, 'you need to reduce your error rate, you need to do this, you need to do that', you have a personal development review every three months

For alumnus 4, it is important that he is flexible and does what is required based on the demands of his employer:

I haven't had a day off in the last two weeks, you are at the peril of the manager, like this Sunday for instance, I had a day off, but then at 10 o'clock he phones and said, 'can you be in in an hour? I'm just on my way out, but I want to have a look at this, this and this', so then from 10 o'clock until about 8.30 I was in work, on a Sunday, so you can't really plan much, it would've been fine if I would have said, 'I can't make it unfortunately', but I think, especially within football, if you start doing that and not making yourself flexible, then you might not be seen as a good worker, or it might be the case that you'll not get offered the opportunity in the future

Alumnus 4 described how not making himself flexible could have a negative effect on his future work prospects. This links with alumnus 17, who also works in a football club environment, and stated:

I've always found that when you start saying yes to work the more work comes your way, if people keep on saying no they go, 'there's no point phoning Ant, because he can never work, we'll phone Dave because he always says yeah', and then when you're actually in and around the club they go, 'what are you doing later? Do you fancy doing the under 10s with me?' And then you go in and you hope to do a good job and then next time when something comes up they will go, 'he was quite good with the 10s last time I asked him', so you have just got to try and say yes all the time

Not only were the alumni required to be flexible regarding their working hours, they also discussed being flexible in relation to the duties they were required to undertake whilst at work. The alumni had to be willing and able to learn, adapt, and be flexible, based on the demands of the employer and the job [1 2 3 5 7 12 15 17].

If colleagues need help then you give them help, and if someone needs you to do something you do it, like if the project director asked me to do something, it's just being able and willing to get on with it, because you have got to help the project, so being a bit flexible I guess [16]

Alumnus 7 feels that graduates are required to:

Do whatever is required and not mind doing it, I think employers want people that are quite adaptable and fit into whatever needs doing

3rd Order Dimension: Self management

In reference to the 'self management' world of work requirement, eleven of the alumni interviewed in this study feel that graduates:

Must have the independence and self discipline to take ownership of their motivation, organisation and time management

Must take initiative, and make steps to drive the company in question forward

Despite the alumni being required to meet 'deadlines and targets', and be 'flexible' and 'do what is required' (as discussed in the 'toe the line' world of work requirement above), the alumni were still expected to be able to self manage. They were required to have the independence and self discipline to take ownership of their motivation, organisation and time management [1 2 3 7 10 11 14 15 16 17]. The alumni were required to take ownership and be independent, with little guidance from others, as demonstrated in the quotations below:

They said, 'right, these are your goals', and there was no specific way to achieve them, I had to work all that out myself [1]

In sport, people haven't really got the time to help you out, people don't want to tell you how to coach a session, they don't want to be looking over you going, 'why have you got so many kids standing around? Why is that set up like that?' [17]

You want someone to come in and say, 'ok, maybe I haven't done this before, but I am willing to come in and give it a go and try it and ask questions', rather than just be babysat and told what to do [3]

They want people that that can fit into the environment, that they don't have to teach how to suck eggs [17]

The alumni were required to manage, motivate, and organise themselves and their time:

There are loads of different duties within recruitment, from going out and meeting with clients, to interviewing candidates, to writing job adverts, to speaking to people on the phone, so you really have to be able to structure your day so that you can form all those duties to the best of your ability, it's about organising yourself, organising your day and the structure of your day and the structure of your week, there is a lot of time management involved [3]

You need self motivation, because you are managing yourself, so keeping yourself organised and making sure you get things done [15]

Alumnus 11 highlights how he was not only required to manage his own timetable, but also required to organise his teams' timetables as well:

You not only have to organise yourself, you have to organise 20 other players' timetables for them, but there are a lot of stakeholders buying for the same time, so whether its coaches or physios or conditioning staff or players families, you have to try and organise schedules and timing that not only suits the players and their particular interests, you have got to sort them around the coaches and yourself as well

According to the alumni, employers want graduates who can take initative and bring something new to the company [1 3 6 13]. The Graduate Recruitment Bureau (2010) stated that employers recruit graduates because they can inject new ideas and diversity into companies. The alumni felt that employers require graduates to enter the workplace and hit the ground running. Alumnus 17 provides a football metaphor to exemplify this notion:

When you actually send in your CV (curriculum vitae), people think, 'there's someone that we can give a job to', it's not a case of they'll have to do this and this, if you put it into football terms, it's a bit like buying a readymade player, like a Torres, as opposed to a lad from the youth team that you go, 'he's good, but we need to work on this, this, and this', and I think that people in any industry want the final article, they don't want to spend loads of time training people, they want people that can get results and can just fit in and they don't have to waste a lot of time on

Therefore, students need to be prepared for the requirements of the world of work in order to enter the world of work and 'hit the ground running' (Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007).

The self-management orientated attributes that the alumni discussed being required in the workplace reflect the 'self-reliance' attributes that the AGR identified as being a pivotal requirements of the world of work (AGR 1995).

3rd Order Theme: A good work ethic/attitude

The alumni interviewed in this study feel that graduates must have a good work ethic and attitude. They feel that graduates:

Must be motivated, enthusiastic and committed regarding their job

Must have a passion, desire and drive to work in their given industry
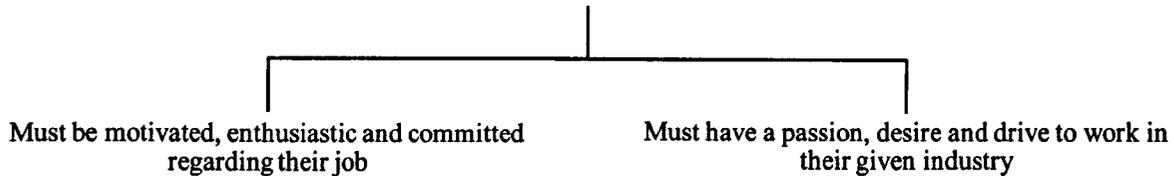
The alumni felt that employees are required to be enthusiastic about their jobs and have a desire to work in the industry in question:

Employers are looking for motivation, you have got to be excited by what you do, they always say, 'I could see from when you walked in that you are really excited about this,' or, 'you weren't to bothered about this job', so it's that natural enthusiasm, and they look for that 13

You need to be passionate about what you do, we tend to eat, live and breathe what we do, like we've all been going in on our days off just to watch sessions from the new guys from Barcelona, which is a bit geeky really, because we could be lying in bed all day, but we want to go, and then we'll chat over lunch and be like, 'yeah but he did that', and then you go, 'well you could move that and do that that way', so then we all buzz off each others' sessions, and the only conversation, really, is football, as sad as it sounds 17

PE teachers have to stay behind after school pretty much every day to do after school clubs, and you're not getting paid for it, you are just doing it for the kids, so you've got to love the job 2

The quote below highlights how graduates benefit from having a 'good attitude' with regard to a job role:

The most important thing in my role is attitude, having a good attitude obviously makes you want to get up in the day, it makes you want to put more effort into everything you do 9

Alumnus 11 believes that employers want employees who have a desire to be involved in the industry in question:

I think employers tend to look for an active involvement or desire in the particular industry that you want to pursue, and motivation to do the job that's in front of you

For the alumni, enjoying their job was important. There was a sense among the alumni that not only was it important for a person to work hard to achieve the requirements of the job, but it was also important for the job to meet the requirements of the person.

➡

My advice to students would be to go and do something that you enjoy, because if you don't enjoy it, you're not going to be motivated to do it, you're not going to want to do it and you won't be good at it 12

➡

Minten (2010) highlighted that it is important to consider how jobs and employers meet the requirements of graduates as well as ensuring that graduates meet the requirements of employers. Minten (2010) suggests that simply focusing on whether graduates meet the requirements of employers does not do justice to the complexity of the graduate employability phenomenon.

The requirements of the job and the requirements of the students are of equal importance. It is important to consider how the world of work meets the needs of students.

JOB REQUIREMENTS ⬅➡ STUDENTS' REQUIREMENTS

71

2.3.2.6 Conclusion Deductive Analysis Theme 3: The Requirements of the World of Work

This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

c.   Determine what the world of work and employers require from graduates, from the perspective of the alumni.

The AGR (2010) feels that there is not a common definition of employability between employers and HE institutions, and Glover *et al.* (2002) found that students are unaware of the requirements of the world of work. Since graduates can be at a disadvantage if they do not understand the requirements of the world of work, it is important to make steps towards enhancing students' awareness of such requirements (Brewer 2009, Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007). Johnston (2003) recommended that the perceptions of alumni should be utilised to determine the reality and requirements of the workplace.

Based on the alumni experiences in the world of work and their perceptions of what employers want five 'world of work requirements' have been created:

The ability to communicate and work with others (n=16)	The Degree, the Knowledge, and the 'Je ne sais quoi'(n=16)	Graduates must 'toe the line' (n = 13)	Self management (n = 12)	A good work ethic (n = 10)
'The ability to communicate and work with others' was the most dominant world of work requirement that the alumni referred to. Working and interacting with others played a major role in the working environments of the alumni. The alumni were required to build positive relationships and effectively interact and communicate with the different stakeholders involved with their work.	Employers view a degree as a prerequisite and are more interested in the type of person a graduate is because, *'that's more important than skills of the trade, because skills of the trade, you can teach'* 12 The alumni feel that employers are more interested in whether graduates will comfortably fit into the given working environment and culture rather than the qualifications or knowledge that they possess.	The alumni were required to work hard and meet the demands of the employer and the job. The alumni discussed having to meet the targets set by the employer.	The manner in which targets set by employers are met is the responsibility of the graduate. Graduates are required to 'self manage' themselves and their work. Employers want graduates to be independent, take initiative, and have the self discipline to motivate and organise themselves.	It is not only important that graduates meet the requirements of employers and the world of work, but it is important for the world of work to meet the requirements of graduates. It is important that graduates have 'a good work ethic/attitude'. They need to be passionate and motivated about their work.

A lack of awareness

The alumni reported that they were unaware of what employers required from graduates when they left university, and as a result, were unaware of what post HE options were available to them:

It really surprised me that a degree gave me so many different options 1

It was only after entering the world of work that the alumni became aware of the wide range of opportunities available to them. This highlights a need to enhance students' awareness of the world of work requirements, and how the attributes that are being developed alongside their degree relates to those requirements, supporting recommendations from Yorke and Knight (2006), Brewer (2009), Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004) and Leitch (2006) (page 10). Students need to be made more aware of the world of work requirements, since graduates can be at a disadvantage if they are unable to recognise, market and apply world of work requirements that they may possess (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Brewer 2009). Students need to be prepared for the requirements of the world of work in order to enter the world of work and 'hit the ground running' (Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007).

General dimension 4 will go on to discuss what more can be done to prepare graduates for their post HE lives based on the perceptions of the alumni in this study.

Table 13: 2.3.2.7 Summary analysis table – What more can be done to prepare graduates for employability?

1st Order Themes	2nd Order Themes	3rd Order Themes	Deductive Analysis Theme

Students need more knowledge & awareness of the competitive reality of the working world 10 12 14 15

Increase awareness of the value of university experiences 5 7 13

More information about the different potential career options 1 3 8 9 13 15

Insight into the career paths of alumni 9 15

Develop students' 'marketability' 5 9 12 13

— Increase awareness of the reality of the world of work

Embed employability into the curriculum 1 3 5 13 14 15

Careers/training fairs 2 11

Gain qualifications alongside degree 5 6 8 11 17

Develop the personal tutor system 1 6 8 9 10 15 16

Encourage peer learning/mentoring 2 7 15

Continued support post graduation 2

Develop the placement process 5 8 12 14 16

Develop more practical & transferable skills 3 9 10 11 13 14 15 17

— Programme/curriculum design

— University perspective

Students need to prepare themselves for what they are going to do post HE 1 3 5 6 11 17

Engage in as much extra curricula activity & additional opportunities as possible 1 5 6 9 10 13 15

Get as much work experience as possible 1 2 3 4 8 11 12 13 14 16 17

Volunteer as a subject for research studies 5 8 10 13 15

Develop a network of contacts 5 6 13 16 17

Be willing and enthusiastic 2 5 9 13

Take responsibility for own learning 5 16

— Alumni advice to current students

— Student perspective

What more can be done to prepare graduates

2.3.2.7 Deductive Analysis Theme 4: 'What more could be done to prepare graduates for employability?'

So far, this chapter has identified the attitudes of the alumni interviewed in this study regarding the purpose of university (Analysis Theme 1), how the alumni perceive their HE experience has impacted on their working world preparation (Analysis Theme 2), and what the requirements of the working world are (Analysis Theme 3). This chapter will now discuss what more could be done to prepare graduates for employability, as informed by the perceptions of the alumni interviewed. These perceptions are based on how the alumni feel that students can be better supported and guided through their university experience in order to enhance their personal and professional development, and what advice the alumni would give to current students for things they could do to enhance their personal and professional development whilst they are at university. The alumni perceptions will therefore be discussed regarding the following two 3rd order themes that were demonstrated in Table 13:

The University Perspective	The Student Perspective
How could students be better supported through their university experience to enhance their personal and professional development?	What advice would the alumni give to current students for things that they could do to enhance their personal and professional development?

This analysis theme addressed the following phase 1 aim:

  d. Identify what more can be done in order to better prepare graduates for employability - from an alumni perspective.

The conclusion for analysis theme 4 will also act as the summary for this chapter.

3rd Order Theme: The University Perspective

This 3rd order theme is based around things that the alumni suggested the university could be doing to better support students through their university experience in preparation for post HE.

2nd Order Theme: Increase Awareness of the Reality of the Working World

As highlighted in deductive analysis theme 1, the alumni suggested that 'a degree is not enough' to get graduates a job (page 47). Students need to be made aware of this reality and be provided with the awareness to make informed choices about their post HE lives, as suggested by eleven of the alumni [1 3 5 7 8 9 10 12 13 14 15]. Four of the alumni stated that students need more knowledge and awareness of the competitive reality of the working world [10 12 14 15]. Students must develop realistic expectations regarding the reality of the post HE world (Browne 2010, Graduate Prospects 2011, NSF 2010, Rae 2009). The alumni suggest that increasing students' awareness about the competitive reality of the working world will result in students being more enthusiastic about engaging with opportunities to enhance their employability and post HE preparedness. This is of importance since three of the alumni felt that students are not always aware of the value and importance of the interventions they experience whilst at university [5 7 13]. This relates to the findings from Glover *et al.* (2002) that students

do not recognise how their university experience relates to post HE.

Alumnus 13 uses the university wide employability initiative as an example:	Alumnus 5 uses an example from his final year environmental physiology module:
It's one of those things that you don't really appreciate at the time, if students were made more aware of it and it's importance, because otherwise a lot of people will just ignore it and get on with what they want to do	*We, as students, were effectively subjects for a scientific paper that the lecturers wrote up, which we had to write up as an assignment as well, which obviously looks good on your CV, you have effectively contributed to a scientific paper, and I'm not sure people understood the value of going through that process, at the time it's just a final year assignment that you want to get a good mark in, you're not thinking necessarily about how can I market this in the future, how can I use that particular experience?*

In the quote above, alumnus 5 expresses how the assessment driven culture within HE creates an overwhelming desire to succeed within HE students. Alumnus 5 described how the pressure of the assessment prevented students gaining from the totality of the learning experience, in a manner recognised by Burgess (2007) and Ainley (cited in Fearne 2008) (see page 5). In the quotes below the alumni suggest that increasing students' awareness of the competitive nature of the working world will in turn increase students' awareness of the 'pay off', or benefit, of engaging with the opportunities provided by the SSES:

| *It's got to be really worth it, it's got to be made to seem worth while* [15] | *A lot of the time students might do something if they know they are getting something back from doing it, if they know it's going to help their chances of getting a job after uni, if it's brought to their attention* [7] | Alumnus 14 suggested involving employers in the process of increasing students' awareness of the competitive nature of the graduate job market:
 If the SSES got the head of active city to come in and say, 'your degree is not going to be enough to get a job in my organisation', that would perk me up |

As stated by Browne (2010), increasing students' awareness of the reality of the world of work will close the gap between skills taught in university and the requirements of the world of work. Leitch (2006) reported that generic skills and attributes can be developed at university if students are made aware of their importance. The SSES needs to be more open and transparent about the benefits and post HE applicability of all employability related opportunities being provided (GEES 2008). Six of the alumni felt that more information about different potential career options was required [1 3 8 9 13 15]. The alumni reported that the careers information that was available was generally orientated towards careers within the Sports Science field. They felt that career information provided should focus on careers opportunities both in and out of the Sports Science industry. At the time of interviewing the alumni in this study were in a range of different jobs, with only 4 of the 17 alumni working in the Sports Science industry (see Table 3, page 33). Furthermore, only four of the alumni specified that they chose to study a Sports Science related degree because they wanted to work in the Sport Science industry (see Table 7, page 43).

I think there are over 4000 graduates a year that have a Sports Science degree, not everyone is going to want to work in Sports Science, so it's about what are the other options out there, what else can you do [3]

The number of undergraduate Sports Science degrees that were obtained in 2010 was 8370 (HESA 2011). Due to the competitive nature of the job market Sports Science graduates face, it would be

beneficial to provide a wider range of information to account for the wide range of individual needs that Sports Science students have:

They could have informed us a bit more about route ways into work, whether it was gaining a certain type of experience or gaining another qualification alongside our degrees, it maybe lacked in providing a wider range of information for all different types of undergraduate [3]

There could have been more to do with what other kind of jobs you can go for, not only sports related jobs, like management and sales and other things science related, to give people wider chances, because there is so much competition within the sporting world, the main thing is making them aware that there are other opportunities out there, just because you can't get jobs being a football coach, which probably half the lads that go in there want to do, doesn't mean that there isn't other good jobs out there, some people think, 'I can't do the sporting thing that I want, so I'm just going to end up doing a crappy job' [9]

Graduates involved in the Graduate Prospects (2011) research also felt that students should be provided with more insight into a wide range of post HE opportunities. It is notable that there was a sense among some of the alumni of 'failure' if they were not working in the Sports Science industry:

For example, in the quote above alumnus 9 said:

Some people think, 'I can't do the sporting thing that I want, so I'm just going to end up doing a crappy job'.

Alumnus 6, who was unemployed at the time of interviewing, stated that she would be embarrassed seeing the SSES lecturers:

I would be embarrassed to come back and have to say, 'I haven't done anything Sports Sciencey', it's embarrassing that they are all high hopes that you have done well, and it's like, 'no!'

This culture of 'failing' within SSES graduates needs to be diminished for a number of reasons:

Firstly, not all Sports Science students necassarily want to work in the Sports Science industry. Only 4 out of the 17 alumni interviewed choose to do a Sports Science degree based on the desire to work in Sports Science, with only 4 out of the 17 working in the Sports Science industry at the time of interviewing (Table 3, page 33).

$\longrightarrow$

Secondly, the highly competitive Sports Science job market means that only a small percentage of SSES graduates will end up working in the Sports Science industry, resulting in graduates going into a wide range of different career pathways, as represented by the alumni in this study (Table 3, page 33).

Thirdly, 'cradle to grave' jobs have become extinct, with current day graduates having several jobs and even several careers between graduation and retirement (AGR 2010).

$\longrightarrow$

A 2010 survey by CIPD found that 59% of employed graduates who graduated between 2008 and 2010 were not working in an area related to their degree. Since so many graduates appear to enter jobs that have no direct relation to their degree subject, HE must ensure that students widen their post HE horizons (Yorke 2004).

These factors combined with the perceptions from the alumni regarding how HE prepared them for the working world (analysis theme 2), SSES students need to be made aware that their degree prepares them for the working world in general, not simple for the Sports Science working world:

It really surprised me that a degree gave me so many different options [1]

Students need to have their horizons broadened regarding the reality of the world of work and the post HE opportunities that are available to them.

$\longrightarrow$

The culture and attitudes within HE needs to reflect the culture that 21st century graduates will experience in the working world. HE needs to 'roll with the times' and align itself with the reality of the world of work in order to prepare graduates accordingly (NCIHE 1997, see page 5 'rapidly changing world').

Four of the alumni felt that students' 'marketability' needs to be developed [5 9 12 13]. As discussed in the literature review, students need to be better prepared for the process of marketing themselves to potential employers and attaining a job (see page 9) (HEA 2006, Leitch 2006, Norton and Thomas 2009, UKCES 2009). As stated by Hawkins and Gilleard (2002: 48), *'success in life often comes down to how well you sell yourself'.*

In the quotes below, alumnus 12 and 9 demonstrate that upon leaving university they were not adequately prepared for marketing themselves to potential employers:

I obviously wasn't filling applications forms in right, I didn't know how to fill them in, that wasn't taught to us [12]

It would have been useful to know a bit more about competency based questioning and how that works to prepare people, because I never really knew about it until I was in an interview, and it stunned me a bit when I was in there, I was lacking in the general knowing what to do in interviews [9]

Alumnus numbers 5 and 13 felt that the SSES lacked in providing information about how students can develop their marketability:

We didn't really get much advice on how to write CVs, do personal development planning (PDP) that sort of thing, there was probably workshops along the way from the university on a whole, but in our school we got too much guidance [13]

As part of the course there needs to be some way of developing students' ability to market themselves, in terms of understanding the transferable skills that they have got [5]

It is important for students to be explicitly aware of the skills and knowledge they are developing in order to be able to explain them and how they can be applied (Burgess 2007, Rae 2009). Rae (2009) felt that all students need to be provided with training in self marketability.

2nd Order Theme: Programme/Curriculum Design

This 2nd order theme discusses the suggestions that sixteen of the alumni gave for things that should be done as part of the SSES curriculum in order to enhance graduate employability [1 2 3 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17]. Six of the alumni articulated that employability should be embedded within the SSES curriculum as opposed to being a university wide or extra curricula initiative [1 3 5 13 14 15].

In our school we didn't get much guidance, it would have been good to sit down with someone and for them to tell me what's out there for someone that's done a degree in Sports Science, what are the areas that you can work in [13]

I found that the careers advice was very optional, no-one forced you to go to careers meetings or to go and see your careers advisor, it may have been more useful for LJMU to talk solely about the kind of jobs that you could go into and possible pathways after uni within the actual lectures themselves, rather than it being such an optional thing [1]

They should have a compulsory careers session, make it a bit more accessible [15]

A regular lecture once every semester, from someone who can provide some information about careers or how students can better themselves as an employable person when they graduate wouldn't do any harm [3]

O'Regan (2010) recommended embedding work related interventions such as skills development, labour market information, work experience, and recruitment procedure knowledge in the curriculum.

According to alumnus 5, embedding employability related initiatives into the curriculum can help develop students' ability to market themselves to potential employers:

It needs to be made clearer what students need to do within their course to get to the next step that they want to get to, what is the best way if you want to go down that route of employment, you need to work out from each of your modules what the transferable skills are and how you can use that to show your employer what you can do, at the moment I don't think that there's an explicit process for that to happen, and that would help, how to market themselves based on what they have learnt

Alumnus 5 goes on to articulate what more can be done within the curriculum to better prepare students for marketing themselves to potential employers and attaining a job in the world of work:

To back up each module there's a module guide that outlines all the certain skills and attributes, I'm pretty certain that very few of the students will actually think, 'I have done x, y and z module, this is supposed to have given me the following skills, I will make sure that I can use a couple of those when I have an interview', I'm sure half of them didn't even know where to find the particular document, so there is a gap there, you might be able to do literally just fifteen minutes as part of the introductory lecture for each course, to say, 'at the end of this module, you will be able to do this', and then a summary at the end of each module, the key achievements and what you might be able to take forward on a CV

AGR (1995) and Brewer (2009) suggests that increasing students' awareness of careers related information should be administered at a departmental as opposed to an institutional level, and be incorporated from the first year. The NSF (2010) recommends implementing review sessions at the end of a course to acknowledge the transferable skills gained.

Five of the alumni mentioned that qualifications should be gained whilst students are completing their SSES degrees 5 6 8 11 17.

79

The alumni reported that for those wanting to go on and work in the Sports Science industry, a degree is the first step in terms of qualifications:

I knew by the time that I had finished uni that my degree would not be sufficient to take me into a full time role within Sports Science, I knew that if I wanted to carry on within Sports Science that my degree was the first step, it wouldn't directly lead me into a job, the reality is if you want to get a job in Sports Science, you're going to have to do further study after your bachelor's degree,

It is important for Sports Science graduates to have additional qualifications so that they can compete in the competitive graduate job market, as alumnus 17 demonstrates below:

When I came out of uni, if I'd have had the UKSCA (United Kingdom Strength & Conditioning Association accreditation), I'm sure that people would have gone, 'ok, he hasn't got a masters, but he's got his UKSCA, he's got his experience and a degree, that maybe that lad that's got his masters hasn't', so then it almost evens itself out.

Alumnus 11 advises that students engage with gaining qualifications whilst they are at university:

It's worth getting your vocational qualifications out of the way whilst you're at uni and whilst you have the time to do them, I don't think people realise just how much time you have available to yourself whilst you're at uni, because once you're in the work place, you don't get buggar all time to think about what you're doing.

Alumnus 11 explained that with some vocational qualifications there is an overlap between the content of the qualification and the curriculum content within the SSES degree course:

You could pretty much pass the CSCS (Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist) qualification in your first year at university on the basis of the core modules that you do, so if that qualification is made available, you're building towards qualifications as you go, instead of having to reproduce the same work twice, you're actually meeting those targets as you go.

The BASES 2010 guide to careers in Sport and Exercise Sciences provides career profiles of 17 people working within the Sports industry. 14 out of these 17 people had post graduate qualifications. It is important that students are at least made aware of the importance of additional qualifications.

Seven of the alumni felt that students could be better supported and prepared for post HE life by developing the personal tutor system [1 6 8 9 10 15 16].

Alumnus 6 gave insight into how the personal tutor system worked:

We all got given a tutor to go and visit once a year, I think it was to find out how we were actually doing to see if we were enjoying the course, say how good our grades were, and that was it, you had about five, ten minutes to talk, I went to see mine twice, maybe three times

Alumnus 15 feels that the personal tutor system was inefficient:

We had a personal tutor, and you were supposed to do PDP, but everyone always used to think it was a bit of a chore, and you don't really get much out of it, and unless you had a specific problem you wouldn't really go and see your personal tutor that much, it's like they have attempted it, but it's not really worked

The alumni believe that students need to spend more time with their personal tutors:

I think more time with your personal tutor needs to be made compulsory [8]

Increasing the contact time with tutors, and tutors demanding to the see the students more often, not to make it look like a school thing, but you need to have that level of discipline, but I think it also comes from the student themselves as well, where they want to meet the tutor to increase that contact time, to be more easily guided and led to what they want to do [10]

In his quote, alumnus 10 demonstrates that he believes both the staff and the students should be engaged in the responsibility of making the personal tutor system more disciplined and effective. This belief was not unanimously represented by all the alumni interviewed as demonstrated in the quote below. Alumnus 1 felt that it is the responsibility of the students to utilise and make the most of the personal tutor system:

I probably only saw the lecturer I was assigned to a handful of times throughout my degree, but LJMU can't really force that on you, I don't think that's the point, the point is that they're providing a facility and it's up to you to make the most of it [1]

However, based on general dimension 3, this approach does not reflect the requirements of the working world. The alumni reported that their employers expected them to 'toe the line'. Five of the alumni reported having to meet the standards, targets and deadlines set by the employers (see page 67). Therefore, enforcing a 'toe the line' work ethic within HE, would better prepare students for the requirements of the working world. As suggested by alumnus 10 in his above quote, *'you need to have that level of discipline'.*

Five of the alumni felt that the placement process needs to be developed so that students can learn and gain some good quality work experience [5 8 12 14 16]. There was a general consensus among the alumni that placements as part of the SSES course are a good idea. However, not all of the feedback from the alumni regarding placements was positive:

It's a little hit and miss in terms of where you end up and how good it is and what experience you get [5]

Alumnus 16 reported having a 'miss' experience of a placement:

My experience of a sports development office was rubbish, it was a waste of my time basically; they need to make sure that students are actually going to learn something.

Alumnus 15 was disappointed with the amount of independence that she was allowed on her placement and did not feel that it prepared her for the world of work in any way:

Everyone's expecting when you go into the world of work that you are straight in there and they expect you to do whatever you have been told, but when we went there, they had set stuff up for us and they were telling us what we were going to do, and yet I thought that was supposed to be our job, we had got everything ready, so it almost felt like it could have been anyone, even if they have not got a Sports Science degree, anyone could have done it.

81

As stated on page 69, the alumni reported that graduates are required to 'hit the ground running' and therefore alumnus 15's placement experience which involved being told what to do did not reflect the reality of the world of work. Suggestions from the alumni for how placements can be developed are presented below:

More work based learning opportunities, even just shadowing, anything to get you out in the industry, so if they gave you little snippets shadowing somebody, like the day in a life of a press officer at Everton, making that emphasis on getting in the industry and watching or working alongside a specialist, going down to Everton and watching a training session, more experience of the Sports Science way of life [8]

⟶

Alumnus 14 thinks that placements need to be more 'meaningful' and have a purpose in which both the students and the placement provider gain. Placements must reflect the true nature of the working world (UKCES 2009):

It needs to be more meaningful, you've got to be there for a purpose, its got to be something that the employers want to get out of it as well, because thinking back to my experience, they didn't really want what I was doing, so it was serving a purpose for us and not them.

The NSF (2010) also felt that placements should benefit both students and providers. Placements should develop students and help providers better meet the needs of their businesses.

Alumnus 12 suggests that there needs to be an increase in the breadth and depth of the placement options that are available to students:

In third year they do some sort of work somewhere, but only a very small percentage of them are going to actually go into that profession, so although its good because they get to go into a club or whatever and do some work, that's not real life, and it won't be for 99% of them.

⟶

The quote from alumnus 12 relates to the suggestion that students need to be provided with more information about different potential career options (page 76). As demonstrated in Table 3, at the time of interviewing, only 4 out of the 17 alumni interviewed in this study were working in the Sports Science industry. According to the preceding quote from alumnus 12, the reality of Sports Science graduates should be reflected in the placement options that are available.

Eight of the alumni feel that developing more practical and transferable skills would have better prepared them for their post HE jobs [3 9 10 11 13 14 15 17]. Below is a list of the skills that the alumni specified they would have liked to have learnt more about whilst they were at university. The skills have been split into three themes:

Skills

— Sports Science related laboratory practical experience

More practical laboratory experience [15]
Weight lifting techniques [11]
Biomechanical methodological techniques e.g. how to measure certain proteins [10]
Collecting and analysing heart rate data [17]
Sports injuries/rehabilitation [17]

— Working with others skills

Project management [14]
Negotiating skills [3 14]
How to effectively work with different personalities [9]

— Job specific skills

Writing a funding application [14]
Computer programmes [13]

The factors that the alumni referred to related to their job roles and were mainly practical in their nature.

Alumnus 15 felt that more laboratory based 'hands-on' practical experience was required:

We could have had a bit more hands on experience at undergraduate level, you only really get to use the couple of bits of equipment that you use for your project and you don't get a great deal of use of any of the other bits, maybe they could do more workshops and things to get more hands on experience, actually learning how to use some of the equipment in the labs, more hands on practical skills.

Alumnus 17 (who is a football coach) would have liked to have learnt practical skills that would have benefited him in the day to day occurrences of job role:

There were things I wish I would've been taught, for example, to do a fitness session with the team, collect all their heart rate data, put it on a computer and then look at it and go, 'right, ok, this is what this means,' day to day stuff.

As a Sports Scientist or a fitness coach, if you have a cruciate knee injury, and the physio goes, 'he's ok to train', you don't want to be going to the physio and going, 'what's he ok to do?' Because then he's going, 'well, you should really know that', fitness coaches do get asked to do rehab with players, so I think knowing the basics to do when they are just getting back from injury.

The UKCES believe it is crucial that graduates are able to use knowledge and skills in the workplace effectively (UKCES 2009). Leitch (2006) reported that such skills and abilities can be developed at university if students are given opportunities to practice them throughout their degree programme in authentic workplace settings. Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004) proposed that formal teaching must be accompanied by practical skills and also applied to the environment in which they will be used, enabling students to develop the cultural and social skills required for the successful implementation of their learning. As stated by Denholm (2011), positive changes can result from thinking less about 'what' and more about 'how' we teach.

3rd Order Theme: The Student Perspective

This 3rd order theme discusses what more can be done to prepare graduates for employability from the students' perspective. The alumni acknowledge that students have to take responsibility for and be engaged with enhancing their own employability.

2nd Order Theme: Alumni Advice for Current SSES Students

This 2nd order theme presents ways current students can enhance their employability from the perspective of sixteen alumni [1 2 3 4 5 6 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17]. Six of the alumni advise that university students need to prepare themselves for what they are going to do post HE [1 3 5 6 11 17]:

I knew I wanted a career in sports development, but I hadn't taken the steps at uni to know enough about how to get into it, which means I wasted the first six months after graduation working in a gym because it was just the stepping stone into sports development that I didn't need [1] (See page 86 for further related discussion of the initial career path challenges of alumnus 1).

→

In order to prevent such initial challenges upon graduation, students should:
Make sure you learn as much as you can about what you are going to go into after uni so that you're prepared rather than you suddenly graduate, you throw your mortar board in the air and you then think, 'oh god, what am I going to do now?!' [1]

↓

Students need to look at the requirements of their desired jobs and begin making steps towards gaining such requirements whilst at university so they leave university in a better position to achieve such job roles:
Students need to take a look at what's out there in terms of jobs, because for example, if you look at a job at EIS (English Institute of Sport), one of the first things it says is to be UKSCA accredited, that wasn't something I even thought about, and I wish I had, because it's something that you can do whilst you're at uni, it's not a heavy work load, you've just got to be organised with it [17]

(The importance of additional qualifications was discussed on page 79). If students do not prepare themselves and make steps towards gaining the requirements of their desired jobs, they may be disappointed post HE when the jobs that they had envisaged themselves getting are unattainable.

→

Students who are unaware what they want to do after HE should research as much as they can about all the possible options that are available:

Whilst at uni, students should be seeking what options are available to them, or what they can do to coincide with their degree to make them more employable in the future, find out about the different options that you have with your degree, you have really got to look at all the opportunities out there so that when you graduate you know what you want to do, you need to seek as many different opportunities as possible to give youself as good an idea as possible with regard to what the opportunities are [3]

↓

Students should consider the purpose of their degree and their future career path at the beginning of their degree:

Students should probably start considering it in their first year, if you had your focus and your goals planned out from year one to your final year you would do considerably better, I could have been a lot more productive with my time at university if I was more aware of what I wanted to do after university [11]

This supports the claim from the AGR (1995), Brewer (2009) and GEES (2008) that all students should be taught career management and effective learning skills from their first year in a progressive manner.

Seven of the alumni advise that students should engage in as much extra curricula activity and additional opportunities as possible [1 5 6 9 10 13 15].

Alumnus 1 demonstrates that it is important that students do not just focus on the academic aspects of university, because as highlighted in general dimension 2, factors such as 'living on your own' and 'interacting with people' also impact on preparing students for the world of work:

I knew a few people in the first year who locked themselves away in their rooms, and didn't make much effort to get out there and meet people and get involved in clubs and things, and although they probably thought at the time that they were doing the right thing for their career, because they were learning their subject as well as they could, they may realise coming out of uni that that was a mistake, because the social aspects are so important, I would really advise people to get out there as much as possible.

As highlighted in general dimension 3, the ability to communicate and work with others' was a very important part of the working environments of the alumni interviewed (page 62). It is important that students are aware of this importance so that they can make steps towards developing their ability to work with others. The alumni feel that it is essential that students develop the factors that employers want, due to the competitive nature of the current graduate job market.

84

In his research, Redmond (2010) found that employers from all sectors wanted graduates to have 'more'. Students must engage with additional experience and activities alongside their degree in order to be world of work prepared (Gilleard, cited in Mail Online 2007). The alumni advise students that engaging in extra curricula and additional opportunities will help them to develop what Browne (2007) termed an 'economy of experience', with the extra qualities over and above academic qualifications that employers want (as highlighted by Green 2009, see page 7).

Get involved with anything you possibly can, ranging from volunteering to be a study subject, get involved with any opportunities external to university, in clubs on placements or coaching or whatever might be around, testing with athletes, just try and embark on anything that is possible, doing other courses that you think would get you above maybe your best mate, because it's very competitive and everyone's out to beat each other to that number one job, you need to embark upon additional stuff to your degree as much as you can [10]

Be aware that you need to be thinking about what you want do, and trying to gain skills so that you stand out from everyone else [15]

People doing degrees have to realise that it's not as easy as graduation and then finding a job, you have got to make yourself differentiate from the rest of the pack, whether it's doing a bit of voluntary work or an extra qualification, that's the key at the moment [3]

Get involved with as much as they can, volunteer, playing for teams, coaching teams, just getting involved in things to show that they've got more than one string to their fiddle [9]

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, employers consider relevant work experience as essential (Blair 2006, Green 2009, High Fliers 2012, Wilson 2012). According to Redmond (2010), work experience guarantees employability. As stated by Schwartz (2011), *"reading by itself will not make anyone wise. Experience is also required"*. The importance of experience is supported by eleven of the alumni, who feel that it is important that students get as much work experience as possible whilst they are at university [1 2 3 4 8 11 12 13 14 15 17].

The best way to improve students' employability is by getting craft knowledge of a certain area, so it could be coaching a young team, or shadowing someone within the particular field, and then maybe getting some work experience from that 4

One of the worst things for graduates coming straight out of university is that they have got no experience, and until they have got experience, they won't get anywhere 12

If you don't get experience, you're never going to get a job in sport 1

Eleven of the alumni feel that it is important that students get as much work experience as possible whilst at university:

Volunteer, get as much experience as they can, people at uni are too cottoned on to, 'I want to work as a sports psychologist or a sports physiologist, but I only want to work with elite people', but you don't get that job without having any experience, and you've got to volunteer, because people aren't going to pay you to start with 17

Employers don't want someone who's wet behind the ears, if they don't get experience, they're going to end up getting a job that's not where they want to be 14

I work in recruitment, and what I see on a day to day basis is that now more than ever, experience is key, when there are so many people out there looking for work a person that has a bit more experience, regardless of what level of education they have gone to, will be employed, it will be a safer option, and what I have learnt since graduating is I wish I had done more work experience whilst at university, and I think that's something that students should be looking into 3

Put yourself in work experience situations where you're being tested and learning new skills rather than working on a till in Sainsbury's 3

According to High Fliers (2011), employers value experience because it means that they can get an idea about how effective an individual may be in the work place. This notion was supported by the alumni:

When recruiters are taking on someone who is already experienced, you know what you're going to get, you can see their career history, you can get the references, and you know what this type of person is about 3

One of the worst things for graduates now, especially coming straight from uni, is that they have no experience, and until they have experience they won't get anywhere, because if they have experience they have a reference from a previous employer saying, 'this person is a good communicator and does this, that and the other' 12

The alumni feel that the transferable skills that students are thought to gain whilst they are at university do not reflect the nature of the world of work requirements, and that experience in the world of work is the only way to truly acquire the requirements of the world of work:

86

It's expected that students pick up good time management skills along the way, and you do, but you pick up good time management skills for yourself and doing your project, and doing a project at LJMU is not like doing a project in the real world [14]

I don't think that's a thing that we can teach, because the only way they know is through experience, so put them in a work setting, other than just observing [12]

You can only really learn from being around and seeing how other people do it and gaining your own experience, and I know a lot of the time you learn when you get it wrong not necessarily when you get it right [11]

Alumnus 17, who gained a lot of work experience whilst he was at university, stated: *'I probably learnt more in work than I did at uni'.* 90% of the students and recent graduates surveyed by doctorjob.com (2004) also felt that work experience was the best way to gain the skills required for work.

Alumnus 17 uses his coaching background to exemplify how being capable in his workplace comes from experience and learning how to deal with different situations:

➡️

There will always be a first time you come up against a situation, and every time after that you know how to deal with it, one of my bosses always used to say, 'you know you're a coach when you've got 20 kids running over the hill, 1 football, 2 cones and you know what you are going to do', I can do sessions with 30 kids and 1 ball, I can do sessions with a ball each, and it's not because I'm a good coach, it's just because I have done it day in, day out and you come up against situations and you get made to think on your toes and you go, 'shit shit shit shit shit!' and you go (sound of fingers clicking), 'I'll try that', and if it don't work it don't work, but at least you go, 'well, next time, it would have worked if we had of just done that', it's having that adaptability, whereas if you have only coached two sessions, it would be like if I did a lecture, it would be rubbish, but the more lectures I do, the better I do it, it's just experience, and I think that's what a lot of people leave uni without.

➡️

This notion of capability is reflected in the quote below: *"Capable people not only know about their specialism's, they also have the confidence to apply their knowledge and skills within variable and changing situations and to continue to develop their specialist knowledge and skills"* (Stephenson 1998: 2). It is important that students gain experience in order to develop such capability.

Experience is also beneficial because it provides students with the opportunity to try different career options (GEES 2008). As discussed, the alumni felt that more information about different potential career options was required (see page 75).

Until they actually go and experience it, they're not going to be able to make up their own minds on which way they want to go [12]

The subsequent quotation demonstrates this notion in action; alumnus 9 wanted to pursue a career as a rugby coach, but a placement with a rugby team made him change his mind:

➡️

If I hadn't of had that experience, I might have been out looking for jobs and jumped into a job doing coaching and then not liked it six months down the line, so it helped me see that coaching was not what I wanted to do.

Alumnus 9 considered himself lucky to have had gained experience to prevent him pursuing a career as a coach. Alumnus 1 however, was not so lucky. He wanted to pursue a career in sports development. Eight months after graduating, alumnus 1 got a sports development role. After a year in the role, he realised that the career progression and earning opportunities did not meet his aspirations, and so began looking for alternative jobs. Gaining experience and awareness of the sports development industry whilst at university could have helped alumnus 1 make more informed choices when he finished university.

Five of the alumni advised that students should develop a network of contacts whilst at university [5 6 13 16 17].

The alumni suggested that students should develop good relationships with the SSES staff, as this will help them understand what they need to do during university, and help prepare them for what they want to do after university:

→

Establish a good relationship with whoever has expertise in your area, so when you do go to them for help you can sit there and have a nice long chat about what your ideas are, and you just come out feeling so much more knowledgeable [16]

Talk to your lecturers a lot, if you can get a good relationship with your staff from early on you feel confident to go and ask them for support and talk to them about their research and ideas that they have and what's out there, then you put yourself in a good situation for understanding what you need to do during university and for after [13]

This notion reflects the suggestion from alumnus 10 that students should increase contact time with staff to be '*more easily guided and led to what they want to do*' (see page 81), adding further credence to the need for students to spend more time with the SSES staff in a post HE preparing capacity.

↓

Students should be generating and utilising contacts from both inside and outside of the university, getting to know as many people as possible:

Maintain or create links with clubs, associations, lecturers, get involved with things inside and outside of the university, get to know as many people as possible, volunteer for things, coach, anything you can to create a network and get to know people so that they know who you are, they know what you do, often it's who you know and not what you know [5]

→

All of the 15 alumni that were employed at the time of interviewing gained employment through contacts of some form, whether it be hearing about a job through a friend (alumnus 9), gaining a job role through work experience (alumni 11 and 17), or 'knowing the right people' (alumnus 16). The fact that all of the employed alumni had benefited from contacts at some point in their careers highlights that students need to be made aware of the important role of contacts. Alumnus 17 provides an example of the impact contacts can have:

↓

It's all through who you know, I know one lad called Dave who was helping out at Tranmere, picking up cones for the under 12s coach while he was at uni, the year after uni the under 12s coach got given a job at the Welsh FA and he took Dave to the Welsh FA, he then got offered a post at Derby County, he took Dave with him, now they're at Wolves, and that was all because he was just volunteering picking up cones, Dave's a smashing lad, he's a grafter and a bright lad, but he didn't get it because he's a bright lad, he didn't get it because he's a great coach, he got it because he showed that he had a bit about him, he showed that he was committed, he'd catch a train or bus over the water to Tranmere, even when it was bloody freezing on a February night, he'd go down there and he'd help them out, he wasn't getting paid, and for me, if I was the boss and I had someone coming to me saying, 'I can help you, I can help you, I can help you', and they kept coming week after week after week and they weren't getting paid, I'd think, 'they really want to do this'.

Redmond (2010) referred to the important role contacts plays in the employability of graduates:

"When more people than ever have qualifications, work experience and skills, having contacts assumes ever greater importance" (Redmond 2010: 200).

~

"It's not who you know, it's not who you know. It's who knows you" (Redmond 2010: 201).

2.3.3 Phase 1 Summary & Conclusion for Deductive Analysis Theme 4: 'What more can be done to prepare graduates for employability?'

The conclusion for analysis theme 4 also acts as the summary for this chapter. Analysis theme 4 addressed the following phase 1 aim:

    d.   Identify what more can be done in order to better prepare graduates for employability - from an alumni perspective.

There is a need for HE to contribute to the delivery of a labour force that will ensure our national economy is capable of flourishing in the current economic climate (Leitch 2006, Browne 2010).

Degrees nowadays are being more and more common therefore less and less valuable or not worthwhile; a degree 30 years ago was probably viewed differently to today, so the degree is not the be-all-and-end-all ₃

According to the alumni, the general purpose of HE is *'preparation for the world of work and post HE life.'* Since a degree is not enough to account for this purpose, what can be done to better prepare students for the world of work and their post HE lives?

There needs to be an increased awareness among students regarding the competitive reality of the working world and the world of work requirements.	There needs to be an increased self awareness amongst students of how curriculum interventions are preparing them for the reality and requirements of the world of work. Page 58 demonstrates that the alumni only began to recognise the benefit of aspects of their university experience once they were in the work place.

An increased awareness will lead to an increased accountability and perceived 'need' to engage with post HE preparing opportunities. This is based on the notion of a 'culture of instrumentalism', where by students only learn what they need, when they need it (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008, see page 5)).

According to the alumni, students need to be aware of the benefit of engaging in order to fully engage (see page 75).

"Students will not be motivated to engage with employability enhancing interventions, if they do not see the urgent need which exists" (AGR 1995).

Increasing students awareness of the value of curriculum interventions will enhance students' awareness of the 'need' to engage.

If students are engaged in the curriculum interventions, then the culture of instrumentalism would be transformed into a culture of learning whereby students gain from the totality of the learning experience (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008, Burgess 2007). Students need to be engaged with interventions in order to gain in the intended manner.

Enhanced engagement combined with an increased self awareness of how interventions are preparing students for the reality and requirements of the world of work will result in students being better able to market themselves and their attributes to potential employers, and apply and develop such attributes when in the world of work.

There will be a further discussion and recommendations for how to increase awareness and better prepare students for post HE in the synthesis chapter of this thesis.

Phase 1

Interviews with alumni from the SSES.

Phase 2: Ethnographic Research Approach

| Part 1 involved participant observation within the SSES student L&T environment and culture. | Part 2 involved focus groups with SSES students regarding their experiences and perceptions of the L&T experience. |

Phase 3

Interviews with immediate graduates.

3.1 Ethnographic Research Approach

Phase 1 highlighted that the HE experience needs to be orientated around preparing students for their post HE lives. The rationale for the use of in-depth interviews in phase one was that they will result in the production of in-depth accounts of the alumni attitudes, beliefs, theories and mindsets regarding their university experiences. However, interviews are situations that are too context dependent to be a reflection of what truly happens within the culture in question (Alvesson 2003). Interviews cannot be expected to capture the genuine experiences the alumni underwent as SSES students. Also, the alumni interviews do not represent the perceptions of students' during their time at the SSES, or provide insight into the SSES student culture. Furthermore, Weerts and Ronca (2007) stated that alumni are likely to support their HEI based on their perceptions of the quality of their HE experiences. That being, alumni with positive perceptions of their HE experience are more likely to volunteer and get involved with their HEI. Brennan *et al.* (2005) suggested that it is the successful alumni who are more likely to partake in research conducted by their HEI in order to demonstrate their post HE success. This highlights the need to gain the perceptions of current students, in an attempt to overcome the limitation of only gaining the perceptions of 'successful' alumni.

Phase 2 of this research programme therefore will address the following research question:

What are current students' perceptions of their HE experience in relation to post HE preparation?

After careful consideration, it was decided that phase 2 of this research programme would be located within the ethnomethodological qualitative research paradigm. The term ethnography originates from two words, 'ethno' which means 'folk' and 'graph' which was derived from 'writing' (Silverman 2001). Ethnography effectively means writing about folk. Ethnography can be defined as a study that involves the observation of naturally occurring events (Silverman 1985). Ethnography involves the researcher immersing themselves within a given cultural group, collecting data through field work over a prolonged period of time (Cresswell 2007). The rich data source that results from this immersion is used to create a cultural portrait of the group in question (Cresswell 2007). It has been suggested that engaging in a close and relatively prolonged interaction with people in their everyday lives can produce a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations and behaviours of people than can be established through any other research approach (Hammersley 1992). Immersion in the student culture provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain a first-hand experience of this culture, allowing for a more in depth understanding than can be offered through the use of interviews alone (Alvesson 2003). The use of an ethnographic research approach reduces the amount the researcher had to rely on the accounts of the participants', and allows the researcher to discover factors that the participants may have been unaware of or found difficult articulating (Creswell 2007). Furthermore, students may use different language in synthetic environments such as interviews and focus groups to when they are in their L&T environment, and therefore immersion in the student culture will allow for

the true students' cultural language to be experienced. Since the researcher did not study for her Sports Science degree at the SSES, she wanted to gain an insight and understanding into the student L&T culture and experience within the SSES that was not biased by making assumptions based on her own L&T experiences (see page 25). On a final note:

"Inundated with information about nearly every aspect of HE, we lack sustained discussion of the changing inner culture of universities" (Rothblatt 1996).

Phase 2 part 1 of this research programme addressed overarching research programme aim 'b':

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

In order to address this overarching aim 'b', phase 2 part 1 aimed to determine what the SSES provided in relation to preparing students for post HE. This involved gaining insight into the employability related information provided to students in L&T sessions by SSES staff, guest lecturers and LJMU careers staff, whom provided insight into the requirements of the world of work and 'what employers want'. Phase 2 part 1 aimed to observe students close up within their university L&T environment in order to gain an understanding of the student culture, so as to better understand and explain student actions, attitudes, mindsets, theories and beliefs, through identifying any trends and patterns that occur between groups and/or individuals. Interviewing is still considered to be an important supplement to ethnographies since they can be used to understand and explore the meanings and ideas behind the behaviours and practices observed in the L&T culture (Alvesson 2003, Krane and Baird 2005). The phase 2 part 1 ethnography was supplemented by group interviews termed focus groups. The focus groups aimed to further address overarching aim 'b' by gaining insight into students' perceptions and understandings of the L&T, assessment and feedback methods, alongside the opportunities that were offered and experienced over the duration of their course in relation to promoting effective learning and preparing students for the working world. It was intended that both the ethnographic immersion and focus groups would illuminate how the SSES can utilise curricula interventions to promote effective learning and better prepare students for the working world, contributing to overarching aim 'c':

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

Whilst some of the findings from the focus groups will be included in part 1, phase 2 part 2 focus groups methods and further findings will be presented and discussed from page 177.

3.2 The Ethnographic Focus

The focus of phase 2 part 1 of this research programme was orientated around the SSES preparing students for post HE. As was demonstrated at a SSES pre-application open day conducted on the 13th

of April 2011, the SSES is proactively employability focused. The pre-application day began at 1.15pm on Wednesday 13th April 2011 with the SSES Director walking to the front of the lecture theatre filled with prospective students, and welcoming them to the SSES. The director described how students *'will develop techniques to use in real life'* as a result of *'academic studies with a view to employment in the future'*[59] (see Table 16 regarding subscript numbers). During induction week lectures for new level 1 students, the SSES director gave more background into the employability focused courses within the SSES:

The curricula is employability focused, we tutor you through PDP, we have a structured career programme and events, and a WRL package [20]

We have an applied curriculum, so there is more currency in the curriculum to understand how the work place works, which in turn enhances your employability when you finish [20]

The curriculum has a WRL core strand that runs through the Sports Science programmes, we think that this curriculum produces high quality graduates [20]

We have developed collaborations with employers in an attempt to enhance your employability when you leave, because that's what it is all about [2]

By the end of your degree you will be an innovative, independent learner, and highly employable [20]

The WRL strand that the SSES director referred to is embedded in the Applied Sports Science (ASS) mandatory modules that run through the three years of all the undergraduate BSc Sports Science programmes (level 4, 5 and 6) (Figure 5). The staged curriculum model consists of interventions devised to develop students' awareness of the skills needed in the workplace (Familiarisation), provide opportunities to develop these skills (Skilling-up) and practise them in work-related settings (Engagement) (Thompson *et al.* 2008[A]). The level 4, 5 and 6 ASS modules was the focus of this research study.
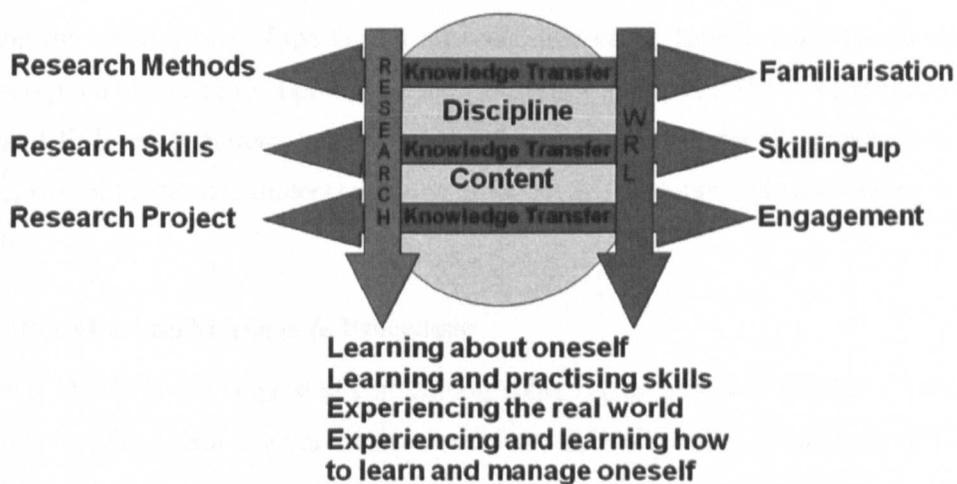
Figure 5: Three stage employability model for undergraduate BSc Sport Science programmes (Thompson *et al.* 2008[A])

3.2.1 Subjects

Students enrolled on the level 4, 5 and 6 Applied Sport Science modules (ASS1, ASS2 and ASS3) during the academic years of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 were the main focal point of this phase of the research.

Table 14: The dates that the L&T sessions for the ASS modules were timetabled within, during the academic years of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011

	2009/2010	2010/2011
ASS1	14/1/10 – 15/4/10	20/1/11 – 31/3/11
ASS2	22/9/09 – 23/2/10	21/9/10 – 21/2/11
ASS3	2/10/09 – 12/2/10	24/9/10 – 28/1/11

An email was sent to the students informing them that the researcher would be observing and conducting informal conversations with students in the lectures, tutorials, laboratory and placement learning settings involved the ASS modules (appendix 10). A copy of the participant information for this phase of the research programme was attached to the email (appendix 11). Students were informed that if they did not want to be included in the study, they should reply to the recruitment email with the words 'opt out'. Students were informed that they could email and withdraw from the research at any point, without giving a reason. Students were guaranteed that any direct quotes used would not be attributable to any individuals, and that all collected data would be anonymous at all times.

Table 15: Numbers of students enrolled onto the ASS modules during the academic years of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 and the number of students that chose to opt out of the research

	ASS 1	ASS 2	ASS3
2009/2010 Cohort Number	228	166	141
2009/2010 'Opt Out' Number	0	2	1
2010/2011 Cohort Number	231	192	151
2010/2011 'Opt Out' Number	4	2	1

For the 2009/2010 academic year, 228 level 1 students, 166 level 2 students and 141 level 3 students were sent the email. None of the level 1 students, two of the level 2 students and one of the level 3 students replied choosing to 'opt out' of the research. For the 2010/2011 academic year, 231 level 1 students, 192 level 2 students and 151 level 3 students were sent the email. Four of the level 1 students, two of the level 2 students and one of the level 3 students replied choosing to 'opt out' of the research.

3.2.2 Data Collection Methods & Procedure

Krane and Baird (2005) suggested that ethnographic research should involve a variety of methods. The aim is to collect data in as raw a form and from as wide a range of methods as possible, in order to create a rich representation of what goes on in the students' culture (Denzin 1997). Participant observations, documenting, informal conversations, focus groups and document collecting formed a major part of the ethnographic research (Genzuk 2003). As stated in the trustworthiness criteria section (page 26), the use of multiple qualitative methods of data collection to study a given phenomenon is known as methodological triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe triangulation as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to research. Phase 2.1 of this research programme employed methodological triangulation in order to enforce trustworthiness.

The phase 2 ethnographic research was effectively conducted in two parts:

Part 1 involved an ethnographic style immersion in the SSES student L&T culture.	Part 2 involved focus groups with the SSES students in order to clarify and elaborate on issues that became apparent in part 1 (the methods and further results for part two are presented from page 177).

Participant observation was the main method of data collection used in part 1 of phase 2. The participant observations involved documenting descriptions of activities, behaviours, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organisational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience of interest and relevance (Silverman 2001). Observation allowed the researcher to gain a broad description and understanding of the workings of the social group in question (Krane and Baird 2005).

"The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of a group or organisation he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed" (Becker 1958: 652).

Observations involved the L&T sessions that occurred as part of the ASS modules and any other sessions that the researcher felt contributed towards the aims of the study (see Table 16 for sessions attended). As described by Becker (1958) in the above definition of researcher observation, the researcher participated in the L&T lives of the students. The researcher therefore had to initially consider the role that they were going to assume in the student culture (Creswell 2007). The researcher decided to adopt a 'fly on the wall' role, in which they attended L&T sessions with the students and observed the content of the sessions. The researcher did not participate in any L&T related activities, such as answering questions, working in groups, participating in laboratory sessions. This role allowed the researcher to share in the activities and experiences of the students in the L&T setting, allowing the researcher to 'feel' as well as see what is happening in the students' environment and culture, enhancing empathy. The researcher was able to gain a firsthand experience and understanding of the current students' HE culture and environment, without impacting on the students' L&T experience (Krane and Baird 2005). The researcher was very conscious that they did not want to interfere or influence the students' L&T and university experience in anyway, and through the 'fly on the wall' role the researcher could ensure that this did not happen. As demonstrated in the above quote from Becker (1958), informal conversation is a part of participant observation. However, communication and conversation with students during L&T sessions only really occurred when initiated by the students themselves.

During L&T sessions, the researcher aimed to position themselves at the back of the room, allowing them to gain a good view of the room whilst having minimal potential of impacting on the students' L&T experience. Field notes were documented during the participant observations in L&T sessions.

Such notes consisted of rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made (Silverman 2001). The researcher made notes on:

- The environment and setting of the L&T sessions.

- The content of the L&T sessions, including quotations from staff and students.

- The researcher's reflections on their own experience, feelings and thoughts.

All documents that were provided to students during the ASS L&T sessions were collected. For example, module handbooks and handouts. Any other documents of relevance were also collected. For example, lecture slides and documents regarding the content of the careers sessions. Relevant documents will be referred to throughout the presentation of the data and are included in the appendices.

3.2.3 L&T Sessions

Presented in Table 16 is an outline of the sessions that will be discussed in this chapter alongside data from the focus groups. The 'Session Number' allows the reader to identify the details and origin of the sessions as they are being discussed. 'Session Details' provide details of the sessions. As stated, the ASS module L&T sessions were the focus of this research alongside any other sessions that the researcher deemed relevant to the aims of the study. As part of the ASS modules the researcher attended lectures, guest lectures, careers sessions, laboratory practicals and placements. Alongside the ASS modules, the researcher attended a guest lecture for the BSc Science and Football course, a careers session, induction weeks, open days, a staff away day and a Students Union meeting. 'Time & Venue' details the day and time each session was timetabled for. Often the sessions did not last for the duration of the specified timetable time. In order to give insight into the type of environment that each session took place in, a key is provided to indicate the seating capacity of the venues that the L&T sessions took place in (where relevant). 'Student Cohort in Attendance' defines the student cohort that the session was intended for. Where noted, the number of students in attendance is stated.

In order to account for the stated trustworthiness criteria, the researcher endeavoured to provide detailed, thick description of the settings and events that were investigated in order to help promote the credibility of the research (see page 26) (Creswell and Miller 2000, Shenton 2004). As stated by Shenton, *"without this insight, it is difficult for the reader to determine the extent to which the overall findings 'ring true'"* (Shenton 2004: 69).

Table 16: Sessions attended during the researcher's immersion within the SSES students' L&T culture that will be presented and discussed

Session Number	Session Details	Date	Time & Venue	Student Cohort in Attendance
1	*GL* Football Performance Analysis	26/3/09	Thursday 3-5 171	BSc Science & Football ~20
2	*IW.L* Welcome	14/09/09	Monday 10-10.30 SF	Level 1
3	*IW.L* Meet Programme Leaders	14/09/09	Monday 1-2 SF	Level 1
4	*IW.L* Evening lecture	14/9/09	Monday 5.15 – 6.30 M	Level 1
5	*IW.L* Welcome back (Staff Member 1)	14/9/09	Monday 2-5 M	Level 2

6	*IW.L* Welcome back (Staff Member 2)	14/9/09	Monday 2-5 M	Level 2
7	*IW.L* BSc (Hons) Sports Science	15/9/09	Tuesday 2-3 116	Level 3
7b	*IW.L* 'WoW'	15/9/09	Tuesday 1-2 M	Level 3
8	*IW.L* Evening lecture	16/9/09	Monday 5.15 – 6.30 M	Level 1
9	*IW.L* School Welfare & Support	16/9/09	Wednesday 2-4 JP	Level 1
10	*L* Introduction	22/9/09	Tuesday 9-11 LLT	ASS2
11	*L* Principles of Exercise Testing	29/9/09	Tuesday 9-11 LLT	ASS2
12	*L* Module Introduction (Introduction to the Placements)	2/10/09	Friday 11-1 CB	ASS3
13	*L.PDP* Reflective practice	16/10/09	Friday 11-1 CB	ASS3
13.5	*GL* Contemporary Issues in Applied Sports Science	27/11/09	Friday 11-1 CB	ASS3
14	*GL* An inter-disciplinary approach to athlete development	1/12/09	Tuesday 9-11 LLT	ASS2
15	*L* Role of the Coach	21/1/10	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
X1	Sports Development Placement°	12/2/10	Friday 1-3 Care Home	Placement Group 1
X2	Sports Development Placement°	26/2/10	Friday 1-3 Care Home	Placement Group 1
16	*GL* Role of the Physiologist	11/2/10	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
17	*L* Assignment Plan	23/2/10	9-11 Tuesday PJ	ASS2
18	*L* Role of the Psychologist	25/2/10	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
PL1	Sports Marketing Placement*	3/3/10	Wednesday 11-2 EAFC & around Liverpool recruiting	Placement Group 2
PL2	Sports Marketing Placement*	4/3/10	Thursday 3 EAFC	Placement Group 2
19	*L* Exam Preparation	15/4/10	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
SAD	SSES Staff Away Day▲	18/6/10	Friday 9.30 – 4 Conference Centre	All SSES academic staff attended the away day
20	*IW* Welcome	13/09/10	Monday 11-12 M	Level 1
21	*IW* Library re-familiarisation	13/9/10	Monday 2-3 LLT	Level 2
22	*IW* Welcome back	13/9/10	Monday 2-3 LLT	Level 2
23	*IW* BSc (Hons) Sports Science	13/9/10	Monday 4-5 SF	Level 2
24	*IW* Welcome back	14/9/10	Tuesday 9-11 137	Level 3
25	*IW* BSc (Hons) Sports Science	14/9/10	Tuesday 2-3 103	Level 3
26	*L* Introduction	21/9/10	Tuesday 9-11 M	ASS2
27	*L* Module introduction (introduction to placements)	24/9/10	Friday 11-1 137	ASS3
28	*L* Welfare, ethics & best practice/self conduct	1/10/10	Friday 11-1 137	ASS3
29	*L.PDP* Development of Reflective Practice (Skill Self-Analysis – BASES Competencies)	5/10/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
30	*L.PDP* Reflective Skills for the Applied Sports Scientist	15/10/10	Friday 11-1 137	ASS3
31	*L* Theoretical Considerations in Performance Analysis & Motor Control Evaluations	19/10/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
32	*L* Ethics & Best Practice in Sport (Contemporary Issues in Applied Sports Science)	29/10/10	Friday 11-1 137	ASS3
33	*L* Theoretical Considerations in Nutritional Evaluations	2/11/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
34	*L.PDP* Development of Management Skills	9/11/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
35	*CS* Alternative Career Options	11/11/10	12-1 Thursday 144	ASS3 16
36	*L* Contemporary Issues in Applied Sports Science Cancelled guest lecture	12/11/10	Friday 11-1 137	ASS3
37	*L* Measurement issues in performance assessment	16/11/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
38	*CS* Applying for Post Graduate Courses	18/11/10	12-1 Thursday 144	ASS3
39	*GL* Contemporary Issues in Applied Sports Science – Talent ID	19/11/10	Friday 11-1 137	ASS3 29
40	*L* Feedback & Data Interpretation: Communicating with Non-Scientific Groups	23/11/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
41	*CS* CV Writing	25/11/10	12-1 Thursday 144	ASS3 8
42	*GL* An inter-disciplinary approach to athlete development	30/11/10	9-11 Tuesday M	ASS2
43	*CS* Interview skills	2/12/10	12-1 Thursday 144	ASS3 4♂
44	*L* Assignment plan & Theoretical Considerations in Physiological Evaluations	17/1/11	1-3 Monday M	ASS2
45	*L* Introduction: Sports Science & Development of Athletes *PDP* Notion of Success	20/1/11	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
46	*CS* Self Awareness & Finding Work Experience	24/1/11	Monday 10-11 PJ	ASS1 5♂

47	*LP* Biomechanics	24/1/11	Monday 1-3 Muscle Strength Lab.	ASS2 12
48	*PDP* Role of the Coach & Introduction to Reflection	27/1/11	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
49	*L* Assignment Preparation	28/1/11	11-1 Friday CB	ASS3
50	*CS* Alternative Careers Options	31/1/11	Monday 10-11 PJ	ASS1 1♂
51	*LP* Psychology	31/1/11	Monday 1-3 M	ASS2 28/29
SU	Question time with the VC ♦	31/1/11	Monday 4-5.30 Parr Street Studios	Liverpool Futures Forum
52	*LP* Nutrition *This lab was conducted in the style of a lecture and lasted ~55 minutes*	7/2/11	Monday 1-3 PC Lab	ASS2 ~18
53	*L* Role of the Psychologist	10/2/11	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
54	*LP* Physiology *Lasted ~35 minutes*	14/2/11	Monday 1-3 Biomechanics Runway	ASS2 20
55	*GL* Role of the Physiologist	17/2/11	Thursday 12-2 M	ASS1
56	*GL* Role of the Biomechanist	18/2/11	Friday 9-11 A&D	ASS1 35
57	*LP* Performance Analysis	21/2/11	Monday 1-3 Performance Analysis Suite	ASS2 7
58	*CS* Alternative Options with a Sports Science Degree: Employer Event *	21/3/11	Monday 9.45 – 12.30 GDC	Open to all students 12♂ 9♀
59	Pre-application Open day	13/4/11	Wednesday 1.15 – 2.15 137	Prospective Students

Key: *IW* – Induction Week Lecture, *GL* – Guest Lecture, *L* – Lecture, *PDP* – Timetabled Personal Development Planning, *CS* – Careers Session, *LP* – Laboratory Practical, *EAFC* = Everton Active Family Centre, *GDC* = Graduate Development Centre
Venue Key: M = 300, CB = 160, A&D = 300, SF = 200, PJ = 156, JP = 186, LLT = 168, 103 = 112, 1.44 = 40, PC Lab = 52, 137 = 198, 171 = 55, 116 = 90

◊ Placement group 1 was part of a Sports Development module, and involved eight students from BSc Sports Science levels 4, 5, 6 and MSc Sports Psychology. The placement involved working on a project aimed at tackling social exclusion of elderly people through physical and social activities. The project worked alongside local primary schools and Care Homes delivering a programme of intergenerational activities, including; gardening, cooking, physical activities and ICT (Miveld 2010). The researcher attended three sessions with the group. Data from two of the sessions will be been presented and discussed (12/2/10 = X1, 26/2/10 = X2, 5/3/10).

● Placement group 2 was part of the ASS3 module, and involved a group of six students working on a marketing strand of a project entitled Premier League Men's Health. The project aimed to motivate and inspire hard-to-reach males aged 18-35, to make positive, healthy lifestyle choices through a series of gym and football orientated coaching sessions, providing physical activity and fitness support (Miveld 2010). The group worked on the project in pairs, covering the following three areas; recruitment, social media and events. The group attended the placement for ten weeks (20/1/10 – 24/3/10). The researcher attended one session with each of the three pairs. Data from two of these sessions will be presented and discussed (Recruitment pair: 3/3/10 = PL1, Social media pair: 4/3/10 = PL2, Events pair 10/3/10).

▲ The staff away day consisted of two presentations (appendix 16 and 17) and group discussions between the SSES staff. Data from both the presentations and the group discussion will be included. It must be noted that some of the data presented from the staff away day was handled and analysed by Elena Zaitseva and Charlotte Chandler. Elena was a research officer and member of the NTF project team, and Charlotte was the NTF project coordinator. Any data presented that was analysed by Elena is referenced with 'EZ', and any data presented that was analysed by Charlotte is referenced 'CC'.

♦ The researcher attended the Liverpool Futures Forum on the 31st January 2011. Liverpool Futures Forum is an annual meeting organised by the students union elected officers open to all LJMU students (Liverpool Students' Union 2009: 6). The 2011 Liverpool Future Forum presented question time with LJMU's at the time vice chancellor.

★ The 'alternative options with a Sports Science Degree' session involved employers from different industries providing insight into the different career options that are available to Sports Science graduates. The involved the following presentations:
- A career in The Army – Army Careers Advisor (DT)
- Working as a Project Co-ordinator for a charity - Project Coordinator for Cycling Projects (SSES alumnus) (DC)
- A career in Finance – Financial Skills Partnership Manager (PM)
- A career in Sports Customer Service/Events Management – Customer Service Manager, Financial Skills Partnership (GS)
- A career in PE Teaching – Assistant Head/PE Teacher (DJ)
The initials represent the presenters' pseudonyms.

The researcher ensured that they gained consent from relevant members of staff prior to attending laboratory sessions. Throughout the process of this research, the researcher liaised with the SSES Director, the ASS module leader and the member of staff that delivered the careers sessions to ensure that they were aware and involved with the research that was being undertaken.

3.2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from phase 2 part 1. Content analysis is defined on page 38. Below is a summary of the procedure used to analyse the data:

1. All notes made throughout the duration of the immersion were copied into a word file in chronological order.

2. The word file was printed out and read thoroughly (appendix 12), allowing the researcher to become familiar with the data set and determine the best way to represent the findings.

3. The data that the researcher deemed to be relevant to the aims of the study were electronically (in word) extracted from the transcripts and pasted into a new word file.

4. Again, the researcher manually read through a hard copy of this new word file, before condensing and arranging the data based on the aims of the study. Findings and themes from different sources were clustered together into units of similar meaning.

5. This process of redrafting the data first manually and then electronically was repeated until the data was effectively saturated and could not be further broken down and clustered into units of similar meanings.

6. The researcher then concentrated on presenting the data and providing interpretative discussion and recommendations alongside inputting relevant literature. The end product is the chapter article presented.

3.2.5 Data Representation

Phase 2 part 1 of this research programme presents the words of the SSES staff, the LJMU careers staff, the guest lectures' and the SSES students alongside interpretational discussions from the researcher and input from any relevant literature. The words of the students will be from within their L&T culture and from the focus groups (part 2). Data will be triangulated with data from the alumni study in phase 1 of this research programme where appropriate. According to Spindler and Spindler (1987, cited in Creswell 2007: 217), an essential part of using an ethnographic research approach is to explain findings from the subjects' point of view. In order to account for this, the researcher's interpretations and reflections have been kept to a minimum. The researcher endeavoured to present the relevant material in its rawest possible form, allowing the reader to make their own interpretations and not have to rely on the interpretations of the researcher (Krane *et al.* 1997). This process enhanced the trustworthiness of the research programme and accounted for the 'thick description' of 'the themes' trustworthiness criteria (page 27).

Extracts from the ethnographic data collection have been tagged with the session number that the data originated from (see Table 16 for session numbers). Some extracts have been tagged with more than one session number, highlighting themes of discussion that had arisen from multiple sessions. Quotations from the phase 2 part 2 focus groups have been tagged with pseudonyms and reference numbers to represent who and where extracts came from (see Table 17 for pseudonyms, page 178). The reference numbers relate to the transcript number and the transcriptions' line numbers that the quotations originated from, allowing the reader to clarify the original form and context of quotes as desired. Providing context allows the reader to make their own interpretations and determine the credibility of the findings (Shenton 2004), again accounting for the 'thick description' trustworthiness criteria of this research programme (page 27). The focus group transcripts are be numbered 1-4. Extracts from D's individual interview will be tagged 'D'. More information regarding the focus groups procedure will be provided from page 180. Transcripts can be found in appendix 13. Some quotations have been edited for the purpose of clarity and constancy (for example, to remove filler words). Any names that were used have been removed to protect the anonymity of members of the SSES staff. Brackets symbolise where names have been removed. For example, where a member of staff's name was stated, (lecturer), (supervisor) or (anon.) will appear instead. Researcher reflections from the L&T sessions are sparsely incorporated throughout the presentation of the data. Such reflections will present additional information and perception into the scenarios in question. As stated by Mitchell (2002):

"The informed researcher's voice does not provide an authoritarian monologue but contributes a part of dialogue" (Mitchell 2002: 208).

Researcher reflections will be highlighted in *grey and written in italics,* to ensure that they are easily distinguishable from the voices of the staff and students.

3.2.6 ASS Philosophies

Before giving an overview of what opportunities the ASS modules offered, the philosophies which underpinned the ASS modules and the subsequent opportunities will be presented.

Such philosophies were based on the competitive graduate job market:

Almost 265,000 students graduated from UK universities in 2007 [34]

Only 20,000 gained employment in graduate recruiters [34]

1 in 3 enter employment in non graduate jobs [34]

Over 60% of graduates have a 2.1 or better [34]

On average 70 graduates apply for every graduate job [22]

This competitive graduate job market means that *'a degree alone is no longer enough'* [34]

Lots of people on paper have very similar qualifications, you have to offer something that tells an employer that you're different, what extra can you offer? [34]

We want you in the top jobs, but it's not just about you having that 2.1 or 1st on your CV, it's about added value, and that's what this module is about [45]

There's 8000 Sports Science graduates a year, you need to build up your CV in order for you to stand out from the crowd, get experience in the 3 years that you are at uni, take every opportunity you can to build your CV up, that is what's going to set you apart from other graduates [56]

You need hard evidence on your CV, you will put your degree, but what comes with that? Having a degree is fine, but what we want is added value, because that's what people in employment want and look for now, they want to know how you differ from other graduates [5 25]

You need a good degree and you need a good CV [5]

The moment you think that your degree is all you need for a job, you've got problems, your degrees just one component of it, it's the basis upon which we develop [45]

You have got to be doing something extra now, so that you can get ahead of the rest [24]

A degree isn't enough, a good degree will provide a basis, but it's added value that's going to get you into the top graduate schemes, the roles in elite sport or wherever you want to go, it's what you tell employers you've done to make you stand out, experience, voluntary work, other skills and facets that you've got, and that's what the ASS module is about, it's up to you how much you take it up, when you come to applying for jobs, you will want to fill your CVs' and covering letters with hard facts to sell yourselves, so you need to pick up on this and move with it [23]

Due to the competitive state of the current graduate job market and the fact that *'a degree alone is no longer enough'*, the SSES developed the ASS employability focused modules:

We've responded to the demand and we're giving you opportunities [45]

You need added extra on your CVs', and the ASS module is going to help us get it to you [19]

The ASS philosophy is trying to bridge the gap between theory and the work environment; how we apply the science [45]

In the first year we look at where you can go work wise, what those jobs involve and what skills are required in the workplace, in the second year we focus on skilling you up with those requirements, and in level 3, you engage in placement activity, which provides the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills that you have gained (see Figure 4) [3 10 20 26]

The SSES staff attempt to engage students with the philosophy of the ASS modules and the importance of preparing for post HE by informing students of the competitive graduate job market and the fact that a degree alone is no longer enough:

101

We've set lots of activities up to help develop you over and above your academic skills and become employable, because the job market is no longer about your degree grade; it's about added value, it's up to you whether you engage, and it's ultimately down to you being proactive [45]

Your aspirations really start when you walk through the door here, because there's so much you can be doing to put yourself in a position to get a good graduate opportunity [26]

Think about what you want from your time at LJMU and what your career goals are, you don't need a concrete idea about what you want to do, but knowing the direction that you want to go in is useful [45 26]

Below is the summary slide that was presented at the end of session 45, exemplifying the encouragement students received from the SSES to engage in post HE preparation:

SUMMARY

- Your time at university should be geared towards you optimising your opportunities when you finish

- PDP and the skills delivered in it will enable you to make the most out of university

- Goal setting represents an important skill that can direct your academic and career activities

School of Sport & Exercise Sciences
FACULTY OF SCIENCE

liverpool
JMU

Whilst students and universities should share in the effort and commitment of ensuring graduates employability, ultimately, the responsibility is the students (Denholm 2011, Graduate Prospects 2011, Lexmond and Bradley 2010, Redmond 2011).

"Universities offer fabulous opportunities for students to develop their skills and experience; all they have to do is join in" (Redmond 2011).

The member of staff in session 45 articulated to students that they need to take responsibility:

Personal development is about you, no one else is going to develop you, we'll develop your academic knowledge, but this really is down to you, you have to drive this, and the best graduates, with the best CVs, are the people who drive this…… it's up to you whether you engage, and it's ultimately down to you being proactive

The alumni supported this shared responsibility notion by making recommendations for what more can be done to prepare graduates for the world of work from both the student and the university perspective (Table 13, page 74). Despite the SSES providing opportunities and encouraging students to engage, members of the SSES staff articulated at the staff away day that they were concerned by students' lack of engagement:

Students don't engage, they don't appreciate what we are offering them [SAD]

They don't want to enhance their performance for some reason [SAD]

The problem we've got is engagement in the teaching process [SAD.EZ]

The SSES staff were perplexed by the students lack of engagement, however, it cannot be assumed that students are employable based on curricula provision alone (Yorke 2006). The researcher established a dialogue with a mature male level 1 student during the academic year 2010/2011. During one conversation, this student described his fellow students as having 'apathy' in relation to their studies and personal and professional development. It is important to determine why students are disengaged to the point of apathy (Cooper 2011). Since the effectiveness of any educational practice is directly related to ensuring student engagement, research is required to examine the nature of such apathy and determine how engagement can be enhanced (Astin 1999, Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009). In order to determine how to engage students, a member of staff at the staff away day suggested that a better understanding of students is required:

Unless we know what motivates students, we don't know what to do; we need to understand them SAD

According to Rae (2007), students' perceptions of how post HE preparing opportunities are delivered determines whether they will engage or not. It will therefore be fruitful to gain a better understanding of students by exploring their perceptions of the post HE preparing opportunities being provided by the SSES (Barrie 2007, Rae 2007). As stated at the away day:

There is a need for pedagogic research to enhance engagement SAD

Insight into how students can be better engaged can determine the best ways to incorporate post HE preparation into the SSES curriculum.

3.3 Phase 2, part 1 overview:

In order to gain a better understanding of students, issues related to engagement and the aims of this study, part 1 of phase 2 of this research programme will provide:

| 3.4 An overview of the post HE preparing opportunities provided by the SSES via the ASS modules, combined with an insight into students' perceptions and experiences of such opportunities. | 3.5 An overview of the advice and recommendations students were provided in the ASS modules regarding the requirements of the world of work and how to adequately prepare for post HE, combined with an insight into students' perceptions and experiences of such opportunities. | 3.6 An investigation of issues of engagement through an exploration of the student culture within the L&T environment in order to better understand students' attitudes and perceptions in relation to the opportunities provided. |

3.4 ASS Opportunities Provided

The employability orientated opportunities that were embedded in the ASS modules are presented below:

Employability Oriented Opportunies (as discussed in sessions $_{34\ 26\ 3\ 10}$):

PDP   Guest speakers   Reflection   Placement   Careers sessions
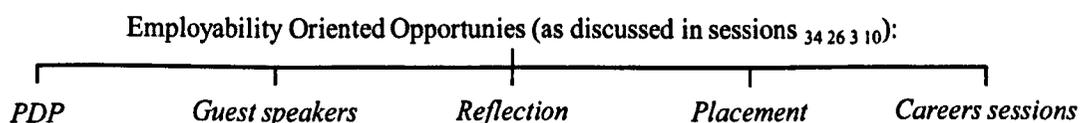
As shown in Table 16, ASS2 involved the opportunity for students to engage with five laboratory sessions. The opportunities presented above will therefore be discussed, alongside the laboratory

practical sessions. The placement and reflection opportunities formed the focus of the phase 2 part 2 focus groups, which will be discussed from page 176.

The post HE preparing opportunies and students' experiences and perceptions of such opportunities will be discussed in the following format with a subsequent conclusion:

- **An overview of PDP**
  - An overview of the purposes of the personal tutor system
  - Students' experiences and perceptions of the personal tutor system, including students' failed attempts to utilise the personal tutor system
  - What more could be done?
    - Subsequent recommendations
- **An overview of the careers sessions**
  - Students' experiences and perceptions of the careers sessions
  - Subsequent recommendations
- **An overview of the guest lectures**
  - Students' experiences and perceptions of the careers sessions
  - Subsequent recommendations
- **An overview of the laboratory practical sessions**
  - Students' experiences and perceptions of the laboratory practical sessions
  - Students' relectance to engage explored

3.4.1 An Overview of PDP

As demonstrated in Table 16, PDP is embedded into the ASS curriculum:

PDP is about employability development, in order to get you into the job that you want, and that is one of the purposes of the applied module spine [3 10 26 45]

Your academic studies is one part of your development, the other part is your personal employability, your career goals, you also need to be thinking about that [45]

The SSES staff referred to PDP as being able to develop students in the following ways:

We aren't just trying to develop you academically, we're also trying to create this rounded individual that has the necessary skills in addition to the academic background to pursue the career that they want to, we feel it is important, because ultimately we're responsible for trying to get you into jobs, and the job market is competitive, and you will need some of this PDP

Develops your ability to understand what can be learnt from different experiences

Ongoing reviewing and evaluation of career and academic goals

Develops your ability to understand what you're learning and improving on

Highlights skills that students should be developing based on what employers want

PDP 45 26

Develops your ability to self improve

Identifies your skill level and knowledge base

Identifies your strengths and weaknesses

Develops the tools to become reflective practitioners

Added value over and above your degree

Identifies new requirements, targets, goals and learning needs

In session 45, the following definition of PDP was provided to the students:

What is PDP?

- "is a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development"

School of Sport & Exercise Sciences
FACULTY OF SCIENCE

JMU

Burgess (2007) reported that the information produced through PDP can ultimately be communicated to different audiences with different needs, such as potential employers post HE.

3.4.2 The Personal Tutor System

Alongside being embedded in the ASS curriculum, PDP is supported by a personal tutor system. In the SSES, each student is assigned a personal tutor during induction week in their first year that they carry through until their last year. The figure below displays the purposes of the personal tutor system:

The Purposes of the Personal Tutor System

Support post HE preparation and PDP

- Employability is in the ASS route way, and your personal tutor is there to support that activity, they are assigned to look after you for the three years [45]

- An important facet of your PDP is the personal tutor system, that is one person who can really work with you and help you think about work experience opportunities, they can point you in different directions career wise [26]

- You should be reliant on your personal tutor, they will help and support you and look at your CVs, that's what they're there for, that's what they're paid for, make them work for their money [27]

Provide students with references post HE

- Your personal tutors are the ones that are potentially going to be helping you with references and developing CVs, use peoples experiences to help you, you'd be stupid not too [25 26 27]

- It is very important that you become familiar with your personal tutor and develop a relationship with them, they can help you through and will be the ones giving you a glowing reference when you graduate and start applying for work, but they can only give you a reference if they know you, so you need to engage and interact with them, make yourself known to them, they are your academic buddy in a way [3 5]

- It's really important to engage with your personal tutors, they will be the ones providing a reference for you, so if you haven't engaged, they won't have a lot to write about [7]

- Engage with the personal tutor system, use them, that's what they're there for, they can write your references when you graduate, as a personal tutor I can't give you a specific reference if I don't know you, if I've never seen you, some reference requests I receive and I don't know them, so I don't write them, it's up to you guys [5 22]

Provide academic support

- Make sure you catch up with your personal tutors, it gives them an idea of where you're at, how you got on last academic year, what you want to achieve, have they got any thoughts on what you are doing and what you want to do, it's also an opportunity to set some goals for the year [25 26 27]

- If some people can't even get 40% to pass a module, there is a reason there, and that reason needs to be clarified, so maybe you need to have a chat to your personal tutor, who you will established a rapport with, maybe you need additional help, whatever it is, and remember you don't get anything unless you ask [22]

Provide personal support

- It shouldn't be if you've planned it but invariable for some people third year is a stressful year, you've got a lot of work on, stress, grades, speak to your personal tutors, use them [25]

The personal tutor system was discussed by the alumni in phase 1 of this research programme. Seven of the alumni in phase 1 felt that the personal tutor system that they experience was ineffective and required development (page 81). As stated by alumnus 15, *'it's like they have attempted it, but it's not really worked'*. The figure below presents the focus group students' experiences and perceptions of the personal tutor system:

Students' Experiences & Perceptions of the Personal Tutor System

The students in focus group 2 reported having very little contact with their personal tutors:

D: I've not seen my personal tutor since the first year K: I see mine every year EG: Mine didn't even recognise me C: I see mine at the start of every year and that's it JF: Yeah I've just seen mine at the start of every year when it's compulsory S: We got told we had to didn't we EG: I haven't even seen my tutor this year, he walks past me and he doesn't know who I am, he doesn't really care D: I didn't see mine this year 3.1.195-1214.

JL and K gave some insight into what they experienced during personal tutor meetings:

JL: They say at the beginning of the year come back and have a little chat with them, but last year I remember going to see my tutor, and I was like, 'hey, I'm just coming to see you because they told me too, so, I'm back!' And he was like, 'ok, so you did fine in your exams', and I'm like, 'yep', and he was like, 'ok, then.....ready for second year!' And I'm like, 'that was the most awkward conversation of my life, why did I just do that?! 1.2182-2187

K: You just go and see them to talk about the marks you got last year and they just say, 'are you happy?' And it's just like, 'yes, no', and then you go 3.1299-1301

Group 2 discussed using their personal tutors as their post HE referees:

K: I want him for a referee, so I have had to get to know him without complaining C: That's the problem really, I'll ask my personal tutor to be my referee, but I don't really know him, because I hardly see him JF: Yeh that's the problem I've got with mine C: He's just really generic and not really that great, but then I suppose there's not really much you can do really is there 3.1216 – 1226

The students feel that they got to know other academic members of staff more than their personal tutors, and would therefore rather approach those members of staff for references and support:

EG: I asked my dissertations tutor to be my referee for my PGCE D: Yeah that's quite a good idea S: I think I might do that, you get a lot more contact with them, and they know how you work JF: Yeah I was thinking of doing that, I feel like my major project supervisor will actually know me as opposed to my personal tutor that I've only seen about four times so I don't really interact with, I've found if I've got a problem, I would rather go and see the lecturer who I need help with, rather than go through my tutor 3.1228-1252

R: I feel like you get to know your lecturers and your dissertation supervisor more, because you see them more, and I feel like they know you more JL: I wouldn't have a problem going to see my tutor at all, if I needed to I would go and see him, but this year the problems that I have are more like, what am I going to do next year, and dissertation, and I guess because your dissertation leader has spoken to you this year and knows your interests, I feel like to go and see him is more worthwhile R: And it's more relevant to go and see the people who lecture the things that you want to talk about 1.2200-2212

JF: I don't really see my tutor, so it's a bit more difficult for me to just start chatting to them as opposed to other lecturers who know me and know my work and things like that 3.1308-1310

JF: With my tutor, his field is so completely different to the modules I do and the areas I'm interested in, there's no common ground, so I wouldn't go and see him about academic matters or anything like that EM: Yeah that's the same for mine, he's psychology and I didn't take that module for second or third year, so I suppose he hasn't really got a feel about what 3.1362-1369

The students feel that the personal tutor system provides a beneficial 'point of contact':

D: It's good having a point of contact I suppose, in first year definitely but.....JF: If you don't have a problem though, there's no reason to see them in a way C: But if you really do need to go see someone, then the options there to go see your personal tutor K: Yeah because if you didn't have your personal tutor, who would you go to in the first year if you did have a problem? 3.1259-1268

JL: In first year at least you know you have a personal tutor and a support person there if you need them, which I guess is nice but it's just like R: And some people probably do need them JL: Yeah and some people do, because of moving away from home and stuff, but then I guess as you gradually move on you realise who you feel comfortable talking to, so you can see them instead R: I suppose you can book to see any lecturer, so you would probably book with the one you know the most 1.2220-2225

As demonstrated in the quotations above, the students involved in the focus groups reported a lack of engagement with the personal tutor system. It has been suggested that engagement with the opportunities HEIs provide is ultimately the students' responsibility (Denholm 2011, Graduate Prospects 2011, Lexmond and Bradley 2010, Redmond 2011). However, some of focus group 1 articulated unsuccessful attempts to take responsibility and utilise the personal tutor system for the support it was intended to provide, as demonstrated below:

Attempts to Utilise the Personal Tutor System

- **Personal Support**

  H: Loads of stuff happened over the summer, so me and my mum went and seen (anon.) and he was dead helpful, and then they sent me to the head of the school, I remember I was literally hysterical, I couldn't even talk and my mum was trying to talk for me and I thought, my personal tutor wouldn't have been able to do anything like that, I would have benefitted from seeing a guidance councillor to literally drag me through everything, because what was my personal tutor going to do if I suddenly started crying in the middle of his room? 1.2190-2231

- **Academic Support**

  R: In first year I didn't like it, because you did so many modules, and I went to my tutor and said, 'I'm thinking about changing course,' and he said, 'yeah, you can if you want', and I was trying to find out what the rest of the course would be like, to know if I would like it or not, and he just didn't give me any information, he was like, 'yeah, you can change, or you can stay on' 1.1565-1573

- **Post HE Preparation and PDP Support**

  JL: I really want to do something abroad, and it is so hard to find out about it, even when you ask the lecturers they're like, 'I don't really know' 1.1004-1005

  M: We have tried to go and speak to lecturers and be like, 'what do you think? What do you recommend? Do you think we should do a masters? Do you think that we should do this?' And obviously they don't really know what's best for us either, because they're like, 'well you could do a masters, but I can't guarantee that that's going to get you a job either', so you just don't have a clue what to do, and it's stressful JL: Because we were saying we really want to do nutrition, and then we went to speak to one of the lecturers M: He's helpful but they can't say, 'do this', or, 'do that', because they don't really know either, because they can't guarantee anything, but I just feel like it's so difficult to know what to do, and no one else really knows either 1.889-905

  S mentioned that she was unsure what post HE options were available to her, but did not perceive going to her personal tutor for guidance as a possibility, despite that being one of the intended purposes of the personal tutor system:

  S: I suppose you could just talk to your tutor but I feel a bit silly going in and being like, 'so, what can I do?' 4.2243-2244

Based on the experiences of the focus group students and the alumni, it does not appear that the personal tutor system is accounting for its intended purposes (page 106), or developing students in the ways the PDP intended (page 105). This is supported by alumni 15, who stated *'you were supposed to do PDP'* when discussing the personal tutor system. The students made reference to how the personal tutor system could be enhanced, as presented in the figure below:

What more could be done?

- The students suggest that the personal tutor system should be aligned to the needs of students, and that tutors should be more involved with the students:

  EG: Maybe they could change every year, with the options you take; you get allocated a tutor from that area K: But then you might get allocated somebody who you don't like, so it could be bad, I suppose you could always switch if that happened S: And it depends because if someone has seen their tutor in first year, they might not want to switch EG: You could request to keep them 3.1314-1327

  S: Maybe if they had a few people and then those few people were involved in the course, what lectures you actually do and things like that 3.1331-1333

- The students suggested that personal tutor groups could have been utilised in order to enhance the interaction between the students and the personal tutors (see page 169 for a further discussion on the notion of community):

  A: On our first day in first year they split us up into tutor groups, and we were never in those groups again M: I can only tell you one person from my group A: Like you could easily, you've already sorted them into groups, all you have to do is arrange for them to meet up even 2.1058-1070

  S: You should see your tutor more in your groups, they could do seminars or get more involved with telling you about careers JF: Or they were kept more up to date on how your progressing, as opposed to the start of each year where you just do a review of the previous year's results, and then you don't see them again for another year 3.1273-1297

The students felt that personal tutors should be more involved with students' HE experience and progression. Above, S suggests that 'a few people' should be involved with providing support for students. This links to alumnus number 16 who recommended that 'the right people' are assigned to act as personal tutors:

As a member of staff, some people are naturally good at being someone's mentor and some aren't, so I think maybe you need to look at the right people being there for support.

It is important that tutors are equipped to meet the demands of the role and provide the required support. In this sense, tutors need to be more proactive in providing guidance to students as opposed to waiting for students to turn up at their door (Hounsell *et al.* 2006). The alumni also recommended that students should spend more time with personal tutors (page 46). The HE experience can be life changing, as it is a time when knowledge, skills, values and personality are developed (HECSU/AGCAS 2011). For many students, entering HE is a big step in their maturation, personal and professional development, and therefore support and guidance throughout this process would be beneficial, if not essential (O'Regan 2010). As highlight in the quote below from D, it is questionable whether students navigating themselves through the turbulent HE experience can also adequately prepare for post HE:

D: I found moving away quite tricky, so I concentrated on settling myself in a new city and living with new people rather than going out and getting work D.975-978

Students were informed that engaging with their personal tutor would help to prepare them for the supervision relationship they may experience upon entering the world of work:

If you go through any professional training you will have to engage with a supervisor and experience close supervision relationship with regard to applied practice 30

However, since the alumni were required to 'toe the line' in the world of work, it does not appear that the personal tutor system reflects the reality of the world of work and is therefore not preparing students for post HE. Increasing the 'toe the line', discipline work ethic and making students feel accountable to the personal tutor system will better prepare students for what will be required of them in the working world. The personal tutor system should reflect the world of work. Instilling the world of work requirements, ethics and cultures within the opportunities that the SSES is providing to students will effectively train students for the requirements of the world of work whilst they are at university. As stated in the literature review, numerous authors have recommended that employability skills are embedded within the curriculum (for example, AGR 2010, Ainley cited in Fearne 2008, Denholm (2011), Kay *et al.* 2007, Knight and Yorke 2004, NCIHE 1997, O'Regan 2009, Universities UK 2006, Wright *et al.* 2010).

3.4.3 An Overview of the Careers Sessions

As stated on page 4 of the ASS Module Handbooks, '*out of class directed exercises and lectures linked to the careers service will.....be used to support the class based tasks*' (appendix 14). A document overview of the careers sessions is provided in appendix 15 which states:

These sessions have been designed to follow the theme adopted in the ASS modules and the personal tutor system, in firstly introducing students to the idea of self-reflection and skills development in the first stage and then in the next stages helping students to develop the necessary skills to support them in their job search (appendix 15: 1).

During L&T sessions, the SSES and careers staff verbally highlighted the content and benefit of the careers sessions being offered to students:

We have developed a specific careers programme, we didn't just want to leave it to you to go to the careers office, because a lot of you aren't proactive enough, so we have some careers programmes that you don't have to go to, it's entirely up to you, but very very useful sessions to get the process underway [45]

Make sure you attend the careers sessions, they will benefit and help you [27]

We urge you to come along, because there is quite a lot of useful information, so please try to come to these workshops this academic year [22]

Again, the competitive graduate job market was emphasised to students, in an attempt to make them aware of the importance of engaging with the careers provisions:

Competition for graduate jobs is very fierce at the moment, 340,000 students graduating summer 2011, with 70 applicants per graduate post with a large company [41] [46] [58]

The job market at the minute is tough and competition for graduate jobs is increasing [22]

It is more important than ever to be prepared for graduate jobs [46]

The job market is competitive, but there are still a lot of jobs out there, but there's a need to be a little bit more proactive when applying for jobs, it's important not to miss any opportunities [35]

Graduate Prospects (2011) research demonstrated that students would be more likely to engage with careers service opportunities if their perceptions of what they thought such opportunities should involve were accounted for, highlighting the importance of gaining students perceptions. The figure below discusses students' experiences and perceptions of the SSES careers provisions:

Students' Experiences & Perceptions of the Careers Opportunities Provided

D was hoping to gain some *'insider information'* from the careers sessions:

D: I've gone to some of the lectures that they've done this year, but they've not been very engaging at all, it's just been sort of reading from PowerPoint slides, it was all information I could've found out myself, I was expecting some sort of insider information, but it was just all stuff that you can find out quite easily for yourself ₒ.₁₀₅₁₋₁₀₆₈

R: We had one talk from the universities employability award people, and it was a good talk and they did talk about, 'you've got loads of options, and there's different kinds of jobs', but it was for Sports Science, we're doing physiology for our 3rd year, some people are doing management, some people are doing biomechanics JL: It was really general R: It didn't feel tailored to people doing physiology, it was like, 'oh, you could be an advertiser', and you just think, 'well, I don't want to do that' JL: And everything she gave us we needed further study, and the only thing we could do was work in a leisure centre, which we don't want to do ₁.₁₀₅₇₋₁₀₆₉

Some of the students discussed how they felt that the careers information was too 'general' and not specific enough:

EG: We had two sessions, PowerPoints of what you can do after this degree, but it could have been expanded, more detail, obviously you could go and see her if you wanted, but when you have no idea of what you want to do and you just get given this list of different things, maybe could have got a guest lecturer to come in or something ₃.₇₀₉₋₇₁₅

JL: We go to these careers talks, which are general about the course and not very specific, and it's hard to know where you want to go, because even still we're saying maybe we will do a masters in physiology, but hold on a minute, where are we going to go with that still?' R: What does that even involve? We don't know, because no one's told us' JL: And you really have to go out there yourself and try and find the information, and it's not that easy to find ₁.₈₇₈₋₈₈₇

Despite the careers sessions being integrated into the SSES, JF and D did not view the careers sessions as 'being available on the course', because it was not directly managed by the SSES. The alumni articulated that employability should be embedded within the SSES curriculum, as opposed to being a university wide or extra curricula initiative (page 78):

JF: The careers stuff is more linked to the graduate centre, it's use your initiative more to go up there or get in contact with them as opposed to it directly being available on the course ₃.₆₈₈₋₆₉₀

D: If there's enough funding there I think it'd be a great idea having it specific to Sports Science ₒ.₁₂₁₁₋₁₂₁₂

S: She obviously can't just tell you the jobs, so she just gave us a big list of websites, but then I've got so much work on that I can't find time to sift through it, I've got so much work that it's just like I want to have a careers meeting but I just feel like I have too much to do ₃.₇₁₈₋₇₂₄

Some of the students cited 'time' as an issue preventing them from engaging with the opportunities suggested in the careers sessions:

JL: When we went to that careers talk she gave us a few sheets, they were actually quite good, I've been going on the websites, the postgrad websites were pretty good, and even some of the job websites sort of help you, but it's just actually sitting down at the computer and doing it, it takes so long ₁.₂₇₆₂₋₂₇₆₆

R: I feel like this is the busiest time of my uni life, I haven't got the brain space to be thinking about what I want to do ₁.₂₇₆₈₋₂₇₆₉

Rae (2007) suggested that students being unable to perceive the relevance and subsequent need to engage with employability related L&T is due to the disjointed way in which it is delivered. Since the focus group students cited having a lack of time in their third year as a post HE preparing barrier, this research programme suggests that students are engaged with post HE preparation earlier in their degrees when more time is available. Alumnus 11 believed that students should consider the purpose of their degree in relation to their post HE lives at the beginning of their degree (see page 83), supporting the claim from the AGR (1995), Brewer (2009) and GEES (2008) that students should be taught career management and effective learning skills from their first year in a progressive manner. The member of staff in session 3 referred to the students' time at university as 'university career'. This philosophy needs to be instilled within the students HE culture. The researcher reflection below implies that such a philosophy should be instilled within the students' culture upon entering the SSES:

I decided at the beginning of my PhD that I was going to have very different tactics to my undergraduate degree approach; stressful 'all nighters' the night before deadlines and going out three times a week were a thing of the past. I aimed to work around a flexible 9 to 5, Monday to Friday working week. I felt that it would be easier to start my PhD with this attitude, and I wondered whether there was any method in my madness. Since attitudes are difficult to re-mould, it is easier to ensure they are originally established in a certain manner (Dweck 2000). In

Alongside establishing acceptable behaviours, work ethics and philosophies amongst students, there needs to be an increased accountability regarding the importance of preparing for post HE, since students will not engage unless they are able to perceive the urgent need which exists (AGR 1995). Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) identified that students' engagement enhances when students perceive a value in a given endeavour. As such, members of staff should not portray the 'optional attitude' regarding the opportunities provided that were observed:

Without a rapport with your personal tutor, you might as well not have one, you're paying for it, it's completely up to you guys [22]

~

They're the careers sessions, they're there for you, whether you take them or not, that's up to you [45]

Graduate Prospects (2011) and doctorjob.com (2004) advised that there needs to be an increased awareness amongst students regarding the importance of careers related opportunities that are available. Reinforcing that the opportunities provided are essential will help to enhance students' awareness of the importance of engaging with them.

3.4.4 An Overview of Guest Lectures

The following extracts are from the ASS module handbooks, which can be found in appendix14:

A series of guest lectures will provide an insight into the nature of the applied practitioners that form the basis of the Sports Science support team and the fundamental skills required in such roles (ASS1 Module Handbook 08/09: 2).

A series of guest lectures from specialist practitioners will provide students with an insight into the nature of Sports Science support within the major scientific disciplines (physiology, biomechanics, psychology, performance analysis and sociology) and the skill base requirements of such occupations (ASS1 Module Handbook 08/09: 3).

The sessions will draw on the experience of practitioners involved in the delivery of Sports Science support (ASS2 Module Handbook 09/10: 2).

Contemporary lecture sessions will be delivered by staff and guest speakers with experience of working in applied Sports Science settings (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 5).

The staff envisaged that the guest lecturers would benefit students from a career perspective:

Guest speaker sessions will be in areas that we think are of interest from a career perspective [27]

It will help get you familiar with the kind of jobs and roles that are out there, getting you to see where you can go [45]

The speakers will talk to you about their backgrounds, the training they've done, the transition from HE to the world of work, things your degree can and can't offer, things that they did when they were at your stage to get them to where they are, and what you need to do if you want to work where they work and do what they do [45]

The guest lecture from session 14 was an employer, which meant that students were provided with the opportunity to gain insight from a Sports Science graduate employer:

If you want to work in the northwest in elite sport in the EIS, then there's a bloody good chance your CV will reach my desk, if someone chucks a CV at me, or if I go to advertise for a job, what am I looking for in an applicant? If you are interested in elite, then this is perhaps a good opportunity just to make a few notes on what you need to be doing over the next couple of years if you want your CV to really standout.

Norton and Thomas (2009) advised that students should be provided with the opportunity to gain insight into employer perceptions. Students were encouraged to make the most of the guest lecturer opportunities:

They will talk to you about their world of work experiences, and what skills are required in the world of work 34

Listen to what they say, ask questions, because they are working in the top end of our game in terms of supporting athletes, and that's just one example of an industry where some of you may go 45

You won't get many opportunities at this stage of your career to listen to people who are at that level and dealing with experiences that you're going to have to go through, ask questions, probe 40

Students' experiences and perceptions of the guest lectures are presented below:

Students' Experiences & Perceptions of the Guest Lectures

K and EG described the guest lectures as 'interesting' and 'inspiring':

> K: They've been quite good, because you can see what they've done in their area, I enjoyed that because I find those interesting, rather than someone saying, 'you can just do this this this and this' 3.785-788

> EG: The guest speakers have been good, they always proper inspire you, and then you're like, 'yes, I want to do something like that,' but then you don't do anything about it 'ha ha' 3.1714-1715

The guest lectures assisted in the stemming of JF's career interests:

> JF: What made me interested in strength and conditioning (S&C) was two graduates that came in that are both working in that field and they were able to explain what they'd done since graduation, how they'd got into employment, things like that, that was interesting 3.797-800

D, K, and JF felt that it is beneficial to hear about peoples' transition from HE into the world of work:

> K: Obviously people just don't go straight into a job, some people were lucky, I think one guy got into his job straight away, but it helps you to see what you're going to have to do JF: If there's someone who's well established, say in their thirties, it's a bit gap since they were a graduate, so you miss out on that aspect of what they have done straight after university 3.808-814

> D: It really helps to see young professionals that got a degree and managed to break into the industry, because there was a guy who was, twenty three or four, he'd come to John Moores a few years ago and he's now high up in England doing something or other, so it's good to see that there is a clear pathway that you can do and you're not just wasting all this money D.1262-1273

S and K felt that it would be good to have more guest speaker sessions:

> S: In first, second and even this year we're meant to have people coming in and talking to you from different professions, but they didn't K: They never did, I think we had two S: It's not the same as experiencing it, but sometimes you don't even know what options there are 4.2231-2241

The students felt that there needs to be more variety in the guest speakers professions:

> D: The guest presentations that they get are really good, if we got a bit more of a variety, because they had loads of S&C people come in, but then not had any performance analysts or coaches D.1253-1261

> H: They have people coming in who talk about what they've done, there were a couple of lads that came in last year, but that was largely S&C, and they were all lads M: That's the thing, they all seem to be S&C, and it's like, obviously we're not going to do that H: When you go into the sports field obviously it is male dominated but obviously girls are equal, well, trying to be anyway, but I don't feel like there's anyone that's come in and said, 'well, I've done this as a placement', or, 'we did this' 1.965-975

> *The researcher heard a student refer to guest session 42 as 'pointless' when walking out of the lecturer theatre after the session:* That was totally pointless for me, because I'm not interested in physiology and I'm not interested in nutrition

The girls in focus group 1 demonstrated that the guest lectures resulted in them feeling demoralised:

> M: It seems like the people that they bring in to speak to us are isolated cases who have ended up being lucky, and it doesn't make me feel any better about the situation, especially because of the fact that they are all blokes and they are all doing S&C, it's just like, 'well, I know I'm never going to be able to do S&C, because I'm not interested in it, and I'm a tiny little girl who's not going to be able to tell beasty rugby players what to do', so I just think it's so pointless for us girls to be sitting in those lectures, whereas they never bring in women who are in this field to speak to us JL: It does feel like if you get a lucky break then you're on it, and if you don't, then good luck to you 1.1021-1032

The students found the guest lecturers interesting, and as demonstrated by JF, they aided in the stemming of career interests. However, the areas of the guest lectures and the information provided needs to be achievable in order to be inspiring and motivating. Students need more information relevant to the stage of career that they are at, for example, what they can be doing whilst they are at university to prepare for post HE. The NSF (2010) stated that guest lecturers must be inspiring and

represent course relevance. The students felt that guest speakers only speak about their careers at their peak. The students would have valued gaining more insight into the processes that the speakers went through to gain their positions i.e. the transition from HE student to the world of work. Information regarding the guest lecturers' routes to their current positions will make the careers seem more achievable and in turn inspiring. Adding to this notion, the alumni felt that insight into the career paths of graduates would be beneficial in enhancing graduates awareness of the reality of the working world and the wide range of possible opportunities that are available post HE (Table 13, page 74). Insight into other graduates career paths can be inspiring and stimulate careers ideas in current students (Rissmeyer 2010). The guest lecturers need to account for a wider range of students needs. As stated by a member of staff, the guest lecturers represent, *'just one example of an industry where some of you may go'* ₄₅. Based on the alumni, not all Sports Science graduates will end up working in the Sports Science industry (Table 3, page 33). It would therefore be beneficial to have guest lecturers that represent and encourage the wide range of potential career options that are available to students, both within and outside of the Sports Science industry. This will decrease the notion of failing if not working in the Sports Science industry as demonstrated by the alumni (page 77), which will be fuelled by presenting students with unachievable examples of Sports Science jobs. Furthermore, since students find it hard deciding what to do post HE (as will be demonstrated on page 147), alumni who faced difficulties post HE should speak, to show students that graduates can overcome the turbulent and difficult transition between HE and post HE. Tod *et al.* (2007) highlighted that providing students with insight into both the HE and post HE experiences of alumni could help them feel more relaxed and stable in their HE experience. Tod *et al.* (2007) described the HE experience as 'an evolution', stating:

> *"Students may benefit from knowing that their experiences are echoed in the lives of their predecessors. Such findings might help normalise their reactions and emotions during turbulent and potentially frightening times"* Tod *et al.* (2007:318 and 332).

As will be demonstrated on page 145, the focus group students described feeling unprepared for the prospect of transitioning into post HE. Alumni can enhance students' awareness and preparation for the difficulties and realities of the post HE world (Graduate Prospects 2011).

3.4.5 An Overview of the Laboratory Practical Sessions

The ASS2 Module Handbook (09/10: 5) states that, *'a major part of the module involves a series of discipline specific lectures and practical sessions which provide students with the opportunity to engage in a number of assessment strategies frequently used during the assessment of competitive athletes'* (appendix 14). During L&T sessions, the staff informed students what the laboratory practical sessions would involve and why it was beneficial to engage with such sessions:

The practicals provide you with insight into how the different sections (i.e. physiology, biomechanics, psychology, nutrition, performance analysis) focus evaluation and assessment, for those of you who have ambitions to work in certain environments where you're going to be working with other practitioners, you need to understand what their game is about, it's useful for people to get an understanding of where we're coming from across the disciplines [44]

Staff with experience of supporting athletes will give you the theoretical background for certain tests, and tell you the process they would go through when assessing athletes [26]

Working in the Sports Science industry involves working in an interdisciplinary team, and understanding the different disciplines and roles that make up the team is a requirement of the world of work (to be discussed on page 124). The laboratory opportunity will therefore help to prepare students for the world of work.

Presented below are the focus group students' experiences and perceptions of the laboratory sessions:

Students' Experiences & Perceptions of the Laboratory Sessions

The students felt that there was a lack of laboratory sessions during their degree:

R: We have had some labs, not as many as we thought and probably would have liked H: But even then you can't see anything because there's that many people in there, they need to split it up [1.2346-2350]

K: We did a bit in first year, but you just get to watch, you don't get to do anything D: The staff carries it out K: And you just sit in and he's just talking, so you don't get to use anything basically [3.1581-1590]

M: We did the odd lab where and it was just, 'this is what you do', we're all stood there watching and we get showed something, we didn't really get to do anything, and I feel like I learn from doing stuff, so if we'd have got to do it, I probably would have known a bit more [1.1817-1820]

JF found it 'frustrating' only learning theoretical knowledge:

JF: You learn the theory of all the tests that get done in labs through lectures, but then you don't get to do them yourself, and it can be a bit frustrating, just having to read about them [3.2204-2206]

For EG, the lack of laboratory time lead her to write a letter of complaint to the SSES:

EG: I wrote a letter of complaint to (anon.) about it, and he didn't even reply to me, because we were meant to have labs in second semester, but because we moved over to this building the third years were in the labs doing their dissertation work, which is understandable, but we didn't get any labs, we didn't learn how to do a VO_{2max} test or anything, it was ridiculous [3.1552-1559]

R feels that she learnt a lot from using the labs for her final year major project:

R: This year for doing dissertation testing and stuff, we've learnt loads in the labs, like how to use Douglas bags and what the results mean and stuff, I think in other years we used to go to the labs like once in every six weeks or something [1.1829-1832]

The focus group 1 students feel that being better prepared for using the labs in their final year projects would have been beneficial:

M: We have had to waste loads of time because our module leader for our dissertation has just been like, 'no, I want you to practice this and practice this', and we've just spent up until Christmas practicing, we haven't even done anything, whereas if we'd have practiced in second year it would have saved us loads of time this year R: We could have done that last year [1.1836-1842]

JF took 'initiative' in order to gain more laboratory time in preparation for his major project:

JF: We are doing a VO_{2max} test for our major project, so you've had to learn to do it, and then you're going to do it for real, and we used our initiative a bit, we've booked our own lab times [3.1561-1564]

D and JF found the opportunity for 'volunteering to be a subject' beneficial for gaining 'lab knowledge':

D: You get chance to go in and help out with other peoples dissertations, which I think is really good, but it's not like part of the course, but say in first and second year we used to get emails every week of people JF: I think that's where I got more lab knowledge, volunteering to be a subject, especially first year because you were never in labs, because I knew people then who were in their third year, and so using that time I'd ask questions and get more involved, and that helped a lot [3.1592-1599]

Five of the alumni advised that current students should volunteer to be a subject for research studies that are going on within the SSES

However, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for research meant that the opportunity to volunteer was not available to all:

S: For girls there's not really the same chance K: No because we always get subject recruitment emails through but it's for males [3.1601-1603]

Despite the students' suggesting that more practical based opportunities are required, the researcher noted that the students were reluctant to engage with the laboratory opportunities that were already being provided:

115

For example, in the ASS2 biomechanics and physiology laboratory sessions, the students were provided with the opportunity to take part in practical based work. Students were therefore required to attend the labs wearing appropriate attire, as articulated by the member of staff in session 44:

The biomechanics and the physiology practicals are very difficult to run without subjects, so please bring kit with you, if we don't have people to do them it's going to be a boring two hours, so make sure you bring kit for those two practicals 44

After this announcement, the researcher overheard a student sitting nearby mutter, *'I'm just going to arrive on crutches.'*

→

Whilst waiting outside the muscle strength laboratory for the Biomechanics Laboratory session to start, the researcher heard one female student say to a male student, *'have you seen what's in there? Everyone looked in and went, 'I'm not doing that!''* During the lab, students reluctantly volunteered when asked. This reluctance to engage was also depicted in the physiology lab, as demonstrated below.

The physiology lab took place in the biomechanics runway. At the beginning of the session, the lecturer asked for volunteers. One girl put her hand up. The lecturer requested more volunteers. No one else offered their services. The lecturer went on to explain that the session would be focused on physiology tests that could be used in a field environment. The volunteer began to complete sprint tests. After completing the majority of the required tests, the girl suddenly said that she needed to stop; she had pulled her hamstring. The lecturer asked for another volunteer, so that the testing could be completed. The lecturer stood facing the students, waiting for a response. After a painfully awkward silence that lasted approximately 15 seconds, the lecturer said, *'if no one volunteers, we haven't got a session'*. He still did not get a response from the students. After another uncomfortable silence, he said, *'if no one volunteers, we may as well call it a day'*. At this announcement, a loud male voice from the back of the room said, *'I'll do it'*. As he stood up from his stool, he muttered under his breath, to no one in particular, *'why did I say that?'*

→

After a while, this male volunteer decided to stop testing and returned to his position at the back of the room. Once again, the lecturer asked for another volunteer. He looked around the group, and resorted to asking individuals directly to take part. When the lad next to the researcher was asked, he responded by saying, *'injuries'*, patting the back of his left knee. After trying to engage the students to volunteer, the lecturer announced at 1.35pm, 35 minutes into the 2 hour timetabled session, *'you are free to go then'*.

The researcher spoke to the lecturer at the end of this session. He said that this was the fourth week he had ran the lab, and that this week was the worst week for volunteers, *'the other weeks haven't had many students turning up to take part and wearing the appropriate kit, but this is the first one where I have had to stop the session prematurely'*.

Astin (1999) warned that a lack engagement can reflect a lack of involvement with the L&T content. Focus group 1 shed some light onto the students' lack of engagement with the laboratory sessions provided:

JL: When we went to those practicals last year, it was split into three groups, and we were in the biomechanics runway and they were like, 'right, someone volunteer to do shuttle runs', and you're like, 'definitely not, when there's 30 or 40 people lined up all the way down this room'
H: They say come dressed appropriately, but you think, 'no, because then you can't pick me' $_{1.2352-2362}$

A: There was one where you were getting dunked in water and I thought there's no way I'm wearing swimming stuff in front all these people
H: That was in first year wasn't it, because I can remember looking at the list and I was the only girl in my group and my mate said, 'you're the only girl in that group, and they want you to wear a bikini', and I can remember thinking for two weeks, 'oh my god, I'm not going, I'm not going', and in the end I didn't go, because I was like, 'no, I can't possibly do that'
JL: But when we went they said they won't make girls do it
H: But they should have said that on the email, because I just didn't go
R: This comes back to the fact that actually, if you knew all the people in the group you might not mind so much
H: It wouldn't bother me to do a shuttle run or standing jump or anything like that, but if they asked me in a class
R: In front of 100 people you don't know
H: I'd absolutely say no $_{1.2364-2394}$

It appears that the dissonance between students desiring more laboratory and practical sessions, yet failing to engage with the sessions already provided was due to large class sizes and a lack of community within the SSES student culture. As stated in the literature review, participation in some form of learning community promotes a sense of belonging and contributes to better quality leaning and student success (Kember *et al.* 2001, Zhao and Kuh 2004). The students feel that laboratory sessions which involve more students engaging in the session at any one time would be beneficial, as opposed to just one student on their own (the issue of large class sizes and community is further discussed on page 169). The researcher reflection below highlights that a lack of accountability may also impact on students' lack of engagement with the laboratory sessions:

I found it peculiar that the students did not turn up to labs dressed appropriately and did not engage. During my Sports Science degree, we had to turn up for labs wearing our 'Coventry University Sports & Exercise Sciences' branded lab kits. If we were not wearing this kit, then we were not allowed into the labs, and if we were not allowed into the labs, we failed the mandatory module. Furthermore, we were all expected to engage and participate in all lab session. Contribution to the lab was marked. It does not appear that the SSES students are given this same incentive and accountability to engage.

3.4.6 ASS Opportunities Provided: Summary

This section aimed to provide an overview of the opportunities provided by the SSES via the ASS modules, combined with an insight into students' perceptions and experiences of such opportunities. This section summarises the SSES opportunities and recommendations for how to enhance such opportunities.

The Personal Tutor System

According to the staff, preparation for post HE and PDP was embedded within the SSES and supported by the personal tutor system. The intended purposes of the personal tutor system were to support post HE preparation and PDP, provide students with references and provide academic and personal support. Students reported feeling unprepared for the world of work, highlighting that the personal tutor system was ineffective in preparing students for post HE. The intended purposes of the personal tutor system were also ineffective when students attempted to access and utilise the support, suggesting that the personal tutor system is unequipped to provide the necessary support when

required. It is apparent that students need more assistance, support and insight to help prepare them for post HE. It is important that personal tutors are able to meet the demands of the role and provide the necessary support. Personal tutors must spend more time with students and be more involved with their HE experience and progression. Since the personal tutor system does not reflect the reality of the world of work, it is therefore not preparing students for post HE. Increasing the 'toe the line' discipline work ethic and making students feel accountable to the personal tutor system, will better prepare students for what will be required of them in the working world. The personal tutor system should reflect the world of work.

Careers Sessions

Despite students being informed that the competitive graduate job market meant it was important and beneficial to engage with the career sessions provided, there was an apparent lack of engagement. Based on the students' perceptions and experiences of the career opportunities provided, careers sessions need to be more specific and embedded within the SSES as opposed to being coordinated at an institutional level. The philosophy of 'university career' needs to be instilled within the SSES culture, with students being prepared for post HE from the beginning of their degrees in a progressive manner. It is important that students are made to feel accountable regarding the need to prepare for post HE.

Guest Lectures

The staff encouraged students to engage with the guest lecture provision, since the staff envisaged that the guest lecturers would benefit students from a career perspective. Based on the students' perceptions and experience of the career opportunities provided, students need more information relevant to the stage of career that they are at, for example, what they can be doing whilst they are at university to prepare for post HE. Students reported that guest speakers only spoke about their careers at their peak and that they would have valued gaining more insight into the processes that the speakers went through to gain their positions i.e. the transition from HE student to their current position. According to the students, this would make the careers seem more achievable and in turn inspiring and motivational. The guest lecturers need to account for a wider range of students needs. As stated by a member of staff, the guest lecturers represent, *'just one example of an industry where some of you may go'* 45. It would therefore be beneficial to have guest lecturers that represent and encourage the wide range of potential career options that are available to students both within and outside of the Sports Science industry. More quantity and variety is required in order to account for the wide range of post HE options, and the wide range of student needs. Since students find it hard deciding what to do post HE, alumni who faced difficulties post HE should speak to show students that graduates can overcome the turbulent and difficult transition between HE and post HE.

118

Laboratory Practical Sessions

The staff perceived that laboratory practical sessions would give students insight into the various roles involved in the Sports Science industry. The students felt there was a lack of laboratory practicals throughout the duration of their degrees. Some students took initiative and got involved in RISES research to gain laboratory knowledge. However, this opportunity was not available to all students, which is an issue that needs to be addressed. Despite the students' suggesting that more practical based opportunities are required, the students were reluctant to engage with the laboratory opportunities already provided. For example, students did not turn up wearing the appropriate laboratory kit and were reluctant to volunteer and take part in the practical lab sessions. Students reported purposefully not turning up wearing appropriate attire to avoid participation. It appears that the dissonance between students desiring more laboratory and practical sessions, yet failing to engage with the sessions already provided, was due to large class sizes. The students feel that the laboratory sessions that involve more students engaging in the session at any one time would be beneficial, as opposed to just one student on their own (the notion of community within the L&T context will be further discussed on page 167). Engaging more students in practical sessions will enhance the sense of community within the L&T sessions and in turn enhance engagement. In summary, there is a need to:

- Increase support based on the individual needs of students.
- Increase students' sense of accountability regarding the opportunities provided.
- Increase the sense of community within the SSES student culture.
- Prepare students for the world of work requirements, which are discussed below.

3.5 Advice & Recommendations for Post HE Preparation

Due to the competitive nature of the graduate job market and the fact that a degree alone is not enough, it is important that students understand what the world of work requires from them. As stated by the member of staff in session 27, *'you need an understanding of the skills and requirements you will need'*. The researcher identified patterns and themes in the data collected from the L&T sessions related to the requirements of the world of work and how students can prepare themselves accordingly. The advice and recommendations students were provided regarding the requirements of the world of work and how to adequately prepare for post HE will now be presented, followed by students' perceptions and engagement with such recommendations. The advice and recommendations are from the SSES staff, careers staff and guest lecturers. For the purpose of this study, these three groups of people will be collectively referred to as 'staff'.

The Advice & Recommendations for Post HE Preparation will be presented in two sections. A concluding summary will be provided after each section:

```
                    |
      ┌─────────────┴─────────────┐
      │                           │
The World of Work            How to prepare for post HE
Requirements
      │                           │
      └─ Summary                  └─ Summary
```
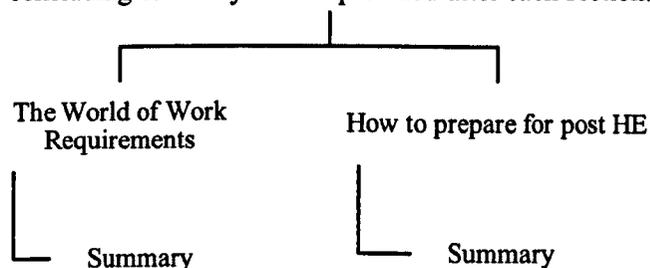
3.5.1 Advice & Recommendations for Post HE Preparation: The World of Work Requirements

It is important to consider how the world is changing and the skills and knowledge that graduates require to make and keep them employable (GEES 2008). In terms of supporting employability development and awareness, it is important to help students identify the kinds of skills, knowledge and qualities that are required of them (Wilson-Medhurst 2005). The world of work requirements as defined by the staff in phase 2 of this research programme are presented below:

```
                    The World of Work Requirements
                              |
   ┌──────────────┬───────────┴──────────┬──────────────┐
   │              │                      │              │
Exceptional People  Interpersonal     Self Awareness &   The Knowledge &
to work with        Working Ability:  Marketability      Experience Triad
Exceptional People  The Team Behind                            │
                    the Team                            Technical Knowledge
                                                               │
                                                         Craft Knowledge
                                                               │
                                                               └─ Experience
```

Each of the world of work requirements will be discussed in turn, followed by an exploration of assessment for the world of work requirements. Presented below is the rationale for the world of work requirement 'exceptional people to work with exceptional people':

Exceptional people, to work with exceptional people

Students were informed that employers value the personal skills that an individual can offer:

As a Sports Scientist, you need to demonstrate a range of personal skills that will make athletes and players want to work with you 53

Feedback from scientific employers indicates that they value personal skills just as highly as they value their technical knowledge, a large pharmaceutical employer told me that if somebody scored below average in how they put across their personal skills, they probably wouldn't look at that candidate even if they scored well in a scientific test, so softer skills are also very important, as is the knowledge that you gain from your course 43

It's important to do as well as you can on your degree because academic results are important, but as well as the knowledge and skills you'll gain from your degree, employers are looking at softer skills as well, such as team working, communication, problem solving, and you need to provide evidence and sell these skills on paper and in person, on application forms and in interviews, so try to build and develop your skills, so that you have got more evidence to talk about in interviews, you can build skills through part time work, work experience, course placements, voluntary work, extra curricula activities like sport 46

Sports Science graduates are required to be innovative. They need to offer something that makes them exceptional:

The guest lecturer in session 42 articulated that Sports Science graduates are required to have many different personal attributes and abilities: You're not just there as a scientist, that's a given, you've got to generate that working hypothesis to answer the coach, you've got to be that sales man, somebody that can stand next to the coach and convince them that your idea is the thing that's going to change them and their athlete, you've also got to be a personal mentor, you've got to be able to look at the coach and think, 'what keeps that coach up at night?' You've got to be thinking about what the coach will probably come to two, three weeks, or even months in the future, so that when he asks you the question, you've already got some assimilation of the answer, you've got to be that positive agitator, you've got to ask the right question at the right time, you've got to be the motivator, the guy that can stand next to the coach, the athlete and generate that extra little bit of enthusiasm for that session 42

My advice is that rocking up to lectures, doing the bare minimum, is not good enough, we are looking for exceptional people, to work with exceptional people, that doesn't matter if you're interested in working for the EIS or if you want to work with Manchester United or whoever else 42

I want to see somebody who has developed and implemented some level in innovation, somebody who can think differently, we actively go out and find people who are a little bit different, not just somebody who has a 9 to 5, fairly plain CV, there's got to be something on there that stands out 42

We're looking for someone who has implemented innovation whilst at university, someone who has gone the extra mile 14

Students have to build around their degrees whilst they are at university in order become 'exceptional':

*You've got to start building up your CV right now, take every opportunity to enhance your CV whilst you can, try and get involved in anything that you're lecturers are doing, do some coaching, get yourself a coaching award, don't be pulling pints in pubs to get yourself through uni, invest a little bit of money, get yourself a fitness trainers award, you might think that you can do that without a degree, which you can, but a degree with a fitness instructors award gives you the opportunity to develop communication skills if nothing else, because you're working with clients 56

*If you're not careful you might just end up with a degree, what you should look to do is build around that degree, in terms of both your work and qualification profiles 55

*Heads of departments that I speak to in football and other sports, say that they look at what Sports Science graduates have done outside of university that demonstrates that they want to work in this world, that demonstrates evidence of doing and understand what the British Psychological Society (BPS) and BASES say are important to be a good practitioner, have you done any voluntary work, have you attended any workshops, attending courses outside of what goes on within the uni is a must, continue professional development, learn from people, athletes, coaches, peers, showing evidence that you have gone out and done other things apart from just sitting in a lecture, and then saying that you're a good Sports Scientist 53

If you want a job when you get out there, you have to have something to say with depth and meaning to tell 53

Investing time whilst they are at university demonstrate that students are committed and enthusiastic about working in their desired field:

*Clubs look to recruit people with the appropriate academic background, but you also have to have the appropriate character, you have to have demonstrated commitment, via voluntary work, additional courses and qualifications, you have to have shown commitment in terms of investing your own time 55

If you really want to work in the professional sport field, you have to put in a lot of time, commitment, and enthusiasm 13.5

The best graduates, academic and employability wise, put in a lot of personal investment and time, successful people have all applied time to what they want to do, they're committed 45

You need to have enthusiasm and energy; you've got the feel the passion for working in that environment 58

Employers are looking to see whether you're motivated and enthusiastic, you can really tell if someone wants a job, and also whether you would fit into the team, and that they would enjoy working with you, so they are looking at certain characteristics 43

Students were encouraged to get involved and make the most of the opportunities available to them:

Get the most out of your degree, get involved, you can buy into BASES as a student, there will be jobs offered up for 2012 Olympics, there are lots of things going on, so my suggestion is have a chat with your personal tutors, have a chat with module leaders, see what's going on 22

Get involved in the research community, if you help them, they will help you, there are lots of studies going on, volunteer as a subject, try and get some more information about how we collect and analyse data etc. 5 22

I encourage all of you to volunteer to be participant in other peoples research projects, it's good to help each other out volunteer wise, and it will help your understanding of your project 24

Ensure you make the most of the opportunities whilst you're at university, because there are lots of opportunities to get work experience to get involved in extracurricular activities and build evidence of skills 46

Get involved in everything and anything, get out there and find yourself a job, meet people 58

* One of the ways staff advised that students can make themselves stand out from other graduates was by gaining additional qualification and courses.

Due to the competitive reality of the graduate job market, graduates are required to gain additional qualifications, as described in the quote below from the guest lecturer in session 39 and D from focus group 1:

I had a postgraduate qualification, but I don't think that was the thing that got me the job, it was the fact that I'd worked at a football club for five years, because a lot of people now are going through a postgraduate, and sooner or later, a load of people will go off to do a doctorate [39]

D: In a professional club it's either you've got all these qualifications or you're an ex-player, because ex-players just walk into jobs [D.880-883]

D: You need to be head and shoulders above everybody else, and a lot of people have got degrees now, so a PhD is the next thing I've got to get if I want to get there [D.888-891]

Ainley and Allen (2010) defined the phenomenon described by D and the guest lecturer in session 39 as 'escalator qualifications', that being:

"Education and training is increasingly like running up a down escalator – a situation where you have to gain more and more qualifications simply to stand still" (Ainley and Allen 2010: 73).

Focus group 1 expressed concern regarding the need to possess additional qualifications for the world of work:

JL: When people say, 'you could be a physiologist for a team', and you're like, 'ok, well I'm not even qualified in that yet, how do I get qualified in that? If I do a masters am I qualified in that?' I don't think we are
A: See I want to do nutrition, but I don't think after doing one year's lectures on nutrition I can say I'm a nutritionist
H: Everything's going to have to have like something extra [1.1048-1055]

M: Every job I have looked at to do with nutrition all want a masters or a PhD, it seems like you don't even get a look in if you've not got one [2.2165-2167]

Five of the alumni advised that qualifications should be gained whilst students are completing their SSES degrees (Table 13, page 74).

The guest lecturer from session 56 who was a Sports Science lecturer at another university, explained how the students in his department get the opportunity to gain additional qualifications whilst they are at university: *We run a certified strength and conditioning specialist award (NCSA) course each year, and our students get to sit that award in the final year, it's technically a postgraduate qualification worldwide, we've got endorsement through the NCSA, so when our students graduate they can already have that NCSA after their name* [56]
In order to compete with Sports Science graduates from other HE institutions, SSES students need to gain additional qualifications.

A member of staff at the staff away suggested that the SSES should offer additional qualifications: *We would be better doing UKSCA and BASES accreditations and things like that.*

The guest lecturers in sessions 55 and 56 highlighted that additional qualifications and courses can not only help students to compete, but they can also prepare students for the reality of the working world:

FA fitness trainers award for example, opens your eyes to the kind of things that are going on in football clubs, it's delivered by people that have an awful lot of experience working in football [55]

If you've not got a coaching award, try and get one, and try and get a little bit of coaching as well, getting a feeling for the different physiological demands of sport is imperative if you want to understand where coaches are coming from, because coaches use a different kind of language to scientists, so it helps you to break down language barriers, you've got to bridge that gap of communication [56]

A summary of the types of qualifications and courses that the staff suggested students should engage with are presented below:

Qualifications

| BASES accreditation [16 55] | Coaching qualifications [56] | Additional qualifications and courses (relevant to the career area of interest) [16 55 56] | *'Get yourself a NSCA or UKSCA badge; it's something people do ask for'* [55] | A postgraduate degree [42 55] |
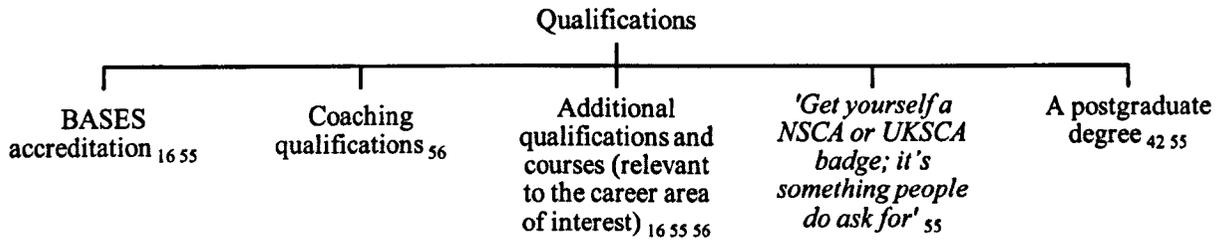
The member of staff in sessions 48 stated:

There's loads of opportunities to do level 1 coaching awards, and through local sports development offices coaching awards might be free for students.

This is an example of a resource that should be fully utilised and that students should be encouraged to engage with, through increasing awareness and accountability.

Interpersonal Working Ability: The Team behind the Team

The ability to work interpersonally and communicate effectively with colleagues and clients is an essential requirement in the world of professional sport:

Communication is a massive quality in the world of professional sport [55]

The vast majority of Sports Scientists that I have seen have good interpersonal skills and are able to cope with the variety of different people that are around them in their working worlds, it's about how you as an individual blend with those around you [13.5]

You can't underestimate communication, it's not just about gathering communication from athletes, it's about how you communicate that information to them, and put it in the right terms and the right context so that you can have an impact on injury prevention or performance [56]

You have to develop interpersonal skills, you have to build up a rapport with coaches and athletes and gain their trust [56]

Empathy is really important, try and understand the person that you are dealing with, try to see the world from the other persons point of view, you need to be sensitive to what they're telling you, try to make sense of what you hear, understand them, check to see if you have got the meaning right [40]

The Sports Science environment deals with interpersonal relationships, if you want to be a Sports Scientist you have to work with people, and if you can't have an interpersonal professional relationship with people then you're on the wrong course, you have to get on with people [15 29]

Working in the Sports Science industry involves working in an interdisciplinary team. It is therefore important to understand the different disciplines and roles that make up the team:

There is a team behind the team which interlinks and works together towards a given goal: Psychologists, Nutritionists, Physiologists, Biomechanists, Coaches etc, and it is crucial that all practitioners know what each other are doing, all practitioners have a weekly meeting to discuss what's going well and what's not going well [14 42]

You have to work in a team, and therefore how you work in a team is very important to being successful, understanding the differences between different professionals is very important when working in this environment, and if you can understand this, you will be in a better position to communicate [13.5]

It is important to understand what other people do, if you are working as part of an interdisciplinary team, you need to understand the role that different people have in those teams, because you will rely on them in the field, and it's the collective team of people that ultimately brings about the success, whether it's in the health sector or the sports sector [11 44 45]

I did coaching qualifications as part of my undergraduate degree, if you've not got a coaching award, try and get one, and try and get a little bit of coaching as well, getting a feeling for the different physiological demands of sport is imperative if you want to understand where coaches are coming from, because coaches use a different kind of language to scientists, so it helps you to break down language barriers, you've got to bridge that gap of communication [56]

It is really important that as a Sports Scientist you understand what coaches do, you're unlikely to be affective if you don't understand the coach's role, so get out and do some coaching, get some coaching qualifications [48]

123

Self Awareness and Marketability

It is important that students are aware of the skills that they are gaining and developing as part of their university experience:

- Brainstorm what skills you possess, we don't reflect everyday on the skills that we have gained, you've probably got a lot of skills from this degree course that maybe you haven't thought about, things like scientific knowledge, lab skills, or softer skills like team work, leadership, skills you might have got from part time jobs or other extra curricula activities 41

- The only way you know which skills you need to develop is by analysing those skills that you've got, most of us have loads of skills that we're not even aware of, there's things you will have developed through school and activities you've done through education so far 46

- Employers value personal skills as well as academic skills, analyse your skills, identify any gaps, what do I need for the different careers that I want to go into? A plan of action can then be developed for the skills that need developing 46

- You won't use everything that you do in your degree in the world of work, but the degree gives you time management, the ability to write properly, the ability to talk to people properly, talk to different people 58

- Demand for Sports Science graduates is high in a range of professions because you develop problem solving, numerical skills that you can use within industries such a business and finances 35 46

Students require self awareness in order to effectively market themselves to potential employers:

- Maximise the skills you have got and demonstrate them to employers 58

- You will have developed a lot of skills and specialist knowledge from this course, you will also have developed a lot of other skills through part time work, extra curricula activities, so it's good to start thinking about how you can sell and put those across to employers on paper and in interview 35

- You need self awareness and the ability to sell your skills on paper and in person 43

- Knowing your skills can help you promote yourself better, it makes it a lot easier to sell yourselves to employers, employers expect to see skills based language, so it's important to understand what employers look for 46

- CVs are really crucial in your chances in the job market, it's the first thing employers see, so you have to make sure you get your applications right and really sell yourselves, take care and time over applications, they can take a while, but it will stand you in good stead 41

S from focus group 2 demonstrated that she was unaware of how the attributes that she developed at university could be applied to different contexts post HE:

S: If you wanted to go and do physio then it would be good to say, 'I've been assessed on doing physical exam', but if you didn't want to be a physio then it's not going to help you, so it would be good to have practical, but you're never going to be able to cover all the practical things that you're going to have to do 4.1468-1476

The inability of S to identify how her experiences at university relate to the world of work bears consistency with the findings from Glover *et al.* (2002), who highlighted that students did not recognise how their experiences at university were applicable to the working world. As discussed in phase 1, the alumni only became aware of the attributes that they had developed as a result of their university experiences when they started to put such attributes into practice in the work place (page 58), which supports the findings from Leggott and Stapleford (2004) (see page 10). As will be discussed on page 213, focus group 1 demonstrated that they were unaware of the attributes that they developed from their placement experience. This research programme highlights that there is a need for increasing students awareness of the attributes they are developing alongside their degree and the applicability of such attributes to the world of work, as established in the below quotation from JL and R:

JL: I feel like they should be leading you down a route
R: And them telling you which jobs you would be good at with the skills that you've got from the course
JL: But I don't think it is 1.872-873

As discussed in the literature review, students need to be made more aware of the notion of marketability and the applicability of the attributes that are being developed from any given situation (HEA 2006, Leitch 2006, UKCES 2009, Norton and Thomas 2009). Experiences do not have to be applied directly; they can be applied in different contexts to demonstrate different attributes. If students are aware of their attributes they will be better able to effectively market themselves to potential employers, and better able to apply their attributes in the workplace (Burgess 2007). As stated by UKCES (2009: 7), *"one of the most valuable skills is the ability to transfer one's skills"*.

The Knowledge & Experience Triad

The slide below was presented to students in session 45 to demonstrate that Sports Science graduates are required to have a combination of knowledge and experience in order to be effective in the world of work.
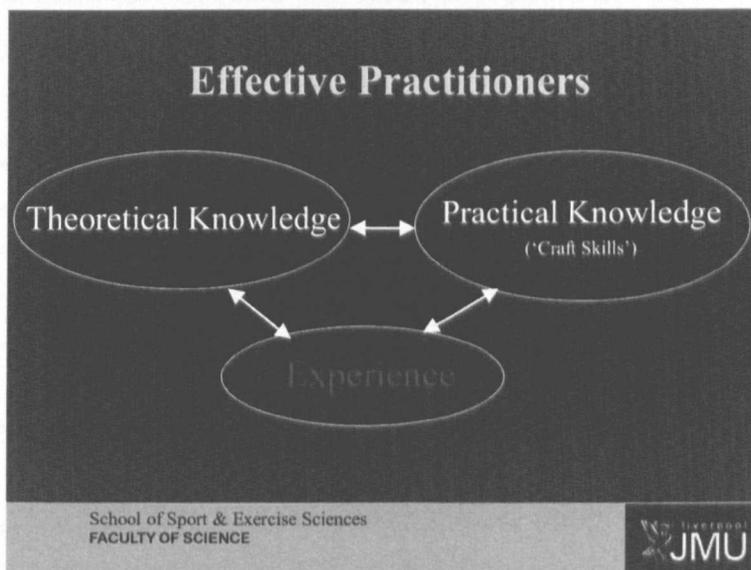
The staff expanded upon this knowledge and experience triad within the sessions:

Effective practitioners require a combination of technical knowledge, craft knowledge skills, and WRL, it's an amalgamation of the three that forms competent practitioners 10 14 26 48

The moment you think that your degree is all you need for a job, you've got problems, your degrees just one component of it, it's the basis upon which we develop, craft skills and WRL are critical 45

A degree is not always enough, the degree gives a solid base, but it's the extra work outside that makes a difference 39 58

The importance of experience, technical knowledge and craft knowledge for post HE will be discussed in more detail.

Experience

To get into the applied area, get some voluntary experience, if applicants haven't undertaken voluntary work, we aren't interested ₁₆

It doesn't really matter where you work; the same core skills apply, so get work experience ₅₈

You don't get jobs without experience ₂₇

Two thirds of employers stated that graduates who had no previous work experience are unlikely to be successful during the selection process, demonstrating the value of doing work experience ₄₆

D: It's got to be really relevant experience and not just blanket experience; it's got to be really tailored to what job you're applying for D.861–863

Get involved in as much work experience/voluntary work as possible, get out there and work in the field, no-one's going to give you a job if you've been sitting behind a desk for three years ₅₈

The CVs that stand out are the ones where the students tried to do something relevant to either their degree or their career aspirations, even if it's been unpaid, voluntary work shows a bit of commitment to their future direction rather than just collecting a few pounds together from serving on tables as a waiter for example ₄₆

Get any experience you can, if you know where you want to go in your career you should be actively seeking that, because there's no doubt now, that on graduation, your CV has to involve some extra personal development activity and evidence of that, going into the market place now with just a degree and no work experience at all is going to prove difficult for you ₄₅

You need to do all you can to stand out from the crowd, and to gain entry into many jobs and postgrad courses, particularly in the Sports Science field, experience may be needed, so it's good to try and find out which skills and experience you need for certain jobs and research into career options ₂₂

We're looking for you to have three years worth of experience, so you need to be getting off your backsides, getting out and getting experience with different individuals, different clubs, different set ups, and it has got to be interdisciplinary experience, I want to see something where you have had to sit round the table with 10 to 15 other people, and had to contribute to that environment and work within that environment to get to a goal, employers want someone who's not sat on their backside at uni, and has started to gain knowledge of the high performance environment ₄₂

Work experience shows ambition ₅₈

Work experience helps you develop and provide evidence of skills; the more work experience you've done the more examples you've got to draw on ₄₆

Work experience is important, and understanding what goes on in the job ₄₅

You need to do work based learning stuff, voluntary stuff, trying to get into sports and doing a bit, that's the biggest regret I had, that I didn't do that as a student, the degree doesn't necessarily offer it, but you have to be proactive and get yourself out and about, knock on peoples' doors, because you'll come out with a degree, but so will something like 22,000 students each year, and what will make a difference, is your experiences not your qualification, that's not what the distinguishing factor is, it's your experiences, it's hugely important, it will make so much difference, and the opportunities are there, it's just being the one that actually puts your hand up and says, 'yeah, I do want to get some of that experience' ₃₉

NB: it should be noted that 'experience' is the term used for the purpose of this study. Different terms were used by different members of staff (including Experience, Elite Sport Knowledge, and WRL).

Technical Knowledge

This knowledge is a given ₄₂

Gained from lectures, theories ₄₈

From level 1 you have some subject matter knowledge, that would allow you to write an essay about $VO_{2\,max}$ or what imagery is ₂₉

Knowledge about the key components that underpins the practical skills, techniques or concepts ₂₉

You need subject matter knowledge, the theories, key skills, key components ₄₈

If you're a physiologist you need to know the technical principles of physiology ₄₂

No matter what profession you go into, you will need theoretical knowledge to do the job ₄₅

There are certain things you need to know as a Sports Scientist, just as there are certain things you need to know as a doctor, as a teacher, as a lawyer, this is the professional knowledge that is gained from academic teaching methods, such as, lectures, you need this before you can work practically ₂₉

The demand for skilled graduates is increasing all the time, which tells us they want people with theoretical knowledge ₄₅

Make sure that what you are bringing into the workplace and teaching is research informed; make sure that you don't over step the mark ₃₂

It's important to have knowledge to impart on athletes to enhance their training and optimise their recovery ₅₂

When working as a Sports Scientist, it's important that you can give out clear recommendations to your client, underpinned by clear scientific principles ₅₂

We have got to be grounded in good theory, so you're going to be gaining your broad theoretical base while you are here that will enable you to go on to practice safely and effectively ₅₅

You need to educated yourself and keep up with the latest things in your professional development, it's as much your responsibility to get yourself trained up on things and address all the information out there as it is the athlete and coach ₅₆

NB: it should be noted that technical knowledge is the term used for the purpose of this study. Different terms were used by different members of staff (including Technical, Theoretical, Subject Matter, Professional Knowledge).

Craft Knowledge

The ability to apply the other two knowledge elements in the work place, for example, in the track centre or at the pool side [42]

Knowing how things are delivered, the methods and processes, how things are broken down or structured, the situational or conceptual issues [29]

Allows you to be able to work with people, to have the basis to transfer what we learn into practice [26]

Craft knowledge isn't taught, can only gain from doing the job, it emerges from the experience of tackling the contextual and complicated realities of everyday practice [29 48]

Me standing here talking to you wouldn't make you a Sports Scientist, you have to actually get out and do it and learn from being in those situations, learn from mistakes, learn from being in everyday practice, you may have prepared an amazing presentation for a football team, but how do you ensure that they engage and don't sit there on their mobile phones? I can't teach you that, you have to get out there and experience it [29]

It's pedagogical knowledge, the teaching, the delivery, knowing how to do something, it's ok understanding the respiratory system, but can you then go and do a VO_{2max} with a 10 year old? Can you do a bleep test with a 40 year old? [48]

People get Sports Science degrees, and then go into the world of work, and find out that they have to learn a lot more to make what they learnt at uni apply, you have to adapt what you learn to the field, you need to apply knowledge to practical situations [53]

From working in the field you enhance your knowledge and skills, you learn how to apply the skills better, and you learn things that we can't teach you here [26]

Craft skills allow practitioners to be able to work with people, to have the basis to be able to transfer what we learn in this environment into practice [26]

You need practical hands on skills, and you get that from experience, I've learnt a lot over the years from my experience in the applied football setting, and it's the same for any job, you learn on the job, so gaining work experience and developing practical skills is so important [45]

Sports Science environment is dynamic and changing practice environment, and you need the ability to make split second decisions, and you learn how to make those decisions from experience, you need to experience for yourselves and learn from your mistakes [15 29]

You need to plan for what happens 'if', you learn from experiences and you build up your strategies to deal with that [56]

As you get more experience, you will know how to deal with things better [58]

You won't be a Sports Scientist having done a degree, you'll be able to write an independent piece of work about Sports Science, but you won't be a Sports Scientist, you have to get experience, one day is never the same as the next, the environment that you work in changes constantly, like a nurse on a ward, patients are different, peoples conditions change, it's the same with Sports Science, you are dealing with people in a constantly changing environment, and you have to learn from experience and have the ability to make changes and decisions in practice [48]

NB: it should be noted that 'craft knowledge' is the term used for the purpose of this study. Different terms were used by different members of staff (including Practical and Pedagogical Knowledge).

As stated, *craft knowledge is required in order to apply theoretical knowledge and experience in the world of work* [14.42]. The guest lecturer in session 42 explained that whilst it is important to have a strong technical knowledge base, craft knowledge is more desirable to employers:

I'm quite happy to take a 10% drop in technical knowledge, for a 10% gain in the craft, it doesn't matter if you have the biggest brain in the world, the coach would rather have 10% less knowledge and someone that can get the message across to them [14.42]

This links to the alumni, who felt that employers view a degree as a prerequisite, and are more interested in the type of person a graduate is (page 65).

→

Focus group 1 demonstrated that they were aware that theoretical knowledge alone was not enough for the world of work:

JL: Because our course is such a unique, applied knowledge, you simply can't get a job on having just the degree, whereas some degrees, like business and things, it's amazing to have placement years and stuff, but it's not as necessary, I think in our degree, you need it
R: You don't get anywhere with just theory knowledge [2.870-878]

▽

However, the focus group 1 students do not feel that they have developed this essential craft knowledge. In the extract below, the students discuss the fact that they know what the different laboratory equipment does, but they do not know how to use it. In essence, they are demonstrating that they have developed good technical knowledge, but that they have not developed craft knowledge:

H: That's not going to come in handy when you finish uni, if someone says, 'how do you use this?' you can't just tell them, and then they'll be like, 'well, go on then', 'I can just tell you what it does, I can't use it' JL: I can tell you everything about it, but not how to work it   H: Yeh practical is the most important thing

[2.1658-1664]

→

At SAD, a member of staff articulated concern regarding the development of the SSES students craft knowledge:
We are now producing graduates who do not know how to put a blood pressure cuff on, which is frightening [SAD.EZ]

▽

The SSES Director articulated the world class excellence of the technical knowledge that students gain from the SSES curriculum: *The research of the world experts' based in this department goes into the curriculum, meaning that this curriculum can't be anymore up to date than it is* [20]
SSES has world class staff, making the curriculum world class [2]

→

SSES students gain excellent technical knowledge from the world expert staff. However, in order for students to be adequately prepared for the world of work, experience and craft knowledge need to be accounted for. In session 45, the member of staff taking the session explained how he feels that his ability to adequately develop these two aspects is not 'exhaustive':

The moment you think that your degree is all you need for a job, you've got problems, your degrees just one component of it, it's the basis upon which we develop. Craft skills and WRL are critical, and using the ASS modules, I'm going to try and help guide you towards developing those, I can help you in some areas, but it isn't exhaustive

▽

The SSES staff do not feel that they have the expertise to account for all three factors of the knowledge and experience triad:
The University would say we are preparing our graduates to be employable in a broader sense of the word, rather than in a very specific location, we have to assess those sorts of skills, the problem we've got is that actually, assessing skills, it's really quite complex and difficult, and often outside of our expertise and knowledge base [SAD.EZ]

→

As discussed, the world of work requirements are often factors that can be described as 'wicked competencies', because their complex nature means that they are problematic to define, teach and assess (Thompson *et al.* 2008). This explains why in the previous quote the member of staff described assessing skills as, *complex and difficult, and often outside of our expertise and knowledge base.*

▽

The SSES staff may not perceive that they are equipped to assess 'wicked competences' due to the disparity from the scientific assessment that they are accustomed to:
Is there an issue with trying to have an aim of something which is fundamentally not capable of being assessed? So in other words, in scientific terms, we try to encourage students to have a hypothesis, and a well written hypothesis can be tested using a statistical technique [SAD.EZ]
The challenge for us is being creative to do the assessment; it's the creative assessment that's the challenge for us [SAD.EZ]

The SSES staff suggest that focused assessment guidelines would help them to improve their current assessment methods:
In order to explore ways in which we can be more innovative and to improve what we are doing, we need more focused guidelines, to help us to focus on the specific learning outcomes that improve what we are doing

[SAD.EZ]

There needs to be a statement in there that helps to guide us in terms of our learning outcomes, so if one statement was related to employment, or real world skills out there, or things that people do, then we would have to respond to that by putting a learning outcome that related to that, and then if we've got that learning outcome, we then need to think about how to assess it, so unless we are driven from outside, I don't think we are going to be very clever in responding to that [SAD.EZ]

→

At the SSES staff away day, the first presentation discussed the development of assessment methods in order to prepare student for the working world (appendix 16). The issues discussed were based around the following:

How does assessment prepare students for what they might face in the world of work?

Assessment needs to be aligned to learning outcomes and what we want students to learn

There is a need for assessment to equip students for the longer term, for life wide and lifelong learning; for a life and work where there is little formal assessment

A need for assessment that equips students for life time learning and work (Boud and Falchikov 2006).

How do we design authentic curriculum and assessment opportunities that will prepare students for a complex world?

This final question will be explored using findings from the research programme.

128

3.5.2 How do we Design Authentic Curriculum and Assessment Opportunities that will Prepare Students for a Complex World?

A member of staff at the staff away day stated *'what I want to know is what other forms of assessment are out there?'* ₛₐD.cc. The discussions at the staff away day demonstrated that the issue of aligning assessment to world of work preparation needs to be explored:

> *Do we want to test peoples' ability to go out and work in the 'real world'? How do you assess that? You've got to send them out to the real world to see what they are doing, and have some method of assessing them* SAD.EZ

> *What the real world expects of our students – that is what we should test, assess if they can go out there and do well in their jobs* SAD.CC

The students also felt that assessments should be aligned to the requirements of the world of work.

> *M: It's like you know when (lecturer) sees you in the corridor and he asks you loads of questions and he's like, 'well, these are the types of questions you'll get asked in a conference if you went to present your work', well, why aren't we being assessed on that then? Why do you just stop me in the corridor and ask me it if you think it's that important? You should be saying to someone, 'this should be on the module guide', because I wouldn't know what questions I would be asked if I went to a conference or whatever, or an interview, so why isn't that part of the module?* 2.3563-3570

Bloxham and Campbell (2010) stated that there is a need to engage students in the assessment process, highlighting the importance of gaining students perceptions of assessment. The perceptions and insights of the focus group students will be presented, in order to determine how students can be better prepared for the world of work through assessment. Suggestions for how each of the discussed world of work requirements can be assessed are presented below.

Assessment for the World of Work Requirements

Exceptional People to work with Exceptional People	Interpersonal Working Ability: The Team Behind the Team	Self Awareness & Marketability	The Knowledge & Experience Triad

Technical Knowledge

Craft Knowledge

└ Experience
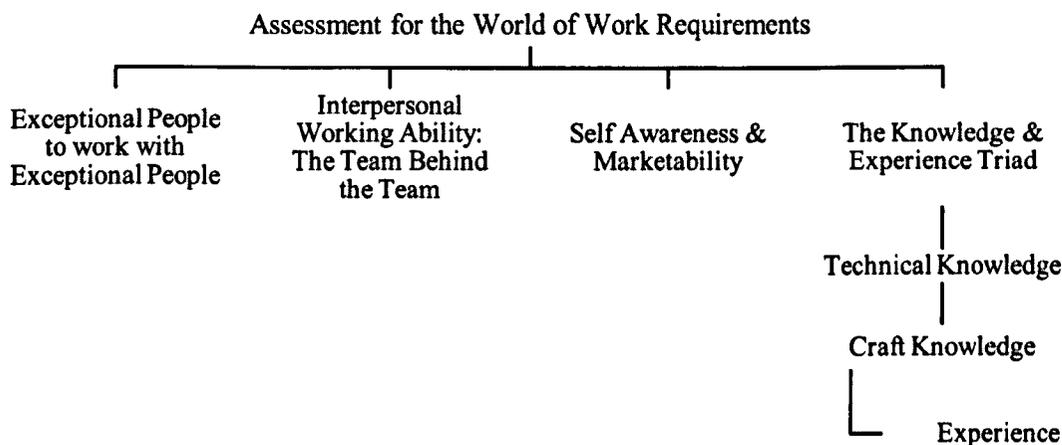
Assessing Exceptional People to work with Exceptional People

Focus group 1 felt that the importance of personal qualities in the world of work means that assessing them would help to prepare students for the working world.

➡️

R: It seems like most jobs you don't have to write essays all the time, especially if you're working with athletes or the public, your personal skills are going to be valued, if two people went to an interview, and on paper one person was better than the other, but the other persons way more socially engaging
A: Which is more important for the job
R: I'd expect them to get it, so maybe they could assess us in, well; we've never had a mock interview or anything like that
A: Or interview techniques
R: Which I know you can go to the careers service and get that, but it's not part of the course, so you're not necessarily being interviewed on a relevant subject
M: You're not really being assessed on it 2.3435-3452

➡️

The alumni also cited personal qualities as being important in the world of work (Table 11, page 61). According to alumnus 12, employers are more interested in the type of person a graduate is, because, *'that's more important than skills of the trade, because skills of the trade you can teach'* (page 68).

Assessing Interpersonal Working Ability: The Team behind the Team

A member of staff at the staff away day articulated that interdiscpilinary team work should be assessed due to its importance in the world of work.

➡️

Maybe what I should be doing is setting a group assignment, because in the real world, with people going to work in a job, they work in small teams, in cardio rehab you have to work in small teams, you work with a cardiologist, and you work with a nurse, so teamwork is very important, and that is a generic skill that they have got to learn, how to work together
SAD.EZ

➡️

The alumni believe that employers are concerned that graduates will comfortably fit into the workplace (Table 11, page 61). Interpersonal working ability should be implemented into the SSES curriculum in order to prepare students for this world of work requirement. A team culture within the SSES could be created by getting students involved and inputting into their course. This will get students used to inputting and contributing to process within a team (Nichol 2011).

Assessing Self Awareness & Marketability

Student A from focus group 1 suggested that assessment should be utilised to help prepare students for marketing themselves in the world of work.

➡️

A: I went to this interview, everyone who sent their CVs got to the interview point, but then they picked from the interview who got it, which shows how the interview affected it, and I think we should get interview training, because it does make a difference, like if you're less nervous and stuff
H: Yeh first impressions 2.3527-3540

➡️

The alumni also suggested that students' marketability should be developed as part of the SSES curriculum (Table 13, page 74).

It has been demonstrated in the literature that during interviewing employers place more importance on attitude, interpersonal and communication skills than on degree classification, adding credence to the need to prepare students accordingly (Adecco Group 2012, Burgess 2007, Talabi 2012).

Assessing the Knowledge & Experience Triad

As demonstrated on pages 85-87, 126 and discussed in the literature review (page 8), important world of work preparation is gained from experience. The students felt that more practical experience should be utilised and assessed to help prepare students for the world of work, as demonstrated below:

130

Practical Experience

M: I've learnt so much more this year just from getting out and doing the stuff rather than just sitting in the classroom 2.1561-1562

The students felt that practical experiences promoted learning. The alumni also discussed the importance of practical experience for post HE preparation (page 81):

R: I learned more from my dissertation than I did from any other coursework or any other lecture or anything, so it would be good to do something different, and you'll get really knowledgeable about a different thing 2.2238 -2243

EG: I think that's how I learn best, just being like, thrown into a situation and then having to do it 3.2200-2202

*S: I find practicals really useful, because he'll tell us the theory behind it, and you get it, but you go to the practical and you're actually using it and you're thinking back to what you've learned, and it just reinforces it and you just understand it better than just seeing a picture on a screen if you can actually do it, I can remember them more because I think like, 'oh yeah, I did that' 4.835-842

JL: Quite a lot of people on like a sports course are the same, they are quite practical people, so it's easier to learn 1.1822-1823

I learnt more out of uni in placement and additional things, than I did in the classroom 58.DC

Duncan et al. (2007) found that practical, experience based learning enhanced student enjoyment, engagement and development of criticality compared to traditional, lecture led delivery in Sports Studies.

H 'wished' that she had gone to a different university with a more practically orientated Sports Science course:

H: I only chose this uni because everyone was like, 'it's a five star uni, brilliant for Sports Science', where as now I wish I'd picked somewhere more practical but not so great at research, because I don't learn by looking at a board, I have to actually do it, and every other uni seems to do that apart from here, and I've bought a lab coat for £30 quid, worn it like once, and I even bought goggles, I've never worn the goggles, ever! JL: Here as well they do have good facilities......... H: But we never use them 2.1593-1603

The students thought that practical experiences should be assessed:

K: We need more practical experience, and the assessment on your practical stuff, rather than just writing and exams 3.1769-1770

K: They should assess some practical stuff, watching you do some things like hands on rather than just all the written stuff, if we got the chance to do practical stuff as well, because you don't really get to do that much, and like S said (see above*), they learnt better from doing the practical because they could relate back to it, when you're just doing an exam, you can't really relate to anything, your just relating to what you've been told in lectures or in a book 4.1423-1437

EG: When we did muscle metabolism, we did the practical, but then it was basically just the write up that was assessed, it wasn't the process that we went through, which would have been good 4.1440-1443

The students provided examples of ways that practical experiences could be assessed:

R: JL's friend does pharmacy, and one of her exams is a fake pharmacy shop, the teacher comes in and asks her for a certain drug, like a pretend job JL: She works in a pharmacy anyway, but it's so good for the ones who don't work in a pharmacy, because they need to do two weeks hospital, two weeks in a pharmacy placement to pass their degree, and that assessment prepares them for going to do the placement, because when they're on placement the person marks them on how responsive they are to questions they're asked 2.3468-3479

H: My sister is at Trent and they had to prepare for this mock person coming in, and she had to greet them and make them feel comfortable, and then she had to take skin folds and blood pressure, and the teacher was sitting in the corner assessing her, which is what is going to happen obviously if you go into it, but she said that was better than writing an essay of what you should do with references, because it's not applied 2.3490-3496

Sharing practice between and within HEIs is an effecient learning experience and use of resources, which can provide inspiration for development (Norton and Thomas 1999).

H: That's something that I definitely would have preferred, rather than having to constantly write about what you would do, rather than someone watching what you are doing 2.3501-3503

H articulated that there should be a shift from assessing 'what you would do', to 'what you are doing':

This quote from the guest lecturer in session 39 supports that assessment on requirements of the world of work holds importance: When you get out into the real world, people start asking you what you've done, rather than what they can expect of you 39

EM demonstrates how assessing practical experiences can provide students with examples that can be marketed to potential employers: EM: When your applying for jobs you can say, 'yeah, I've done this, got assessed through this', but if you don't do that, then it's just all your knowledge, you can't really like refer to that 4.1444-1449

Do you assess knowledge or the application of knowledge – a lot of it can be 'what is this, what is that', very superficial, or you are looking at application and establish a scenario and see if you can pull together what you have taught to effect a solution SAD.CC

The UK Commission believes that it is crucial to be able to use knowledge and skills in the workplace effectively (UKCES 2009). Leitch (2006) reported that such skills and abilities can be developed at university if students are given opportunities to practice them throughout their degree programme in authentic workplace settings. Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004) proposed that formal teaching must be accompanied by practical skills and also applied to the environment in which they will be used, enabling students to develop the cultural and social skills required for the successful implementation of their learning. If it is not possible to take students on workplace visits, working with employers to

develop virtual or real world teaching resources should be considered (GEES 2008). As stated by Denholm (2011), positive changes can result from thinking less about 'what' and more about 'how' we teach.

Other 'Real World' Assessment Issues

- Oral assessment for 'wicked competencies'

At the away day, the staff highlighted the difficulty involved with assessing 'wicked competencies'. The students and staff suggest that oral assessments could be utilised to assess competencies that are complex and 'hard to convey':

K: Sometimes it's easier just to speak things rather than write it down
EG: Yeah doing vivas, like a spoken exam 4.1462-1465

JF: The thing I like about presentations is if the lecturer questions something, you are able to justify it to them, and explain yourself, where as if it was just a piece of coursework they would just say, 'oh, that's wrong', where as in that f face to face scenario you are able to give an account of yourself and why you've done things
S: Yeah I suppose sometimes where you know what you mean........
JF: Yeah but it can be hard to convey it
S: It's giving you a second chance to explain it 3.1515-1525

I get the best understanding about how good a student is when I interview them, talk to them, you can challenge and question them, I would like to use more interview-type assessment SAD.CC

- Accountable Assessment

As previously mentioned, students are not engaging with the opportunities provided by the SSES. As demonstrated in the quotations below, it appears that assessments that make students feel accountable enhances engagement and learning:

K: Presentations are good; because you have to go over it over it again to make sure you can present it
D: Yeah because you're actually on the spot, your accountable as well, because you're actually there in person so you can't just hand in a piece of coursework, 'oh its rubbish, it's gone', at least with doing a presentation if you don't know your stuff you're going to feel a little bit humiliated
K: Yeah it makes you more prepared because you don't want to look the fool doing it, especially if you have to do it in front of the class
D: Because you can hide behind a piece of coursework, once it's gone it's gone 3.1497-1513

R: Sometimes when you're doing a presentation you end up learning more because when you're doing a coursework all you have to do is write it on the paper and you can forget about it forever, and you make yourself know it when it's a presentation because when people ask you questions so you get put on the spot a bit 1.715-723

S: Sometimes when you have the lecture and they say, 'do the reading', you don't just go and read it straight away, but when you have coursework, then you have to do it to be able to understand it, so I suppose the coursework makes you actually have to do it 3.1406-1409

H: I do prefer working in a group, because then I feel like you can't let other people down, where as when I'm working by myself I'm terrible, really bad 1.588-589

Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) demonstrated that students take more responsibility for work when it impacts on the success of others.

Focus group 1 suggested that observational assessments should be introduced. According to group 1, this will encourage people to put more effort into tasks (page 211).

The staff toyed with the notion of accountability at the staff away day:

Can you make assessment somehow more challenging for the students so that we can actually put them more on the spot?
The answer is yes we can: consequences SAD.CC

Due to a culture of instrumentalism, where by students learn what they need, when they need it, students need to be given a reason or consequence to learn and engage with assessment, such as not

wanting to be humiliated during a presentation or not wanting to let peers down (Ainley cited in Fearne 2008). Students need to be made 'accountable', as engagement is enhanced when students perceive a value (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009). A member of staff at the staff away day stated *'as soon as students see the benefit of something then they're on it'* SAD.CC. In the above quotations, both D and R refer to a culture of 'hiding behind coursework'. In the quotation below, the member of staff facilitating session 45 stated that it is 'easy somebody telling you which essay to write':

People always get a bit uncomfortable when we start talking about PDP, it's easy somebody telling you which essay to write and which question to do, but once the onus is on you, you find out who the lazy ones are

It may be that students are not used to taking responsibility within the educational setting as opposed to them being lazy (this issue will be pursued in greater depth on page 290). Students need to be better supported and more involved in the academic community in order to enhance accountability, responsibility, engagement and learning, and remove the option for students' to 'hide behind coursework' (the notion of community is discussed in more detail from page 169). It is important to encourage students to engage with things outside their comfort zones. As Rae (2009) states, students may prefer 'safe and certain' approaches to learning and assessment, but the real world is not safe.

- Cohort Size

It should be noted that the staff feel that the assessment options available to them are limited due to the large cohort size:

The biggest problem we have is that some of the things that you want to assess, just restricted by the sheer volume of people you are dealing with SAD.EZ	*You know what the big problem is for our program, I think our program has got too big for a start off, that's the problem if we are really honest, it's got too big* SAD EZ

3.5.3 Summary: The World of Work Requirements

This section aimed to provide an overview of the advice and recommendations students were provided regarding the requirements of the world of work and how to adequately prepare for post HE, combined with students' perceptions and experiences of such opportunities. With regard to the world of work requirements:

| The SSES provides excellent technical knowledge, but the other world of work requirements are not accounted for to the same world class standard. | ➡ | This issue is reflected in the personal tutor system; whereby the expertise of the SSES staff could not account for providing students' with the required personal and professional support. | ➡ | The SSES therefore needs the staff expertise and specialism to account for the other components of preparing students for their post HE lives (i.e. the requirements of the world of work and support). The SSES staff highlighted a need for 'focused assessment guidelines' in order to prepare students for other world of requirements. | ➡ | Assessment approaches that develop employability should be explored and be as equally valued as technical skills and academic knowledge (Pegg *et al.* 2012). |

As highlighted in the literature review, there is an apparent 'skills gap' between the skills possessed by graduates and the requirements of the world of work. This offers the potential for HE to realign courses to the requirements of the world of work (GEES 2008). The UKCES (2009) suggested that HE learning environment should resemble the workplace. Numerous authors have recommended that employability skills should be embedded within curricula (for example, AGR 2010, Knight and Yorke 2004, O'Regan 2009, Wright *et al.* 2010).

In order to prepare students for the world of work, assessments should be aligned to the requirements of the world of work. Learning and assessment should resemble world of work application.

➡

The world of work requirements, ethics and cultures should be instilled and embedded within the SSES and it's students, creating an environment that replicates the world of work and it's components, with the addition of support, guidance and nurture.

➡

The students' university experience will therefore be effectively training and preparing them for the world of work. A student's career should begin when they enter HE.

The World of Work Requirements: Summarised

Exceptional People to work with Exceptional People	Interpersonal Working Ability: The Team Behind the Team	Self Awareness & Marketability	The Knowledge & Experience Triad

Exceptional People to work with Exceptional People

— Personal skills

— Innovative people who are a little bit different, stand out, gone the extra mile .

— Students have to build around their degrees whilst they are at university in order become 'exceptional'.

— By investing their time whilst they are at university, students also demonstrate that they are committed and enthusiastic about working in their desired field.

— Students were encouraged to get involved and make the most of the opportunities available to them.

Interpersonal Working Ability: The Team Behind the Team

— The ability to work interpersonally and communicate effectively with colleagues and clients.

— Working in the Sports Science industry involves working in an interdisciplinary team. It is important to understand the different disciplines and roles that make up the team.

Self Awareness & Marketability

— It is important that students are aware of the skills that they are gaining and developing as part of their university experience.

— Students require self awareness in order to effectively market themselves to potential employers.

The Knowledge & Experience Triad

Effective practitioners require a combination of technical knowledge, craft knowledge skills, and WRL 10 14 26 48

Technical Knowledge: This knowledge is a given. Knowledge about the key components that underpins the practical skills, techniques or concepts.

Craft Knowledge: Knowledge about how to transfer technical knowledge into practice, gained from experience.

Experience: *You'll come out with a degree, but so will something like 22,000 students each year, and what will make a difference, is your experiences, not your qualification, that's not what the distinguishing factor is, it's your experiences* 93

134

Crebert *et al.* (2004) underlined the importance of embedding the development and assessment of generic skills and abilities in HE. Below is a summary of recommendations for developing and assessing the world of work requirements as stated by phase 2 part 1 of this research programme:

Exceptional People

Students need to build around their degrees and invest time engaging with a variety of different opportunities. The degree alone is not enough. As stated by Gilleard (cited in Mail Online 2007), students must engage with additional activities and experiences alongside their degree in order to be world of work prepared. Students need to be provided with suggestions of additional opportunities to engage with, including the opportunity to gain additional qualifications and courses.

Assessment:

Due to the importance of personal skills, students' effectiveness in mock interview scenarios should be assessed, with evaluative feedback.

Interpersonal Working Ability: The Team behind the Team

Students need to be able to work effectively in an interdisciplinary team. A team culture within the SSES could be created by getting students involved and inputting into their course in a team set up (Nichol 2011). This will get students used to contributing to a process within a team.

Assessment:

Interdisciplinary group work should be assessed. Group work must reflect the reality of the world of work in order to effectively prepare students. Assigning individual roles and assessing individual contribution can help to promote 'real world' group work.

Self Awareness and Marketability

There needs to be an increased awareness of the attributes students are developing alongside their degree, and the applicability of such attributes to the world of work. As stated by a member of staff in session 46, *'most of us have loads of skills we're not even aware of'* (see page 124). If students are aware of their attributes they will be better able to effectively market themselves to potential employers, and better able to apply their attributes in the workplace, as demonstrated below:
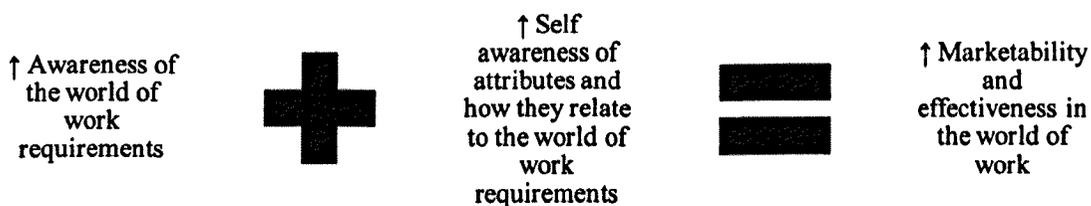
Assessment:

Mock interview scenarios with evaluative feedback will enhance students' awareness of how to effectively market themselves to potential employers.

135

The Knowledge & Experience Triad

NB: experience will be discussed in the 'how to prepare for post HE' section below.

Students require a combination of technical knowledge, craft knowledge and experience in order to be adequately prepared for the world of work. Technical knowledge alone is not sufficient for the world of work. Whilst it is important to have a strong technical knowledge base, craft knowledge is more desirable to employers.

Assessment:

More practical experience should be utilised and assessed. Practical experience can be used as examples to market to potential employers, which students should be prepared for accordingly. Assessment needs to be shifted from hypothetical to 'real world' scenarios. In essence, students need to be assessed on what they are doing rather than what they would do. For example:

- An observed mock needs analysis with a client/patient/subject.
- Responsiveness to questions during a mock job scenario. This assessment can also provide preparation for placements.

General Assessment

The staff highlighted the difficulty involved with assessing 'wicked competencies'. The students suggest that oral assessments could be utilised to assess competencies that are complex and 'hard to convey'. Assessment that makes students feel accountable enhances engagement and learning. Without accountability, students can 'hide behind coursework'. Examples of accountable assessment include:

- Presentations
- Group work
- Observations

The presented summary highlights a range of assessment opportunities that require consideration. The NSF (2010) promoted the consideration of a broader range of assessment methods, as appropriate to the subject matter.

3.5.4 Advice & Recommendations for Post HE Preparation: How to prepare for post HE

Below is an overview of each of the factors that will be discussed regarding the advice and recommendations the staff gave for how to prepare for post HE:

How to prepare for post HE

The Importance of Experience	The Importance of Preparing Early	The Importance of Considering Post HE Options	How to prepare for post HE: The Students' Perspective
Contacts	How can students be engaged with preparing for post HE?		What more can be done?
Trial job options			Summary: How to prepare for post HE
Students' Perceptions of Experience (and Subsequent Recommendations)			

3.5.4.1 The Importance of Experience

The importance of experience was discussed in the literature review (page 7) and highlighted by the phase 1 alumni (page 86). As presented in phase 2, students require technical knowledge, craft knowledge and experience in order to be adequately prepared for the world of work. The degree accounts for technical knowledge, and since craft knowledge can only be gained from experience, it is essential that students gain experience. As demonstrated in the below extract, employers require graduates to have work experience:

Two thirds of employers stated that graduates who had no previous work experience are unlikely to be successful during the selection process, demonstrating the value of doing work experience 46

Guest speaker 39 attempted to engage students with the importance of gaining experience:

I cannot push the placement stuff enough, I never really valued it enough when I was at uni, but I can tell you that when you get out into the real world, people start asking you what you've done, rather than what they can expect you to do 39

This adds credence to H's suggestion that there should be a shift from assessing 'what you would do', to 'what you are doing' (page 131). As demonstrated previously on page 126, experience helps to prepare students for the general world of work and enhances their ability to compete in the graduate job market. Experience can also provide students with opportunities to network and develop contacts, and trial potential job ideas, which will now be discussed. An overview of the benefits of experience are presented in summary form below:

Experience

World of Work Preparation (previously discussed, see page 127) | The Ability to Compete (previously discussed, see page 127) | Contacts | Trialling Job Ideas

3.5.4.2 Contacts

The extracts below discuss the important role experience plays in developing contacts, as articulated by the staff:

In 2010 over one quarter of graduate vacancies were filled by graduates who had received further job offers or students who'd already done work experience with the company, demonstrating the value of work experience 46

People sometimes find out about jobs through contacts and networking 35

Work experience helps you make useful contacts; employers do recruit from those that they take on in work experience 46

The students were informed that establishing a dialogue with staff can help to prepare them for the world of work: *often lecturers have a lot of contacts in industry and you don't tend to find out about them unless you're on a more friendly terms with them than lecturer and student, ask lecturers if they have any contacts for experience 46*

Experience can develop contacts and networks, which in turn can create job opportunities:

Experience gives you the opportunity to get to know people, 'spiralling effect' regarding contacts, when you meet one person, meet lots of other of the back 58

A lot of jobs are gained through networking and meeting potential employers 46

Work experience allows you initial access to companies 58

If you want to progress into performance sport, try and network and speak to people that you feel are influential in the sports that you want to progress into, don't wait for opportunities to come to you, from my experiences, that only happens on the very odd occasion, you have to seek these opportunities 18

The guest lecturer from session 56 described how students at the university he works at engage in a lot of placements in sports clubs, and as a result, *students are in a prime position to be looking for work at the end of the third year. One student last year did a placement with Man City and he's working there now, it's about getting that experience behind you and building the CV up 56*

The students in focus group 1 and a student in session X1 were conscious of the important role having contacts can play in the employability of graduates:

JL: That's why we are so lost for after uni, because in this job it's all about who you know, get your name spread around, or get a few contacts, because if you apply for a big job, it's so obvious that probably some other lad's going to have had a contact and get the job before you
A: Yeah or used to play for them or used to know them 50

~

I'm going to study fashion, there are no jobs in Science and Football, I did the degree because I loved sports at school, but I'm really unlikely to get anywhere in it, it's who you know in this game X1

138

The fact that all of the employed alumni who were interviewed in phase 1 gained their employment through contacts of some form, demonstrates the importance of students networking (see page 87). Hawkins and Gilleard (2002) stated that networking is a skill employers rate highly. The ability to network and develop contacts is not only beneficial for helping graduates get into the work; it is also of benefit in the work place, as demonstrated in the quote below from the guest lecturer in session 42:

It's not a bottomless pit of money, you've got to be somebody who has a broad network and have that communication, somebody who can pick up the phone to the SSES and say, 'can you do some research for us', or 'what deal can we break for you to do something for us and we to do something for you' [42]

3.5.4.3 Trailing Job Options

As stated by GEES (2008), work experience gives students the chance to try a career. The extracts below highlight staff attempting to make students aware of the importance of experiencing the environment involved in potential career options:

You need to be able to be pretty sharp and quick, because if you don't get your defence in quickly then you'll be knocked to the floor, you also need thick skin, you will be on the receiving end of peoples anger and disappointment, players who are left out of the squad who feel like they should be in the team, they will always look for someone to lash out at, and at points they will find a way to blame the fitness coach or the Sports Scientist, and the information that's been provided that's prevented them from being picked, so you need to be thick skinned, most of the things that are said in these places people don't mean, they're just lashing out [55]

Football clubs are a bizarre, industrial environment, inhabited by competitive people with 20-30 ridiculously overpaid egos that if you don't stand up to and don't make sure that you're on the same level as them can make your life hell [55]

It's a very unstable world because coaching positions are very performance target dependent, and performance depends on your athletes, so if an athlete has a bad day or is struck down by illness, you're collecting your P45, only interested in medals [48]

Experience allows students to trial the working environment and culture of potential career ideas. This appears to be of particular importance in the context of the Sports Science industry:

The culture and philosophy in the British cycling team is 'medal or nothing' [42]

Football and high performance sports world has a highly unique culture, it's idiosyncratic, ruthless, 1 manager comes in, 12 people can lose their jobs, it's competitive [18]

The students were advised to gain experience in order to trail potential career options before committing to them, as demonstrated below:

Applied sports physiology is an insecure, dog eat dog environment, and you must be able to cope with it [16]

Get experience in different things, and apply for different things [58]

You need to understand the culture of the sport that you're interested in working in [53]

The first step is job shadow; find out if the career is for you [58d]

If you understand your sport and its culture, you'll be able to present yourself in a way that people will think is useful [53]

Speak to those in job fields that interest you, find out more about what they do, informational interviewing, speaking to a professional that's doing a job that you want to get into, to find out about that job, industry etc., it gives you another viewpoint than can be offered from websites alone [35]
Hawkins and Gilleard (2002) and the NSF (2010) advocate talking to people in potential jobs and asking those 'warts and all' questions.

Students were advised to trial career ideas before committing to them:

Internships give you the chance to get your hands dirty, find out whether you're comfortable in professional sports environment, and it's something on your CV that makes you stand out from all the other graduates [55]
There are a range of opportunities to get involved with, but go and have a look in the first place [55]

There's so much to doing a job that you don't experience when you're at university, do work experience while doing your degree [46]

Work experience can help you see if a job is a good fit for you and your personality, and it helps you to test out the reality of the job, so, if you've got any particular careers in mind, its worth trying to do relevant work experience or shadowing, even a few days work shadowing is good for checking out work ideas and developing contacts [46]
Hawkins and Gilleard (2002) feel that trying different kinds of work experience allows students to determine what they are good at and passionate about.

The quotation below from alumnus 12 demonstrates how experience can help students determine what career paths they want to pursue:

Until they actually go and experience it, they're not going to be able to make up their own minds on which way they want to go

3.5.4.4 Students' Perceptions of Experience (and Subsequent Recommendations)

As discussed, work experience is essential for developing important post HE components such as preparing students for the competitive world of work, developing contacts and exploring potential career options. Many of the focus group students had not engaged with work experience, despite staff advising students of the importance of preparing for post HE during their degrees. Students' perceptions of work experience are presented below:

Students' Perceptions of Experience

Students 'do not know where to start' regarding engaging in work experience:

A: You don't even know where to start JL: And you don't even have the confidence to email someone and say, 'can I come in and shadow you?' because you don't necessarily know about nutritionist and strength and conditioning coach and all the individual things, and you don't realise the importance of them, and how they work together until you develop through uni R: When they're like, 'go out and get yourself a placement, it's really good', I'm like, 'well what jobs are there? I don't know what job exists!' 2.899-920

S: A lot of the guest speakers did work experience all the way through uni, which everyone always says is good to do, but when you don't have a clue what you want to do and you don't really know until later on, it's hard to know where to even start going to 3.817-820

JL: Even if it had of been two days for each module in first year, just to get a better understanding, because even the guest lecturers haven't said, 'this is how you go about getting a placement there' 1.1000-1003

A lack of confidence prevented students from engaging in work experience:

JL: They're like, 'oh, just email all the clubs', and you're like, 'they're definitely not going to email me back!' We just think that's like way beyond us M: And especially not like a little first year, they're not going to be like, 'oh yeah, come along' A: I wouldn't even email my lecturers JL: Yeah I didn't go and see my lecturers in first year, it's just, too scared to do anything 2.922-933

In session 58, DC told students that they are required to be confident regarding experience: You can't be a shy person, you need to get out there and see what people want, get involved in everything and anything

Focus group 1 demonstrated that a lack of accountability prevented them from engaging with work experience:

JL: They said in first year you should be going out and getting involved, getting a placement, but when they say that to you in first year, you don't care, because you feel like graduation is a million miles away 2.895-897

JL: If we wanted to do a placement I guess we could have gone out and found one ourselves, but in first year you don't realise that R: You don't think that in first year M: It's like at the time you don't realise the importance, where as if you were stressed out a bit more you might have been a bit more proactive R: It just doesn't seem real, it's like your degree is going to last forever 1.988-998

D and JL described how they were made to feel accountable and understand the importance of gaining work experience after gaining insight into the reality of the world of work:

D: They were looking for an internship performance analyst, I applied, I went down for an interview; I didn't get it, and I was told I didn't get it because I didn't have enough experience, so straight away I thought, 'well, I need to get some experience', I really wanted to get that intern, so I was a bit mad at myself for not having any experience, so then I went out and got quite a bit D.935-982

JL: It was only in final year where it finally clicked, when we did that rugby interview, you final realise, 'oh my god, I don't know anything', and that's when you think, 'I really need to do some work experience, and quick' 2.880-883

D: It needs to be pushed through that you need to get as much experience as you can, because some of my friends have jobs in Subway and stuff, which are good enough jobs, but if you come out with a Sports Science degree putting down on your CV that you worked in Subway is not what employers are looking for at all, there needs to be more of an emphasis from the uni on actually getting out there during summer and Christmas breaks and actually finding stuff D.813-824

The focus groups felt that students need to be encouraged and made more aware of the importance of gaining experience, so that they feel more accountable and engage with work experience throughout their degrees:

D: In first year you're not clued up enough, I know from my own experiences I thought during the summer of first year, 'right, this is it, I'll come out with a degree that'll be me done, I must be head and shoulders above everybody else going for the job', so maybe in first year if you drill it in that you need to go out and get a placement, the emphasis of going out and getting related work needs to change D.831-842

C: I wish I'd got that proactive, they should really encourage you more to get proactive, maybe second year ask you what do you want to do in the future, and in third year encourage you to look for a work placement and stuff, whereas I was just left to my own devices and I just focused on my work, wasn't getting anything experience wise, so I'm going to come out of a degree with no experience K: Yeah I don't really have experience JF: Yeah I wish I'd started looking in the second year, because it's only this year, I've done this applied placement and then I've done a lot of shadowing work, but I wish I'd started sooner as well 4.2157-2170

C referred to being 'left to his own devices', adding further credence to the notion that the personal tutor system designed to provide personal, academic and employability focused support is inadequate (see page 108).

Since engagement enhances when students perceive a value, HE should do more to make sure that students are aware of the important need for gaining work experience (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009, Graduate Prospects 2011).

Since students 'do not know where to start' and show a lack of confidence, students need more support to help them gain work experience.

D suggested that if students engage with experience, it should be acknowledged through assessment:

D: At this university we have like six months off, rather than just saying you've gone completely at the beginning of May they say for six weeks you're still in uni, but you've got to find a placement, and if you do you get an extra 5% added on   D.806–811

D: Maybe if they got assessed for the amount of hours they did at a placement and the number of placements they got, it should be acknowledged within the university if you go out and get a placement and get work   D:1162–1168

Due to the lack in confidence, focus group 1 felt that the SSES should provide more support with regard to students pursuing work experience:

JL: It would have to come down to them saying, 'these are the options, you choose what placement you would want to do', they're not going to organise it for you, you just know they're not, but if there was some way to do it
H: But for £9000 they should organise it for you
M: But then, other courses go on placements every single year, and they go for months, if other courses can arrange it, then why can't ours?   2.942–950

D suggested providing more placement opportunities:
D: The uni has got a website for vacancies and stuff, they could put more placements up there and placement providers and details   D.1055-1059

According to Graduate Prospects (2011) and GEES (2008) the importance and benefits of engaging with work experience needs to be better highlighted to HE students. As suggested in the quote below; students need to be made to feel accountable and aware of the importance of opportunities in order to engage and gain:

If there isn't a demand to engage, then people won't do it; lack of accountability, lack of engagement 30

3.5.4.5 The Importance of Preparing Early

The quotations below present the advice given to students from the staff regarding preparing early for post HE:

Research different roles, don't be too fussy, I hate to burst your bubble, but you're not going to go straight into your dream job as soon as you graduate, start thinking about your dream job now 58.DC

Start thinking about your future and getting prepared, investigate and research your career options early on, think about what you want to do, find out how you can get into those jobs so that you are in a positon to apply in third year 22 35 46

If wait until your final year or when you graduate to start looking, you are leaving yourself in a vulnerable and pressured situation, it is good to have something lined up for when you finish 22 35 46

The entry route for Sports Science jobs can be quite complex, you may require further study or experience, so the earlier you start to research the better, so that you can start to gain what jobs require 46 22

The Importance of Preparing Early

We don't want you to get to the end of your degree, and you've done nothing to think about where you're going, because sometimes at that point, it's too late, you cannot afford to close everything out and keep your head down and work, we want you to work hard, but you need to look up to see where you're going sometimes 27

For large employers and postgraduate courses you need to start applying early in your final year, so it's good to get prepared and ready to apply for things 22 46

In third year you're not going to have as much time to volunteer and gain work experience, and you don't want to get to six months towards the end of your degree and think, 'what am I going to do?' and have to volunteer every hour god sends, but if you do it now, and do it in your own time, just a couple of hours a week, you're going to make it a lot easier for yourself going into year 3, and when you start looking for jobs 22

The member of staff in session 46 informed students of what they should be doing each year of their degree in order to help ensure that they are prepared for post HE:

1st Year

Start looking at your skills and what you need to develop, what careers are out there, start gaining relevant work experience

2nd Year

Continue gaining work experience, continue research careers, start to look into postgraduate courses that you might want to apply to

3rd Year

Apply for things early, particularly for large employers and postgraduate courses [46]

M from focus group 1 gave insight into how she approached preparing herself for post HE over her three years at university:

1st Year

First year you don't think about it, you're just too busy making friends and having fun

2nd Year

Second year I was like, 'I want to do nutrition', which is when I actually started thinking about it and stuff, and even then I was just like, 'well, I will see what happens in third year'

3rd Year

Now it's like, 'shit! I finish really soon, what am I going to do?!'

The approach adopted by M reflects the students involved in O'Regan's (2009) study who demonstrated little concern regarding the labour market, with only a few beginning to consider skills development as they approached the end of their second year. Alongside M, some of the other focus group students described feeling unprepared for post HE, as demonstrated below:

143

Students Unprepared (central node)

K: It's a bit scary now, I was looking forward to getting rid of all education and like exams and coursework and things, but now I'm thinking, 'what am I actually doing like with my life?' It's a bit scary 4.1841-1844

R: Now it feels real because we're finishing soon, so you feel like your panicking like, 'what am I going to do?' 1.1630-1631

JL: They really leave it totally up to us what we want to do with this degree, and I feel that that's why we speak to people that are working in retail shops with a Sports Science degree, all I have been thinking about for the last month is what am I going to do, and it's hard to keep going and thinking about it 1.977-981

H: I know loads of people that work in the home office and shops and they've all got Sports Science degrees, and you're just like, 'oh my god, what I am going to do? All this money and all that work' 1.1016-1019

JL: I feel like they give you really false hope, I can remember my parents saying, 'Sports Science, why are you doing that?' And I was like, 'no seriously, this is such an amazing course', and now I'm like, you were definitely right, I'm so wrong, it's unbelievable 1.1069-1073

JL: I chose Sports Science because it was the only thing that I would remotely want to do, and then I feel like it took me until this year to even slightly know what I want to do, and I feel like this course just leads you to where? Because you come out this year and you're qualified in nothing at all 1.836-840

JL: I do really like our course, but I feel like I'm gradually losing motivation this year because I don't know where I'm going with it, and that makes it so much harder 1.1548-1550

R: I've done so much academic work now through my whole life, school and this, I want to do something and get some skills, at the moment I can't do anything, I don't feel qualified to do any job, I'd like to do something which builds your skills and stuff 2.2010 – 2014

PL2: I quite want to go into projects working with obesity, but there doesn't seem to be many opportunities to get into that, and I was thinking about doing a PGCE, but I didn't have enough time to apply

M: If we had jobs in mind you could be like, right, 'I really want to do this, I'm going to work towards it', but because I want to be a sports nutritionist, but how many people are actually sports nutritionists? Not many 1.1552-1554

M: I do really enjoy our course, although I bitch about it, it's only because I'm stressed out about getting a job, I'm enjoying what I'm doing, but it's just thinking about the outcome, everything I'm learning I'm really interested in, I'm willing to learn, but it's just what to do afterwards which is stressing me out 1.1676 – 1684
This quote adds credence to the notion that the SSES is accounting for the development of students' technical knowledge, but not the other world of work requirements necessary for post HE preparation (page 128).

It is notable that despite all the advice and opportunities to encourage students to prepare themselves for post HE, these students were a few months away from completing their degree and not prepared. Page 189 demonstrates more students unprepared for post HE. A reason which may in part account for the students' perceived lack of preparedness, is that students' confidence can be low during the final stages of their degree and the transition from HE to post HE (Rae 2009). Holland and Holland (1977) suggested that career indecision is impacted on by a lack of confidence. Rae (2009) advised that HEIs should endeavour to nurture students' confidence levels during the important HE to world of work transition.

3.5.4.6 How can Students be engaged with Preparing for Post HE?

According to the career planning process diagram presented below, students have to be engaged and want to career plan:
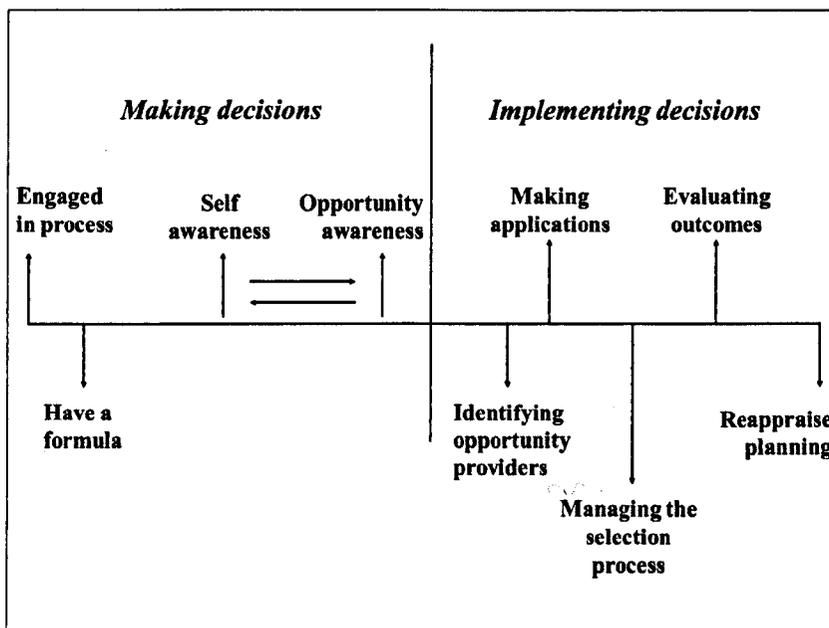
Figure 6: The career planning process diagram, as presented to ASS1 students in session 46

Whilst the SSES may be providing opportunities to help prepare students for post HE, if students are not engaged, the career planning process is futile. However, based on figure on page 145 entitled 'students unprepared', it does not appear that the students were engaged until the prospect of post HE seemed 'real' and they felt accountable (i.e. in the final semester of their third year), despite the advice of staff as demonstrated on page 143. Rae (2009) suggests that part of the reason why students are unprepared for post HE despite being offered employability opportunities is because they do not perceive post HE preparation as interesting or a priority, and Holland and Holland (1977) suggest that career indecision is partly based on a perceived lack of urgency about the need to make a decision. The focus groups felt that students should be made to feel accountable and perceive a need to engage in preparing for post HE earlier in the degree, as demonstrated below:

Engage Students in Preparing for Post HE Earlier

| R: *I feel like this is the busiest time of my uni life, I haven't the brain space to be thinking about what you want to do* 1.2768-2769 | R: *You think about it now because it's really real, because we're leaving in a couple of months, whereas in first year where we had so much free time, even last year in the first term we didn't really have any deadlines so we were doing no work, but because no one was pushing you to do anything* 1.983-986 | C: *Encourage people to think about what they want to do after uni, what they want to be with their degree, they do mention possible careers and stuff, but maybe they should emphasis it more, mention it more, reminding to pick soon so that you can better yourself to be whatever you want to be* 4.2226–2229 | S: *I don't really know what I can do, I'm still thinking, but I only really started thinking about it this year, in first and second year it would be better to have more information about what you can actually do, because everyone says, 'oh what can you do with that then?' I don't know, and it's not until you actually take modules that you actually find out more about what you can do, it's only this year that you actually find out more information* 3.654-661 |

In her second quotation above, R suggests that her lack of engagement with preparing for post HE was due to the fact that she was not being 'pushed'. Denholm (2011), Graduate Prospects (2011), Lexmond and Bradley (2010) and Redmond (2010) stated that preparing for post HE is predominantly

the responsibility of the students. However, as discussed on page 133, students are not used to taking responsibility within an educational setting. The member of staff in session 45 exemplified students being uncomfortable with responsibility:

People always get a bit uncomfortable when we start talking about PDP. It's easy somebody telling you which essay to write and which question to do, but once the onus is on you, you find out who the lazy ones are

This relates to students saying that they 'hide behind coursework' (page 132). The assessment driven culture results in students doing what they need to, when they need it in order to pass (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008). Students therefore have to perceive a 'need' to engage. Enhancing accountability and not giving students the option to be 'lazy' when the 'onus is on them' or to 'hide behind coursework' will in turn enhance engagement and learning. In his above quote, C suggests that the importance of preparing for post HE needs to be 'emphasised more'. Students need to be focused and made aware of the importance of the opportunities, advice and recommendations provided to them, in order to identify a 'need' to engage (Mail Online 2007, Graduate Prospects 2011). As previously discussed, students need to be engaged with post HE preparation earlier in their degrees when more time is available (page 145). Alumnus 11 believed that students should consider the purpose of their degree in relation to post HE at the beginning of their degree, supporting the claim from the AGR (1995), Brewer (2009) and GEES (2008) that all students should be taught career management and effective learning skills from their first year in a progressive manner (see page 111). As previously stated, the member of staff in session 3 referred to the students' time at university as 'university career' (see page 111). The researcher reflection on page 111 implies that such a philosophy should be instilled within students upon entering the SSES. As stipulated by Rae (2009), HE students need to be prepared for a post HE world which will not always allow them to take 'safe and certain' approaches. The realities of the world of work must be embedded in the HE experience in order to adequately prepare students for their post HE lives.

3.5.4.7 The Importance of Considering Post HE Options

Leitch (2006) recommended that individuals should make informed choices regarding their career. The staff advised students to consider numerous personal factors when considering post HE options:

146

What direction do I want my life to go in? What kind of lifestyle do I want? Consider the jobs lifestyles involve 35 46 26 45 33 46

If you're considering doing a postgraduate course, make sure you have clear reasons for doing it and you know how it's going to help you in the future, make sure that the route you're picking is the right route for you, don't just do it because you're not sure what else to do 38

The NSF (2010) stated the importance of ensuring students consider whether entering into employment or continuing with further study is the best option for the individual.

What are your ambitions? What do you want to do and achieve career wise? 26 45 35 46

There are a lot of options open to you, it is important to consider the options in relation to yourself 35 46

Consider what am I interested and motivated by? 26 45

You have got to have a passion, you need to find something that captivates you, so you can bring it alive and make it real 18

What attributes, qualities, skills and experience are required to achieve your career goals? 26 45 10 5/6

What am I good at? Assess your strengths and weaknesses to see how careers fit with you 33 46

What is important to me in a job? Assess your motivations, values, personality and temperament, because that can influence what you want to get out of a job 33 46

There was a sense among the phase 1 alumni that it was not only important for a person to work hard to achieve the requirements of the job, but it was also important for the job to meet the requirements of the person (see page 71). Minten (2010) suggests that simply focusing on whether graduates meet the requirements of employers does not account for the complex nature of graduate employability, and that how the world of work and employers meet graduates' needs should also be considered. Despite the advice from staff that students should consider post HE options in relation to themselves, JL and M still had concerns about making the right choice post HE:

M: I've excepted a place to do a physiology masters, I don't know if it's going to be that worthwhile, but I'm just going to do it anyway, I just don't know what else to do really, I just think it's a chance to do more research and get more experience and stuff 2.1936-1939

JL: I've been looking into doing a masters in physio, but I'm scared just because, what if I do that and that's not even what I want to do? 1.2737-2739

As demonstrated in her above quote on page 146, S lacked awareness of the post HE options available to her: *'I don't really know what I can do'*. There are a wide variety of post HE options available, both Sports Science and not Sports Science related. It is important that students are aware of all the potential avenues (NSF 2010). For example, at the employer event 58, PM stated that his company recruit from all degree sectors, which students were also informed of during careers sessions:

Around half of graduate jobs are open to graduates with any degree, there's lots of ways that your degree can be used, whether it's related or not to your degree, it's really important to be aware of all the options 35 24 22

Furthermore, a member of staff at the away day stated, '*the majority of our students' don't go into Sports Science jobs'*, highlighting the importance of increasing students' awareness regarding the range of different options. As demonstrated in Table 4 (page 34) by the HESA, over 20% of 2009 Sports Science graduates were employed in the sports related industry 6 months post graduation (HECSU/AGCAS 2010). Yorke (2006) proposed that since many graduates enter into post HE options unrelated to their degree subject, HE should ensure that students' horizons are broadened. The alumni concurred that more information about different potential career options is required (page 76). Below, some of focus group 1 demonstrated a lack of awareness regarding both Sports Science and non Sports Science related post HE options:

Sports
Science
Related

Non
Sports
Science
Related

JL: In Sports Science there are obviously jobs, but there isn't a ridiculous amount
M: It's because we don't really know what they are either, obviously we think of the obvious ones, but then there are probably loads that we haven't even considered, because why would we? But if someone maybe gave us more ideas, we could then go and research further options l.1040-1046

M: It's good that we get options, but then if you want to come out and get a job relating to your degree I think we're going to struggle, where as someone who's done maybe something like physio, who's qualified in one thing, at least they know what to apply for, where as we could apply for a whole bunch of things but then not really be arsed about any of them
R: It's good because you've got your options open, but then which options?
M: It's bad at the same time l.857-869

What more could be done?
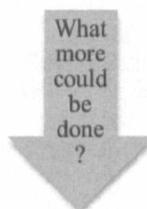
JL: It's almost too open, we want to do physiology, and we've all chosen the modules, and I feel like they should be leading you down a route
R: And them telling you which jobs you would be good at with the skills that you've got from the course
JL: But I don't think it is l.871-876

The students cited above felt that the SSES should have done more to guide them towards the post HE options that are relevant to them based on their interests and skills. This is supported by the career planning process diagram, which states the importance of students' developing self and opportunity awareness in order to consider the post HE opportunities that are available in relation to themselves (Figure 6, page 145). It is also supported by Minten's (2010) suggestion that the ability of the world of work and employers to meet students' needs is a crucial consideration in the post HE preparation of students.

Increasing students' awareness about the wide range of post HE options available to them can be interlinked with increasing students' awareness of the attributes that students are developing alongside their degree, and the applicability of such attributes to the post HE options (page 124).

3.5.4.8 How to prepare for post HE – The Students' Perspective

The focus group 1 students described how the SSES did not meet up to their expectations in relation to world of work preparation:

JL: When you're in school and you read up about this course it makes it sound awesome
H: Like you can do anything
R: It makes it sound like you're going to be in the lab like every week
JL: Yeah and you're going to be like amazingly qualified l.846–854

JL: When you're applying they say it's the most amazing uni ever, so you fall for that l.1810–1811

The students felt that more needed to be done to help support students' professional development and preparation for post HE. The lack of support and guidance the focus group students received is exemplified below:

M: Every job I have looked at to do with nutrition all want a masters or a PhD, it seems like you don't even get a look in if you've not got one 2.2165-2167

M: If I'd have known I was going to have to pay three grand and fund it myself to do a masters as well, I probably wouldn't have done this course, because who can afford to do that? I can't afford to do it, and if that's what I need to do to get a job, it's a bit of a joke after we have already got all this debt l.1075–1079

It is not fair to allow 100 plus people onto the course, it gives them false expectations, let them on to the course and then just leave them to fend for themselves after, it's like, 'that's another 200 through the system' 58.DC
This links to the alumni who highlighted a need for continued support post HE (table 13, page 73).

H: I wish they'd said during the open day, 'these are the types of jobs, but maybe you should do this course, still in the SSES type thing, but a different route' l.1106-1109

M: I feel like they just want people on the course, obviously because they just want people at the uni, whereas they're not actually trying to help you l.1111-1112

Lack of Support and Guidance for post HE Preparation:

H: I went to a physiotherapy open day before I came to uni, and they were like, 'there's no point there's no jobs', whereas when we came to the SSES open day, they were like, 'yeah, the world at your feet', and stuff like that l.1014-1016

A: I wish they'd have told me to do Exercise Science, I'd be there now l.1561

A: I wish they'd have told us in first year the difference between Sports Science and Exercise Science, because I've got a friend who does Exercise Science and they've done nutrition from first year until now and their placements are like health and nutrition and working with people that need better diets and stuff, whereas our course is really based on
JL: Elite l.1081–1088

As previously stated, students' confidence levels can be low during their final degree stages and HE to world of work transit, which may in part account for students perceived lack of support (Rae 2009). However, students need to perceive a 'need' to engage with preparing for post HE. As demonstrated on page 93, students were informed that they would undergo *'an employability focused curriculum'* and effectively given the impressions that they were receiving a package deal which would result in them graduating prepared to enter the graduate job market. Since students were given false expectations, it is not surprising that they did not perceive a need to engage and prepare for post HE. Students must be aware of how their course will approach post HE preparation, and given realistic

expectations regarding the reality of the post HE world (Browne 2010, Graduate Prospects 2011, NSF 2010, Rae 2009, Redmond 2011).

3.5.4.9 What more can be done?

As previously mentioned, there needs to be better careers related support for students from early on in their degrees (page 145-146). Based on the quotes presented on page 149, such support should even be as early as pre-application open days, in order to help students make the right choice to suit their needs, a suggestion that is supported by numerous authors (Browne 2010, Coughlan 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, NSF 2010, O'Regan 2009). As demonstrated, support was not available to students when required, and students were not being prepared for post HE (pages 108 and 144 respectively). The above extract from DC in session 58, suggests that students are handled in a manner that reflects the claim from the Leitch Report (2006) that people are the 'natural resource' of the 21st century. As will be highlighted on page 302, this approach does not do justice to the complexity of students. As stated by the 2011 White paper, the student experience and students' needs require more consideration (BIS 2011). The above quotations show that the SSES did not meet up to some students' expectations, and Yorke and Knight (2006) stated that one size does not fit all with regard to students' employability. Since students are orientated to pursue their education and post HE preparation in different ways, HEIs need to ensure they meet the needs of the broader student population (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009).

It has been established that some students were unprepared for post HE. In the quotation below, R and S reveal how they intended to prepare for post HE:

R: Our course is so broad, and there's no obvious route way, like for me, I'm thinking, 'ok, I might like to do a masters in the future, if it's not too much money', but I'd rather decide what I want to do it in first, what I want to do is try and get some placements or like volunteering experience, watching people doing the jobs and talking to people, like one of my mum's friends works in a hospital and she said she'd put me in touch with the dietetics person there, and I can just talk to them about different kinds of jobs, and then if I find one I like and you have to do a masters I'll be motivated to go and do it then, and hopefully do one that gives you skills or something 2.1984 – 1999

S: My mum's been going to this biomechanics lab at home, so I might try and go there and get something that way, even if it's just going in and seeing, it just tells you if you want to do that 4.2184–2187

The process that R and S intend to go through in pursuit of post HE options could have been undergone whilst they were at university. Students' can be supported and guided to help them decide what they want to do post HE. Gaining work experience, observing and conducting informational interviewing with employees in their working environments will help students to determine where they want to go post HE. Furthermore, encouraging students to have something to aim for post HE will enhance students' sense of accountability and motivate students to engage with the opportunities provided. As stated by M on page 144: *'if we had jobs in mind, you could be like, 'right, I really want to do this, I'm going to work towards it'.*

Increase Awareness of the Reality of the World of Work

In phase 1 of this research programme, the alumni recommended that students need to be made more aware of the reality of the working world and the relationship between HE and the world of work (see page 75), a notion that is reiterated by phase 2 part 1 of this research programme:

M: People just think, 'I'll go to uni, get a degree, get a job', whereas now we're here we've realised it's not that simple l.1617-1618

In order to enhance their understanding of the importance of the opportunities and the advice that the SSES offers, students need to be aware that a degree is not the 'key' to the world of work. According to Yorke (2006), employability is probabilistic, in that a students' characteristics impact on the extent that they are employable, but the labour market and other factors determine success. Students need to be made aware of the reality and outcome of their degree, and what they need to be doing during their time at university to ensure they are prepared for post HE. Focus group 1 showed a lack of awareness regarding the reality of the world of work in the below quotations:

R: I don't feel any rush, I don't want to go straight into the job for the rest of my life, there's no rush
H: That's why I'm going to Australia to escape the fact, because I just know I'll have a nervous breakdown
JL: That course that I was looking at starts in January, which as much as it would be annoying because it delays you again for a few months, it would be good because it gives you a full on break, but then if I don't get into that then I'm screwed, no backup plan l.2875-2884

H: That's what you think isn't it, your jobs going to be for the rest of your life l.2917

According to the AGR (2010), 'cradle to grave' employment is now outdated, with graduates having numerous jobs and careers in a post HE lifetime. Increasing students' awareness of the reality of the world of work can decrease students post HE concerns and anxieties. If students are adequately prepared, the transition from HE to post HE can be an exciting as opposed to worrying time for students.

3.5.4.10 Summary: How to prepare for post HE

This section aimed to provide an overview of the advice and recommendations students were provided regarding the requirements of the world of work and how to adequately prepare for post HE, combined with students' perceptions and experiences of such opportunities. A summary of recommendations for how to prepare students for post HE will be provided under the themes that were used in this section:

Experience

The staff highlighted the importance of gaining experience for world of work preparation to students. Experience helps to prepare students for the world of work by enhancing their ability to compete in the graduate job market, by providing students with opportunities to develop contacts and the opportunity to trial potential job ideas. However, students did not engage with experience. Students reported that

they *'do not know where to start'* when it comes to gaining work experience. A lack of confidence and a lack of accountability also prevented students engaging with experience. Students need more support and encouragement to help them gain experience. They need more insight into experience options and how to engage with work experience. Providing students with insight into the reality of the world of work and what employers want can make students feel more accountable:

↑ Emphasis on gaining work experience **+** ↑ Awareness of importance of experience **=** ↑Accountability
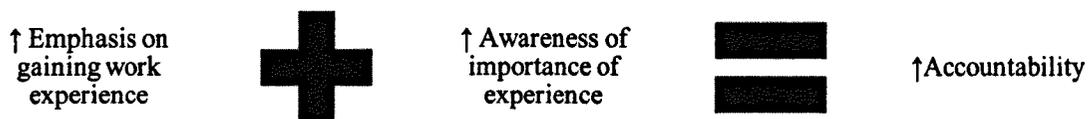
The Importance of Preparing Early

Despite the opportunities provided by the SSES and advice from the staff to prepare for post HE during their degrees, students reported feeling unprepared. The importance of preparing for post HE needs to be emphasised. Students need to be 'pushed' and encouraged to engage. This is important because students are not used to taking responsibility in an educational setting. Students need to be focused and made aware of the importance of the opportunities, advice and recommendations provided to them in order to identify a 'need' to engage. Students should be engaged in preparing for post HE and made to feel accountable from the beginning of their degrees in a developmental manner.

Post HE Options

The staff advised students to consider options in relation to themselves. However, students did not know where to start looking at options and had difficulty deciding which options were best for them. Due to the wide range of post HE options available to Sports Science graduates, the SSES needs to make students aware of all the potential post HE avenues, and guide and prepare students towards post HE options that are relevant to their individual needs, skills and interests.

How to prepare for post HE – the Students' Perspective

The students described how the SSES did not meet their post HE preparing expectations. More needs to be done to help support students' professional development and preparation for post HE. The student experience and their needs require more consideration. Preparation and support is required from pre-application to ensure that students make the right choice to suit their needs and are aware of the reality and outcome of their degree. Students should be supported and guided through the process of determining and appropriately preparing for their post HE aspirations. Students need to be aware of what they need to be doing during their time at university to ensure they are prepared for post HE. Encouraging students to have post HE aspirations will enhance students' sense of accountability and motivate students to engage with the opportunities provided by the SSES. Students need to be made more aware of the reality of the working world and the relationship between HE and the world of work. In order to enhance their understanding of the importance of the opportunities and the advice that the SSES offers, students need to be aware that a degree is not the key to the world of work.

152

Accounting for such factors will reinforce students' confidence regarding the HE to post HE transit.

Final Thought:

Think about what you want from your time at LJMU, and what your career goals are, you don't need a concrete idea about what you want to do, but knowing the direction that you want to go in is useful 26 45

Deciding the direction of their post HE lives is a daunting task for HE students. As implied in the above quote, students do not need to make a 'concrete' decision, but making steps towards the direction that they want to go in is invaluable. Students need to be engaging with the recommendations discussed in order to enhance post HE preparation. It is essential that a culture of training and preparing for post HE is instilled within the SSES from the beginning of the SSES degree programmes.

3.6 Student Engagement

The data presented in the first two sections of phase 2 part 1 demonstrates that the SSES are proactive in providing opportunities, advice and encouragement to help students develop personally and professionally. However students are not engaging, as demonstrated through a lack of engagement with the personal tutor system, the careers provision, the guest lectures, the laboratory practical sessions, advice to engage in work experience and encouragement to prepare for post HE. As previously discussed, the provision of employability related opportunities does not guarantee that students will engage (Yorke 2006). The fact that students did not engage with the opportunities, advice and encouragement that staff provided highlights a dissonance between the perceptions, understandings and expectations of the SSES staff and students. Research was required to examine the nature of the dissonance, and to identify how gaps can be narrowed. As highlighted at the SSES staff away day, SSES staff are aware that there is a student engagement issue, and feel that a better understanding of students is required in order to diminish the dissonance (page 102). The extracts below demonstrate that the staff do not understand students' needs, by making assumptions about students' reasons for going to university and doing a Sports Science degree:

How many people are members of BASES? Nobody's joined BASES? You're all on a Sports and Exercise Science course and no bodies joined BASES as a student member? 29

As you move into the workplace and leave university and hopefully get a job within Sports Science 32

The applied module is often what people say they got the most out of, because it's doing what they came to university to be 29

Post HE Destinations: Staffs' Assumptions:

If you go on to work in sport, which I hope most of you will, you will have to deal with doping control 28

Most students find it quite refreshing to write the reflective assignment, because you're writing about something that you actually came to uni to do, real world applied practice 30

Students are looking to progress as a Sports Scientist, that's why you're here 18

According to the alumni, students do not necessarily do a Sports Science course because they want to work in the sports sector (see Table 7, page 43). Presented below are some of the focus group students' reasons for going to university and choosing to study a SSES degree:

D: It was always something I wanted to do when I was at school, it was college and then university; there wasn't any sort of other option for me D.1226-1228

D: I wanted to become more independent by moving out, and it was just the degree at the end of the day, separating myself from thousands of other 21 year olds, so I thought, 'why not be skint for three years, but then come out and do a job for the rest of my life I enjoy D.1233-1242

JL: I chose Sports Science because it was the only thing that I remotely wanted to do 1.836-847

I did Science and Football because I loved sports at school X1

As demonstrated in the self criticality section, the researcher chose to pursue Sports Science based on enjoyment reasons (see page 24). As previously discussed, it is not realistic to expect all Sports Science graduates to work in the Sports Science industry, and staff making unrealistic assumptions about students post HE destinations could potentially fuel the notion that graduates have failed if they do not end up working the Sports Science field, an attitude that was exemplified by the alumni (page 77).

This section aimed to explore the students' culture within their L&T environment in order to better understand students' attitudes and perceptions in relation to the opportunities being provided, and investigate issues of engagement. From the researchers' two year immersion in the students L&T sessions and culture, the researcher identified issues of engagement based around the following three themes:

The 'Lack of Focus and Engagement in L&T Sessions' Culture

The 'Assessment Driven' Culture

The 'Lack of Dialogue Between the Staff and Students' Culture

Each of these themes will be discussed in turn with a subsequent summary. Issues of engagement within the laboratory L&T sessions was discussed from page 114.

154

3.6.1 The 'Lack of Focus and Engagement in L&T Sessions' Culture

Within the L&T sessions the students were not always focused and engaged with the task in hand. For example, during session 48, the researcher observed as two girls sitting two rows in front of her have a momentary water fight using their water bottles whilst the lecturer was conducting the lecture. The researcher identified the following 'lack of focus and engagement' issues whilst immersed in the L&T sessions:

The Culture of 'Lack of Focus and Engagement' in L&T Sessions

Mobile Phones	Talking	The 'Sleeping' Culture	The 'Arrive Late, Pack Away Early' Culture	The 'Blackboard Backup' Culture	The 'Attendance' Culture

Talking
|
The 'Drunken' Topic
|
The 'Negative' Topic
  └ The 'Unprepared, Unaware' Topic

Lack of engagement in the L&T Sessions: Mobile phones and talking

Mobile phones (notably 32 18 37 44 51 56).

In session number 18, the lecturer stopped his presentation after half an hour to tell some students, 'can you put your phones down please'. Fifty five minutes into the same lecture, the lecturer had to comment again, 'just make sure your mobile phones are turned off please'.

In the psychology lab whilst group work was being undertaken, a male student made a phone call to cancel an appointment. Later in the lab, a male student sitting behind the researcher was enrossed in his phone, a few minutes later, exclaiming, 'fucking hell! Andy Carroll is leaving Newcastle!'

In the physiology lab, the students stood around observing and quietly chatting amongst themselves whilst field tests were being conducted.

Talking (notably 18 34 44 45 48 22 26 37 29 33 56 51 54).

In the psychology lab, the students talked among themselves. One girl was telling her a fellow student the problems that her sister was having with her nursing degree.

In sessions 29 33 37 44 the lecturers had to resort to asking the students to stop talking.

During session 37 the researcher noticed the low mummer of a male and a female voice talking. This continued for a few minutes, before the lecturer said: *Can you cut down on the chatter please, because it's quite distracting.*

Approximately 1 hour seven minutes into a 1 hour 15 minute lecture, the lecturer said: *Come on guys, listening, I haven't finished yet* 44

Approximately twenty minutes into an hour and five minute lecture, the lecturer said: *is there something you don't understand at the back?* 29

Approximately fifty two minutes into the same lecture, the lecturer had to stop their lecture again: *excuse me do you not understand what I'm saying? Is there some confusion?* 29

With regard to the talking issue, the researcher noted some recurrent topics of conversation that occurred within the L&T sessions:

The 'Drunken' Topic	The 'Negative' Topic	The 'Unprepared, Unaware' Topic
This topic of conversation was orientated around going out, drinking and hang-overs.	There was a culture of students making negative comments about the L&T content (notably sessions 22 48 21 9).	The researcher over heard students demonstrating a general lack of engagement with their course.

155

Examples from each of these three topics of conversation are presented below:

At the beginning of the lecture, the researcher watched as a male student said the following to another male student sitting a few rows across from him:

'Have you seen Dave this morning, he looks rough as fuck! He couldn't even open his eyes!' 3

Whilst waiting for session 25 to start, the researcher heard:

'How are we feeling?'

'Alright actually, surprisingly, I got up for 9 o'clock as well'.

During session 18, the researcher overheard a student whisper the following to a fellow student, *'what you doing tonight? Are you out?'*

In 54 the physiology lab, a student came and stood with one of the students behind where the researcher was residing. They initiated a conversation, which began with one student asking the other, *'did you go out this weekend?'*

The 'Drunken' Topic:

As walking out a lecture, the researcher heard the following exchange between two students:

'I can still taste the vodka.'

'Yeah, and I can still smell it on you!' 18

During a lecture, two male students sitting in front of the researcher had the following discussion: *'Whatever he's just said for the past twenty minutes, I've not listened to one thing'*

'Where did you go yesterday?'

'I went to the pub at about 1 o'clock, and then Cava, BaaBaa, and I've got a stamp for Funky but I don't know whether I went or not' 44

In the break between the two lectures, the researcher heard this same hung-over student say to his friend: *'Fucking hell, get me out of this place!'* 44

When walking out at the end of session 10, the researcher heard the following exchange:

'That was such a waste of time'

'I know, I said it would just be going over what we did last year, we know what we did last year, we were here!'

During the break in session 48 the researcher watched a male student get up from his seat and walk across the lecture theatre to where a group of male students were sitting. The male student initiated the following exchange:

'It's quite interesting today'

'Are you being serious?!'

'I'm being sarcastic' 48

The group of approximately four male students were talking amongst themselves for the majority of session 48. During this time one of the students said the following, *'she's qualified, but she doesn't actually have a clue does she'.*

The 'Negative' Topic:

The researcher noted that mummers of, *'this is shit'*, *'fucking hell'*, could be heard from students throughout session 9, despite valuable information being provided regarding student loans and funding, contents insurance, doctor registration, mental health services etc. doctor registration, mental health services etc.

In session 22, a student sitting a couple of seats to the left of the researcher whispered, *'I wish she'd fuck off!'*

When walking in session 29, one student asked another student, *'do you think this is going to be the same as last year, where they stand at the front and tell us how good they are, tell us how they got to where they are?'*

The researcher heard a student comment after a guest lecture, *'that was totally pointless for me, because I'm not doing nutrition and I'm not doing physiology'.* 42

156

The 'Unprepared, Unaware' Topic

Before the lecture had started, one male student turned to the male student sitting next to him and asked , *'have you got a pen?'* The student in question shook his head. The same question was asked of the next student along in the row of lecture theatre seats, who also shook his head, causing all three students to start laughing [7b]

Approximately 38 minutes into a 1 hour 15 minute physiology lecture, two male students sitting in front of the researcher said:

'What's he on about here?'

'I don't know, physiology?!' (laughter) [44]

Approximately 42 minutes into the same lecture, the researcher heard the same two male students say, *'what the fucks Wingate?'*

'It's.....erm.....I've forgotten' (laughter) [44]

In a break between session 24, one student exclaimed, *'you didn't know we did a major project in level 3?!'* [24]

The researcher made note of her perceptions regarding the talking issue that was present during the L&T sessions. These perceptions are presented in below:

> *Approximately 1 hour 5 minutes into lecture 48, one of the lads in front of me starting talking to his friend, I had to fight the urge to tell him to shut up, and even debated kicking the back of his chair.*

> *In session 26, there were people talking throughout. I found the boys next to me very annoying. I contemplated telling them to, 'shut up', but I had to remind myself of my 'fly on the wall' role, and my desire not to interfere with the students university, learning and cultural experience (see page 95).*

The researcher found the talking within the L&T sessions both distracting and irritating. It appeared that the SSES students also found the talking irritating. After session 37, the researcher over heard two Sports Science students discussing the lecture:

> *Student 1: 'That girl would not stop talking!'*
> *Student 2: 'I know. The lecturer even had to tell her to stop!'*

The 'Sleeping' Culture

The researcher noted that students were disengaged in L&T sessions due to a general lack of concentration:

The researcher followed a group of male students into the lecture room for session 34. As one of the students pulled open the door to reveal the dark lecture theatre he commented, *'why is it so dark in there? It makes me fall asleep!'*

As the researcher was walking up the stairs of the lecture theatre in session 22, she heard one of the students following her up the stairs say, *'I'm going to sit at the back so I can fall asleep'.*

When walking out of session 4 the researcher heard a student say, *'that was painful wasn't it?'* His friend replied with, *'yeah, I was falling asleep.'*

As the researcher was walking out at the end of lecture 3, one of the students was informed by his peer of some important information that he missed, *'he said it as you were sleeping!'*

The nutrition lab session 52 was conducted in the style of a lecture and took place in a computer room. Throughout the lecture, the girl sitting on the computer nearest to the researcher was struggling to stay awake. Her head kept nodding down. The two boys sitting at the computers the other side of the girl were finding the fact that she kept 'nodding off' highly amusing.

157

The 'Arrive Late, Pack Away Early' Culture

Generally, a few students arrived late to the majority of the lectures that the researcher attended. Furthermore, the signal for the end of the lecture appeared to be the presentation of a slide entitled 'summary' or 'references'. When either of these slides appeared in lectures, the students started to pack away, and even start talking amongst themselves (notably [37] [34] [45] [26]). For example in session 37, the lecturer had to complete his lecture over students talking.

The 'Blackboard Backup' Culture

It appeared that it did not matter if students did not engage in the L&T sessions, because they had the backup option of blackboard:

Upon leaving the lecture room at the end of session 19, the researcher overheard a student say, *'I don't know why I bothered coming to this, I didn't even make any notes'*. His friend replied, *'well that's where you went wrong then'*, proudly holding up a page of notes to show his friend. The first student's response was, *'yeah, but the lecture notes are going to be up on blackboard, so.......'*.

In session 15, the lecturer informed students, *'the first half of today's lecture is the role of the sports coach, and the second half is reflective practice and it will be on your exam, so if you decide to leave in the break between the two sessions half way though, you won't be able to answer at least ten of the questions on your exam paper'*. The researcher heard a student sitting behind her mummer, *'just get it off blackboard'*.

JL from focus group 1 made reference to the blackboard backup culture: *'blackboard has everything on it, a lot of people miss lectures and they're like, 'whatever, we'll read the blackboard slides'* [1.1849-1851]

The 'Attendance' Culture

At the away day the staff felt that poor attendance was a problem that prevented students from engaging with the L&T process:

The lectures are a choice; the students have a choice whether or not to turn up, a large proportion, if not the majority don't turn up [SAD.EZ]

Getting students to turn up in the first place, that is the problem, engagement in the teaching process, people just don't turn up [SAD.EZ]

Data from the L&T sessions related to attendance is presented below:

Attendance and Engagement in the L&T Sessions

In session 40 there were approximately 67 students in attendance. During the lecture, the lecturer commented, *'there are 150 students if we have a full house; I take it the rest of you are still in bed.'*

In the physiology lab, the researcher heard a student say, *'I set my alarm for eight this morning to go to biomechanics. It didn't happen. I haven't been for weeks!'*

The guest lectures had low attendance:

In session 39, 29 of the 151 ASS3 students were in attendance, with one of these students leaving forty minutes into the hour long session.

In session 56, 35 of the 231 ASS1 students were in attendance.

The careers sessions had low attendance:

12 male and 9 female students attended session 58, which was open to all SSES students.

Of the 231 students enrolled on the ASS1 module, 5 male students attended session 46, and one male mature student attended session 50.

Out of the 151 students enrolled on the ASS3 module in 2010/2011, 16 attended session 35, and 4 male students attended session 43.

Students did not return from the breaks in between lectures:

In session 34, students were provided with a five minute break after the first hour of lecturing and told that they had to come back for the second half of the lecture, *'the graduate skills officer has some important information for you'*. Approximately fifteen students walked out in the break, and approximately four students returned.

The first half of session 17 was assignment preparation and the second half was a presentation from the graduate development centre about the universities employability award. For the first half of the session, some students had to stand at the back of the lecture theatre because there were not enough seats. After the break between these sessions, there were notably less people standing around.

In session 44, students studying the applied Sports Psychology degree were not required to stay for the physiology session that was after the assignment preparation lecture. As the physiology lecture started after the break between the sessions, the researcher heard a student exclaim, *'fucking hell, half the class is gone!'*

The two extracts below from the L&T sessions shed some light on the reasons behind the poor attendance and engagement with the L&T opportunities provided:

In session 16, the researcher asked the girl sitting next sitting her, *'is it a guest lecture today?'*

'I don't know, I have hardly been to any of these lectures.'

'How come?'

'Because we only have one lecture on Thursdays, and it's a lot to come all the way into town for one lecture.'

In session 55, the researcher overheard the following exchange between two students:

'Did you go to (lecturer's) tutorial?'

'No, because I hadn't done the work'.

3.6.2 The 'Assessment Driven Culture'

Assessment appeared to be a big driver for students' attendance; attendance was noticeably higher in assignment preparation sessions:

In session 17, an assignment preparation session, there were too many students for seats. The lecturer commented, *'it's a good turnout, not surprising for an assessment lecture'.*

In session 49, there were only a handful of seats remaining out of 160 seats in the lecture theatre.

Exam preparation session 19 was the fullest ASS1 lecture the researcher had sat in. Even the girl that had told the researcher, *'I've hardly been to any of these lectures'*, was there (see above).

During session 19, the lecturer reminded the students what they should be revising, *'the role of the coach, reflective practice cycle, performance analysis, BASES and UK Sports Governance, the exam is partly based on the information presented by the guest lecturers'*. At this revelation, a low hum of voices began to fill the room, highlighting the students' regret for not attending the guest lecture sessions.

This relationship between assessment and attendance was also reflected in the focus groups:

Group 1 discussed their reasons for not attending a seminar:

R: It was well known that it wasn't on the exam, so very few people turned up
M: People told us it wasn't on the exam and told us it was pointless and not to go, so then no one went
R: And if you know for a fact that it's not going to be on the exam, you don't care
M: It was just pointless, if you know it's definitely not going to be on the exam, what's the point?
2.1099–1102

Group 1 also revealed a similar attitude towards attending modules which were not assessed:

A: The modules that you don't have an exam or a coursework in, but you had to still go to the lectures......
M : So no one ever went 2.2689-2692
H: In first year we didn't have anything for that module, so no one went, and it was just pointless
M : I never used to go to that Friday afternoon; I think I turned up once
H : I think I turned up like once, and then I was like, 'hang on a minute, there's no coursework or exam, no!'
2.2709–2715

The focus on assessment was also highlighted through the students' engagement with learning:

Students took more notes when the L&T session was related to an assessment (notably sessions 26 48 19).

In lecture 37, the researcher heard a student ask his peer, *'how much is that exam worth?'* the researcher did not hear the response, but it caused the student to exclaim, *'is it?! I best get learning then!'*

The staff articulated that they were aware of the students focus on assessment:

The assessment is where everybody switches on 29

It's amazing how many people get their pens out when you put the assessment slide up 45

75% of marks achieved at level 3 will go towards your degree classification, so you may start to feel the pressure 24

The bottom line is, if you want to know how to pass this work, pens at a ready 30

We get students who have been trained to pass tests, they won't attend the lectures if there is not any assessment on it SAD.CC

The staff also demonstrated an orientation around assessment:

Last year 56% passed out right, 44% had to re-sit, 19% dropped out, 9% are going into year 2 with year 1 modules still to complete, 16% re sitting first year, 65% of your cohort from last year are here now – it's not a good start 22

This year counts towards your degree now, it's very important 23

The ultimate goal is to get the best degree you can possible have for your money s 22

Staff Assessment Focus:

It's important to do as well as you can on your degree because academic results are important 46

Collect as many module credits as we can, that's the aim of the game 23

You need to decide, what do you want out of your degree, and how are you going to get that, consider what your module choices will mean for your progression, think strategically, plan for success s 22

Focus, and pass everything that you can pass with the best grade that reflects your ability 22

The staff attempted to utilise the assessment driven culture to engage students:

At the beginning of session 37, the lecturer highlighted which module aims and learning outcomes the lecture would be addressing, from the perspective of passing the subsequent end of year exam.

We'll do the session in two halves; if you're daft enough to escape in the break you won't be able to answer the questions on part two of the exam 48 15

Bottom line for you as students is, 'what do I need to know to pass the exam', if you only rely on slides that you'll get today, you'll be able to answer about two out of the ten questions, if you do the reading, you'll be able to answer ten out of ten, you do the maths, you engage with it how you want 48

The crux of this is the assessment, and fail to engage with this material at your peril, you need to pass this module to get an honours degree, that's the bottom line, and having been a student in the dim and distant past, I know that's what you want to know, I understand that the approach is to try and put the least amount of work in to get the maximum value 30

If you aim for 40% you may not achieve it, aim for first class 9

D agreed that students should avoid the '40% mentality':

Start first year as if it's your last year, I've got a lot of friends who scraped the 40% in first year, but they've not been able to turn it round since, because if you've got the 40% mentality, then I think you're going to get that throughout, but if you start as if first year counts it puts you in a better place for second and third year
D.1350–1358

The extracts below demonstrate that for students, assessment justifies effort:

JL: For our dissertation, our tutor gives us a mark but it's like a 5% mark, and it's just about our meetings with him and how often you go see him, it's not like how you worked in the lab
R: Because he's never in the lab with us, he never saw us
JL: But that's how we got the results we got, so why be marked on how many times we went to see him, how's that relevant?
A: Because it's how proactive you are isn't it
JL: Yet if we got good results and worked our arse off in the lab every day, then why does it matter that we went to see him once a week rather than twice a week or whatever? 2.3505-3518

S: I went at the start of the year to the universities employability award, where they tell you in one day how to do it, and I was like, 'yeah, I will do it', but because it's not a deadline I haven't done it 4.2089–2091

EG: If you're given a deadline, you always meet it 4.2087

D: If we were to be assessed on the universities employability award then a lot more people would do it, well we'd have to do it, whereas at the minute it's like, 'well, we're not being assessed on it, why should we waste our time on it?'
D.1087-1091

D describes assessment as 'the only thing that students respond to':

D: The only thing students respond to is assessments, because all we're bothered about, is how we're going to be assessed, what we need to do to pass, I know it doesn't sound very good, but that's what the majority of students think D.1156–1160

This assessment driven culture is reflected in the researcher's self criticality section, whereby the researcher's *'only real priority whilst I was at university was to achieve the best final grade that I possibly could'* (see page 24). As stated by Brown *et al.* (1997: 7), *"assessment defines what students regard as important"*. In this manner, the goal for HE students is to pass the degree as opposed to learn (Ainley and Allen 2010). This results in students learning what they need when they need it, disregarding information they do not perceive a need to engage with (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008). As demonstrated by Burgess this can be detrimental:

"The persistence of a system that concentrates on a single summative judgement results in a fixation on achieving a number that is considered 'good'. This drives the behaviours of academic staff and students and works to the detriment of the currency of other information" (Burgess 2007: 5).

As a result, more emphasis is placed on academic achievements and qualifications than world of work preparation (Roberts 2009). The assessment driven culture that exists within the SSES can be summarised in the below quotation from the member of staff conducting session 29:

A degree is like learning to drive, you get your degree, and then you go out into the world of practice, you only learn how to drive, when you've passed your driving test, before that you're learning to pass a test

In session 40, the lecturer mentioned intrinsic feedback, which triggered the researcher into recalling about proprioceptors, the muscles stretch receptors functioning to prevent damage:

> *I began to wonder if I had remembered the name and the function and the receptors correctly. I considered asking the lecturer at the end of the session whether my recall was correct. However, it then occurred to me that I may have to write down the names of the receptors, because when I was at university I learnt discipline related words based on how they are spelt phonetically, to ensure that I spelt them correctly under assessment conditions. For example, I used to pronounce the silent 'c' in gastrocnemius, in order to correctly remember the spelling.*

The researcher's strategic learning exemplifies Burgess's (2007) claim that summative assessment drives the behaviour of students at the detriment of other invaluable information. As highlighted at the staff away day, such summative assessment does not prepare students for the reality of the post HE world (page 128):

"There is a need for assessment to equip students for the longer term, for life wide and lifelong learning; for a life and work where there is little formal assessment
A need for assessment that equips students for life time learning and work" (Boud and Falchikov 2006).

As discussed, students need to be prepared for the requirements of the world of work (see page 133). At the beginning of session 37, the lecturer discussed which module aims and learning outcomes the lecture would be addressing, from the perspective of passing the subsequent exam that the students had to sit at the end of the academic year. Students need to start 'learning to drive' whilst they are at university. The focus of assessment and learning should not just be on the development of technical knowledge and gaining the highest grade possible; it should also be on how such curriculum interventions prepare students for their post HE lives (page 133):

Not everything you do in your degree you will use in the world of work, but a degree gives you time management, the ability to write properly, talk to people properly........ 58.DC

~

The major project is fantastic, it builds organisation, project management, working to deadlines, liaising, networking – all those things which we don't realise and don't fundamentally think about all the time SAD.CC

~

We don't understand the generic skills that we are achieving, and more importantly, students don't SAD.CC

The assessment driven culture should be utilised to prepare students for post HE, by creating a sense of accountability. The member of staff in session 30 stated:

If there isn't a demand to engage, then people won't do it: lack of accountability, lack of engagement 30

Learning outcomes need to be aligned to the world of work requirements. However, students must perceive learning goals to be meaningful and worth engaging (Marzano 1992). There is a need to

make students aware of the importance of general transferable aspects of their degree. Students need to be informed of the important world of work preparation involved with the curriculum interventions (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Brewer 2009, Leitch 2006, Yorke and Knight 2006).

3.6.3 The 'A Lack of Dialogue between the Staff and Students' Culture

The researcher identified the following 'lack of dialogue between staff and students' issues, each of which will be discussed in turn.

The Culture of 'A Lack of Dialogue Between the Staff and Students'

3.6.3.1 The 'Question' Culture: Within L&T Sessions	3.6.3.2 The 'Question' Culture: Outside L&T Sessions	3.6.3.3 A Lack of Student-Student Dialogue	3.6.3.4 Reasons behind the lack of dialogue	3.6.3.5 What More Could be Done?
Students' Perceptions	Students' Perceptions		A Lack of Community	
	The need for a greater dialogue		The world renowned SSES status	
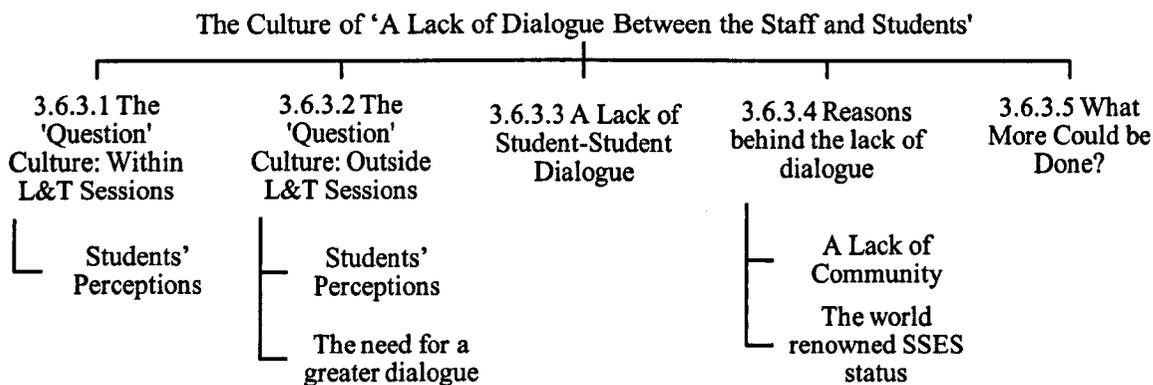
3.6.3.1 The 'Question' Culture: Within L&T Sessions

As demonstrated on page 114, students were encouraged to ask the guest lecturers questions. At the end of each of the guest speaker sessions, the students were given the opportunity to ask the speaker questions. However, the students did not actively engage with and make the most of these opportunities:

For example, at the end of session 39, the speaker said, *'if you have any questions about going from an undergraduate to working in elite sport, go for it'.* One student asked, *'what was your route way when you left uni?'* After this question was answered, the students did not offer any more questions. The lecturer proceeded to ask a few questions, before saying to the students, *'any more questions guys?'* This was followed by silence, so the lecturer announced the end of the session.

At the end of session 42, the speaker said, *'any questions either about the cycling or practitioner stuff, or your degree?'* This question was followed by a ten second silence, before the lecturer intervened and said, *'any questions guys?'* there was silence for approximately five seconds before the lecturer said, *'you don't get many of these opportunities, use the time'.* Still no response. *'Somebody must be interested in something'.* The lecturer resorted to asking a question himself, *'how many applications do you get for posts at the EIS?'* Midway through this question being answered, a student put his hand up and asked: *'is it true you burnt the suits the cyclists wore in Beijing, to stop everyone else knowing what they were like?'* This initial question then seemed to trigger more questioning from the students. *'What finish time are you aiming for for 2012?' 'Are there any work experience opportunities in elite sport?' 'In a typical week, how often would you be in contact with the team itself?' 'Are we going to win 2012?'*

Students did not ask any questions at the end of session 56 when given the opportunity. However, the member of staff who normally encouraged students to ask the guest speakers questions was not the member of staff facilitating this session.
During session 56, the speaker tried to get students to answer questions, and appeared surprised by the lack of response, *'has anyone spoken to you about BASES and the accreditation process?'* (No response) *'No?'* (No response) *'Have you heard of BASES?'* (No response) *'Give me some feedback here!'*
Later in the session the speaker asked, *'what tendon does your quadriceps move into?'* (No response) *'Flipping heck, have you had anatomy yet?!'*
The guest was a lecturer at another university, and his surprise suggested that he was not used to such a lack of engagement and community amongst students.

The researcher attended a guest speaker session for the Applied Science and Football module$_1$, which is part of the SSES Science and Football programme.
There was a lot more question and answer interaction in this session than there was in the ASS guest lectures. Below are some examples of the questions that students asked the speaker at the end of the session.

'What was the interview like?'

'What did you have to do in the interview?'

'How did you learn how to use the performance analysis software?'

'Would you have got offered the job with a MSc?'

163

The questions that the students asked in the Science and Football session were more employability focused than in the ASS sessions. This may have been due to the session being more specialised and specific to the interests and area of study of the Science and Football students. As stated, some of the focus group students described the careers information as too 'general' and not 'specific' enough (page 111). On occasions, the staff tried to engage students in question and answer dialogue within lectures:

At the beginning of lecture 32, the lecturer warned, *'we want you to get involved; we've got a task for you to do'*. During the introduction and theoretical background to the task, the lecturer asked, *'are there any other words that spring to mind when you hear the word ethics?'* This question was followed by no response. *'Any ideas? We're hoping for some interaction, you'll be forced into interaction with the task we're going to be doing in a moment, anyone got any ideas? We've got integrity, commitment, truth....'* Eventually, two students piped up, *'safety'* and *'moral'.*

In lecture 31, the lecturer tried to engage the group with answering questions. It took approximately a minute and a half to get responses from the students. *'It seems like we're slow this morning'*, the member of staff commented. At another point when the lecturer tried to ask a question and got no response, he said, *'maybe we're going to have to do it another way if you're not going to engage'*. He gave students the choice of four answers, which he then said one by one. The students had to put their hands up when they thought he had said the right answer.

The fact that students did not ask questions in the L&T sessions meant that students did not ask question when they had a query in relation to their academic work:

In session 30, the researcher overheard two girls speculating about the assessment criteria:

'I don't understand what the 10% is for?'

'Well that will be what we have done as a group to hand back to the person that we have done the analysis for'.

'I don't know'.

Despite not being clear on the criteria, it seemed that the girls were going to leave their query unresolved.

Students in the physiology lab 54 demonstrated an unwillingness to ask questions to clarify their queries. As everyone got up and prepared to leave at the end of the lab, the researcher heard a student behind her say quietly to another student, *'what are we supposed to do for this assignment then?'* A male student was also heard whispering, *'how the fuck are we supposed to write up 10 pages on this then?'*

As noted by Astin (1999), passivity such as that demonstrated by the students in the above examples, is a sign of a lack of involvement which will result in students not learning and developing in the intended manner. Furthermore, if students do not make queries when they need to clarify their understanding of a given entity, it may explain why the SSES staff feel that, *'some mistakes are made consistently, despite telling them what they have done wrong'* SAD.

- ### *Students' Perceptions*

The girls group attributed the large cohort size to the lack of interaction in lectures:

K: I don't like speaking in huge rooms, like in first year, there are hundreds of people and you don't really want to speak in front of everyone 3.991-993
~
M: Especially in first year, you'd never want to speak up in class and ask questions, because you don't want to look like an idiot in front of all these people you don't know
R: 250 people in a lecture hall that's so big
JL: When you get to third year the lecturers are way different, but they're still joking and saying, 'why is nobody talking out?' and I'm like, 'I still can't speak up in this class, because there are just too many people'
M: And if you get shot down once, it's like, 'oh god, I'm never speaking again' 1.1160-1171

According to the girls, class size has a major impact on students' question and answer interaction with staff in L&T sessions. This may explain why the students answered questions more effectively in the smaller class sized laboratory sessions than in lectures. For example, in the psychology and performance analysis lab (students in attendance = 29 and 7 respectively), students readily answered questions asked by the lecturer. Furthermore, the researcher observed more effective questioning in the Science and Football guest lecture₁ as opposed to the ASS guest lectures. The Science and Football session involved approximately twenty students and took place in a classroom, as opposed to the ASS guest lectures which took place in lecture theatres (Table 16, page 96 for room sizes). The girls made reference to guest lecturers attempting to engage the students in dialogue, as demonstrated above in the quotations from session 31 and 56:

JL: When random lecturers come in, they're always digging for information and trying to get you to speak, and we're just like, 'our class doesn't speak, at all', because everyone's just scared to speak out, because I guess we know quite a fair few people on our course, but we still wouldn't sit there in front of a room of 100 people and speak up
R: Because no one else does
M: The one time I've spoken up you just get really embarrassed, or you get shot down ₂.₉₉₃-₁₀₀₅

The girls articulate that the culture of not answering questions in L&T sessions has been set since first year:

R: If everyone was talking, you wouldn't mind putting your hand up and getting something wrong, but because from first year no one speaks because the classes are so big, no ones used to doing it, so now we're in smaller lectures, and the lecturer will ask a question, and everyone in the room knows the answer
M: But everyone's silent
JL: Nobody wants to say it
A: Everyone's sat whispering it ₁.₁₁₇₃-₁₁₈₃

JL: That seminar the other day like, everyone was speaking up, because there was only twenty people in the room so it's not that embarrassing if you get it wrong because everyone else was answering questions so everyone's getting it wrong
R: Everyone else was speaking so
M: Where as if no one does you don't want to be the one person doing it ₂.₁₀₀₇-₁₀₁₄

R: Because everyone's got it into their head that they don't speak up and no one else speaks up, we've all carried it into third year, when actually the lectures I think are a decent size
M: They are a better size, but now it's just the done thing
R: But now because everyone's in that state of, 'oh, I won't answer because the person behind me's not going to answer'
M: It's annoying, the lecturer will be stood there like, 'right, I'm not going to say anything until someone says something', so the whole class just sits there in silence for ten minutes, I'm like, 'what a waste of time is this', it's annoying
A: And it's really uncomfortable
M: Yeah it's really awkward; everyone's just sat there
JL: But as well you're like, 'you speak up', but then the person besides you is thinking that as well, 'oh, why don't they speak up?' Because you're just too scared to, it's so annoying
M: And no one wants to make eye contact with the lecturer in case they're like, 'right, you'
H: I would die if they asked me, even if I knew they answer, my mind would just go completely blank
M: You'd just be like, 'err, I don't know'
R: To be fair to them, most of them don't pick out individuals, because I think that's sly
H: Thank god ₂.₁₀₂₂-₁₀₅₆

3.6.3.2 The 'Question' Culture: Outside of the L&T Sessions

The staff made apparent effort to encourage students to enter into dialogue with them outside of the L&T sessions if they had any queries or problems:

Use the staff to the maximum [20]

At times it will feel like an uphill battle, come and use us [8]

You are meant to be drawing on the lecturers 20/30 years worth of experience, get your monies worth [18]

If you want to go and speak to staff about the work, then the option is there to do that [44]

Any problems that you've got that I can help you with, you can come and see me anytime [22]

If you need to speak to me about ASS3 and all my allocated time slots are full then just email me for an appointment or knock on my door, because you need to the tutorial time and access to me [49]

If you need anything from me, you know where you can find me [23 25]

Anybody that has any problems understanding the material, do get back to me [29]

Staff are here to support you and we understand the pressures that you may be feeling, and if you engage by attending lectures, workshops, booking frequent tutorials, asking questions, responding to feedback on courseworks, then staff will be there to help and support you to get the best degree possible [24]

Feel free to book in to see me or ideally your personal tutor if you want to speak about careers aspects, or you can book an appointment with our Sports Science careers advisor [45]

If you are struggling with what you want to do, there is a one to one advice and careers guidance service available, do feel free to make an appointment if you want to talk through choices [38]

If you want to talk to me about options with your course, work experience that you can get, or anything about what you can do after your degree, any career related concerns you can make an appointment to see me individually [46]

- ***Students' Perceptions***

Despite these offers from staff, students did not always choose to engage with this opportunity for dialogue with the staff:

A: I wouldn't even email my lecturers
JL: Yeah I didn't go and see my lecturers in first year, it's just, too scared to do anything [2.930-933]
D: I rarely went and saw them in first year, it was just lectures I had with them [D.1398–1399]

H: I really struggled with the work, and there's only so much that like my dad can help me with, cause he doesn't know anything about it, and I just felt like an idiot going to tutors and saying, 'I don't understand', because everyone else did, and I just used to think they'd say, 'well, why have you done the course then?' [1.1306-1310]

R: We went to see a lecturer about some coursework we did this year, and he gives you really cryptic answers, and I'm like, if you're not going to tell us the answer, there's no point coming to see you, and you're like, 'is this right?' and he's like, 'maybe', his answer is always like, 'don't you know that?'
H: It's always a riddle
M: Obviously I don't understand it, because otherwise I wouldn't come here and asked you
A: It's hard when you go and see him, he tests you doesn't he, so you go in for help and he's like, 'ok so, what's this?' And you're like, 'I don't know', and he's like, 'you should know' [1.1511-1546]

JL: It wasn't until this year were we actually went and spoke to tutors about assignments
M: Yeah because I feel like they shot you down
JL: Because I remember last year I was like, 'I'd really like to go and speak to someone and make sure I'm along to right lines', and then I was like, 'oh no, I can't do that'
M: We do go and see staff a bit more now, but I found that in first or second year I'd go to be like, 'oh, can you tell me if I'm along the rights lines', but they won't read over it for you, so they won't tell you
H: And then if you ask them questions, its like, 'well, do you know this? Do you know this?' And feel like I don't want to go, because they're like interviewing me, and if I don't know something I'll just feel really stupid, and it's like I'm sat there on the spot
A: It's like being tested
H: That's what I mean, that's why I don't go
R: Whereas actually you've been proactive and did well to go and ask for help rather than sitting back
M: And it's like they're punishing you for going and asking for help, because they just make you feel ten times worse [1.1312-1344]

According to Black and William (2001: 8), the dialogue between students and staff should be thoughtful, reflective, evoke and explore understanding, and ensure that all students have the opportunity to think and express ideas. It does not appear that the focus groups students had the opportunity to engage in such a dialogue.

- *The need for a greater dialogue*

The NSF (2010) made a call for placing more emphasis on staff and student relations. At the SAD, the staff highlighted a need for a greater dialogue between staff and students, and a need for enhancing student involvement with their university environment (see appendix 17: 15). According to Bloxham and Campbell (2010), students want dialogue, but are too embarrassed or intimidated to ask for help. This reflects a discussion regarding the importance of programmes coordinating a complaints system for students that occurred at session SU, in which a student commented, '*a lot of students are 18 year olds, and they're too scared to complain*'. Bloxham and Campbell (2010: 297) stated that the students in their study appeared to be, "*on the periphery of an academic community, not yet comfortable in actively participating except in the safe confines of their peer group*". In order to overcome this, Bloxham and Campbell (2010: 294) felt that staff, "*need to be proactive in providing guidance, particularly for struggling students; not waiting for students to turn up at their door*". The alumni reported that establishing a good relationship with staff is important, as it can help students make steps towards what they want to do post HE:

> *Talk to your lecturers a lot, if you can get a good relationship with your staff from early on, you feel confident to go and ask them for support, and talk to them about their research and ideas that they have and what's out there, then you put yourself in a good situation for understanding what you need to do during university and for after* [13]

The alumni suggested that students should increase contact time with staff to be, '*more easily guided and led to what they want to do*' (page 81).

3.6.3.3 A Lack of Student-Student Dialogue

Not only was there a lack of interaction between the students and the staff, the researcher noted that there was very little communication between the students themselves. For example, during the laboratory sessions there was limited interaction between the students. Very few of the students appeared to know other members of their cohort. The fact that the researcher overheard two students talking after session 37 and make reference to '*that girl*' (see page 157), suggests that the cohort do not know each others' names and that the SSES student cohort is not a close knit community. This made it relatively easy for the researcher to adopt her 'fly on the wall' ethnographer role in the L&T sessions, without any disturbance to or from the students (page 95).

The students in focus group 1 feel that there was a lack of community between their student cohort:

JL: I guess it is uni, it's not school, so it's up to us to go out there and make friends, but it's hard in a room of 250 people to make friends
H: Yeah that's when I think it is important for the lecturers to do that, because my sister she's in Nottingham Trent doing like sport and nutrition or something and their lectures said like, 'oh, we'll all do this', and they'll all meet up in the cafeteria or something and all get together and they all go out on like Christmas nights out and stuff like that, but I've never heard anything like that on this course
JL: All my friends go on course nights out and stuff, and I think that's really nice, because obviously we're not friends with a million people on our course, but there are loads of people that we talk to and we get on really well with, and know we could be good friends if we socialised outside
A: Because you can't really socialise in the lecture
JL: But the course reps, I couldn't tell you anything they do, I've heard their name in first year probably once, and they could have changed since then, I don't know
A: I've got a friend, she does English and media or something, but every week there's different things, there's like poetry nights, and they have pub quizzes but course ones, for the first few weeks it was all get to know each other sort of things, and we didn't have anything
R: My friend at Leeds, on the second week went on residential to the Lake District and did all these outdoor activities and stayed together for the whole week and forged with people straight away
A: Yeah my friend's gone on a weekend away
JL: That was the course reps chance to make it a cool group who can go do stuff together, but now it's just way past the point nobody cares now l.1214-1287

H exemplifies the negative impact a lack of community can have on the student experience:

H: I understand obviously that studying is the most important part, but if you don't know people, like I don't, I've really struggled in uni
R: And you struggle in stuff like group work, because you don't know anyone
H: Yeah exactly, I've really struggled through uni and it's because obviously everyone's like, 'move away, move away, because you want to get away from your parents', but I think that it's really important, because you make friends, whereas I wasn't forced into that situation, I had my mates at home, and then I came to uni because I had to, which is how I still feel, I still feel that I have to, I don't want to
RESEARCHER: So what would have made it easier for you?
H: Knowing people and other people being in the same situation, obviously everyone's in the same situation, but I lived here and I had three mates on the course, and they've all dropped out and I was like, 'oh, I don't know what to do', and I really struggled with the work, and there's only so much that like my dad can help me with, cause he doesn't know anything about it, and I just felt like an idiot going to tutors and saying, 'I don't understand', because everyone else did, and I just used to think they'd say, 'well, why have you done the course then?' l.1289-1310

According to Astin (1997) and Hill *et al.* (2003), the most significant factor in student academic success is student involvement fostered by student/staff interactions and student/students interactions. The lack of SSES community does not reflect or encourage the world of work requirements, since it is important that graduates fit into the workplace team and effectively communicate and work interpersonally (as demonstrated on pages 61 and 123).

3.6.3.4 Reasons behind the lack of dialogue
- *A Lack of Community*

A potential reason for the lack of dialogue between students and staff may be due to a lack of community within the SSES:

168

R: In first year the course is so big, you feel like they're just packing it with students because they must get money per student or something
M: There was like 300 people in first year
R: And you don't get any contact time with lecturers, you felt like the lecturers didn't even know who you were, just like a dot in a sea of students, just get no attention 1.1116-1124

R: Everyone on a sports course at other unis has a uni tracksuit, you know they're on a sports course, whereas would you know anyone of us was on a sports course at the moment? 1.1825-1827

R: First and second year I felt like the uni didn't care, because all they cared about was the masters and the PhDs and the third years and the dissertations
H: All the people that are on scholarships, I noticed that a lot, they used to just absolutely love them
R: In first year they just literally didn't care, but I think in first year that's why they gave us so much group work, because they didn't want to mark so much work 1.1351-1366

A: In first and second year you get given the lecturers that nobody really wants 2.983-984

These findings reflect those from (James *et al.* 2010: 5), which demonstrated that, *"student-teaching interaction appears impersonal and distant for many students"*. Students surveyed by James *et al.* (2010) did not perceive staff to know their names or have interest in their progress. As Bowles (2011) stated, *"it is hard to feel authentically engaged with your learning if your lecturers do not know your name"*. The 'sleeping', 'arrive late, pack away early' and 'attendance' cultures, along with the fact that students talk about 'drunken', 'negative', 'unprepared, unaware' topics, and play on their mobiles during L&T sessions, suggests that community is not present within the ASS modules. The researcher's reflections below demonstrate that the researcher perceived a lack of community to have impacted on the students' disengagement within guest lecture 56:

> *At approximately 10.10am, 55 minutes into the 1.15 minute session, three people two rows in front of me were whispering to each other. I found it very distracting, and also felt that it was rude and disrespectful towards the guest lecturer. I felt embarrassed and bad for the guest. This demonstrates that students lack a sense of community, ownership and involvement in their course - the students obviously did not have any compassion for the guest, and were not worried that they are potentially representing the SSES in a bad light.*

> *At approximately 10.25am, 1.10 minutes into the session, and 5 minutes towards the end, I noticed a male student sitting in front of me playing on his phone. I heard a 'clicking' sound to my right, and looked around to see one male and one female student also playing on their mobile phones. I found it surprising that the students were being so rude. I also thought that it was a shame that the students were obviously not fully engaged in such an interesting and informative session. I felt that the difference between the students' attitude and my own was because I have ownership and did not want to appear rude and not involved in front of the guest lecturer, and more importantly, the member of SSES staff facilitating the session.*

> *The guest lecturer, who was a Sports Science lecturer from another UK university, seemed surprised by students' lack of engagement when he asked questions. This suggested that he was not used to the lack and engagement and community demonstrated by the SSES students.*

Furthermore, the fact that the member of staff in session 37 introduced himself to students at the beginning of his lecture, and that K from focus group 2 exclaimed, '*I have never heard of these people!*' 3.1345, when the other students in group 2 were naming their personal tutors, highlights that students do not know the SSES staff. The lack of community means that students do not have an identity within their course and therefore do not feel any involvement, ownership or accountablility. They do not 'feel bad' for members of staff, because they do not know the members of staff and members of staff do not know them. They do not feel like they are letting anyone down or representing themselves in a bad light if they do not engage in L&T sessions. For example, the

students in the physiology laboratory did not appear to feel any compassion for the member of staff desperately trying to make to lab session work (page 116). Increasing the sense of community within the SSES and the engagement and dialogue between staff and students will enhance students' perceptions of involvement, ownership and loyalty regarding their course, which in turn will enhance students accountability and engagement. The students felt that they were more involved with their university environment in their third year than their first and second years of university, where they felt like 'nobodies':

R: I like the course this year, because I feel like you get attention, I feel like you get help, I feel like people care about you doing well, and it's what you want to do because you choose your modules, you choose your pathway, and I feel like the last two years were really different to year 1.1686–1689

R: This year is better, because we get to do a dissertation and stuff so you have more contact with the tutors and you get more help and stuff in the third year 1.1114-1116

JL: I just feel like until this year we were just like....R: Nobodies 1.1126-1128

A: I think in third year they do care more 2.983

D: I rarely went and saw the staff in first year for meetings and stuff, but then as its gone on, I've thought, 'I'll get me money's worth here', so I've been nagging them for the last year pretty much D.1398– 1402

JF: We've booked our own lab times, which I think I feel more comfortable doing as a third year, but as a second year I would have never just booked a lab session, I would have felt like I was intruding or something, where as now I feel more justified in doing it and I'm happy to do it

S: Yeah in third year everything seems more relevant and you're more in touch with it, where as in second year you just don't really know about it all, and even how to book the lab or anything, because they don't tell you that until third year 3.1563–1579

In the above quotations, the subjects' reported that they received more 'help', 'care' and 'attention' in their third year. Such provision needs to be provided throughout the duration of the degree course. Focus group 1 exemplified through the following scenario how engagement between staff and students and feeling involved with their HE community can have a positive impact on students. Focus group 1 undertook the application process for a placement at a rugby club, which involved a presentation and an interview. After the event, the group were told that they did not get the placement due of their gender:

JL: The lecturer was like, 'I really wish you had of come and seen me before, because I probably would have said don't bother applying for the rugby one', because he obviously knows the competition on the course, and he knows the guys that have done it before 1.2598-2602

~

R: Did we tell you when we went to that Sale Sharks interview? We didn't get it, they didn't just say you didn't get it because you're girls, but they were like, 'well, you know...
A: It's not appropriate
R: Which if I was going to pick someone who best fitted in a male group
H: Yeh I wouldn't pick girls
M: I'd pick a group of rugby players over us five little tiny girls 2.3078-3094

Despite the group 1 being generally negative towards their course throughout the focus groups, the group were surprisingly content when discussing the fact that they did not get the rugby placement. It appeared that this was due to the fact that the SSES staff member who was the academic contact for the placement took the time to discuss and explain the situation with the group. The engagement with the member of staff increased ownership and involvement, and an explanation ensured that the group were understanding and fully aware of the situation.

- *The world renowned SSES status*

As mentioned previously, the SSES staff are 'world experts' within their discipline areas (see page 128). During the immersion, the researcher noticed that a lot of the references appearing on the L&T materials (e.g. lecture slides and handouts) were names of the SSES staff. At the open day attended by the researcher, the SSES director stated that there were 42 academics within the SSES. This large staff cohort combined with the fact that the staff are world renowned in their areas of expertise and conducting internationally respected research in world class facilities, may cause the students to feel alienated from them. Students may be intimidated by the world class research status of the institute, the facilities and its staff, meaning that the SSES has to do more than other Sports Science departments to merge the student and staff boundaries and community.

3.6.3.5 What more can be done?

The students feel that smaller L&T sessions can help to overcome some of the present issues that exist within the SSES:

JL: More seminars, practicals, and labs
M: And especially in first year when the classes are huge, that would definitely help
2.3666-3669

EG: There's only like 15 of us in my socioeconomics class, and I really enjoy that class, because it's just like being back at school, and you don't feel much pressure
K: And you know everyone 3.1012-1016

Graduates in research by Lexmond and Bradley (2010) who had experienced more seminar orientated L&T sessions as opposed to lecture orientated teaching were more satisfied. El Ansari (2002) found that students valued seminars small enough for them all to contribute.

As mentioned, group 1 attributed a lack of engagement in lab sessions to be due to large class sizes (page 118). A member of staff at SAD stated, *'the big problem for the SSES programme is that it has got too big'*. The 'lack of focus and engagement' and 'a lack of dialogue between staff and students' cultures could be due to the large cohorts and large lecture theatres negatively impacting on the students' sense of community, involvement, ownership and accountability. The manners in which the students' perceived smaller L&T sessions would help to overcome the current staff and student dialogue issues are exemplified below:

171

Smaller Group L&T Sessions

Can enhance a sense of community and dialogue:

D: Lecturers are a bit unapproachable, a bit scary to first year students, maybe if we had seminars and tutorials where its lower numbers, that might have disappeared a little bit sooner, because I know in third year most people are comfortable around lecturers, but you're nearly finished by the time that happens, whereas if you can get that in first year it might help towards your degree D.1386-1395

K: I wish we had more smaller group sessions because I don't like speaking in huge rooms, like in first year there's hundreds of people, and you don't really want to speak in front of everyone, so it would be nice to separate everyone down a bit sometimes 3.991-994

S: We've got two biomechanics ones and there's about 15 of us, and it's so much easier to interact, and the lecturer knows everyone, and I learn so much more from that, and it's just a lot better to have smaller classes 3.1021-1025

R: My friend does this course in Leeds met, and they're split up into three groups and they have their lecturers, seminars, practical's within their groups, so although you don't know the people in the other groups, you get to know people dead well, you're more engaged with the lecturers, ours is just vast 2.986-991

Can enhance learning:

JL: I think seminars would definitely be the best way, it just helps you get to know everyone better, because even when we did that muscle metabolism assignment this year, you had to do the practical in a group where you didn't know people, and it's harder because you don't know people, whereas if you could have worked in seminars before, you could have met the people before 2.3582-3607

A: We get told something in the lecture, and then we're supposed to go home and read on it, whereas if we were to go to the lecture and told about it, and then go to the seminar, so then when you're hearing it again it's like you then know it, you understand it M: Then you will go and do the reading before the seminar 2.3673-3679

K: They want you to go and do your own reading, but you get a lecture and then of you go, there's no added help, you've just got to go and do it, which I know that's what uni is about, but sometimes it's nice to have a bit of smaller......JF: Yeah especially if you're struggling or you don't really understand, just doing more reading on the subject doesn't always help, it can make you more confused at times EG: Sometimes they don't follow up things, they'll just give you the lecture and then they won't talk about it again 3.1040-1050

JF: A few of the lads I live with do business and they have regular seminars, like once a week, and it will be a group of 10 or 12 sat down with the lecturer, and they say that that's when they learn the most, just in small groups having a discussion, and they said that that's really beneficial to them D: You've got to be prepared for that haven't you EG: Some people have tutorials as well where they'll get given some work based on the lecture, and then they'll have to do it, and you can ask if you don't understand what you are doing K: And work books some courses get, so they just work through the work book after the lecture 3.996-1010

Create accountability:

D: It was scaring you into doing the work, because there were only six of us there it made the chance of you being asked a question much higher, so you had to know the stuff, so he sent us quite a bit out to read before, and then we went down and he went into more detail, I learned a lot from the two that he did D.1375-1379

JL: It almost puts you under pressure to learn it, because I read that email and I was straight on the phone to R like, 'oh my god, I forgot we had those seminars, I need to do work for it', but if it was just a lecture I'd be like, 'well, maybe I'll just hope he doesn't pick on me', and in a lecture you can just be like, 'I don't know', and get out of it, whereas in a seminar, well, because I've never been to one, I'm like, 'oh god, I'm going to have to learn everything' A: In case he asks questions 1.2030-2038

JL: People don't really miss labs because what you miss in a lab you can't really get back, where a lot of people miss lectures and they're like, 'whatever, we'll read the blackboard slides' 1.1844-1851

JL: If they said, 'you're going to have a lab on this in a week's time', you'd be like 'oh ok, I've got a lab that I need to go in' M: Because no one bothers to go do the reading, whereas if you had to have a seminar next week and you had to get questioned, you'd do the reading, because you wouldn't want to look stupid 2.3681-3687

R: For that first seminar that none of us went to, 'because it's not on the exam, and we've got other stuff to do', whereas if your seminar was marked on, everyone would turn up for a start, no one would miss it, and you'd do background reading, and that's the way you learn 2.3609-3613

As demonstrated on page 132, students referred to 'hiding behind coursework'. Enhancing the community between staff and students will increase the chance that the students will be familiar with the member of staff marking their work, which will increase accountability and decrease the ability to 'hide behind coursework'.

Develop students' ability to ask and answer questions in L&T sessions and a group setting:

R: Not everyone is confident to speak up in front of other people, but say you got assessed on your contribution and how much background reading you'd done, everyone would make more of an effort, people would get more confident at speaking, and you'd have to do some background reading so you'd learn, rather than, 'only in exam conditions and in written coursework', not everyone's good at that 2.3574-3580

H: If I learnt it and then he asked me a question I still wouldn't know because I'd just be so mortified that he'd asked me in front of this big group that I'd just be like, 'I don't know', where really I do R: And the practice of that is only by having them more; when you've had 10 you'll be more confident 1.2040-2050

A member of staff at the staff away day stated, *'a lot of students work best with relatively small groups'* SAD.CC. As stated in the literature review, smaller cohorts foster a more inclusive environment, and students learning is best nurtured through small, supportive groups that use interactive L&T,

172

formative feedback and one to one engagement (page 15) (Harvey, cited in Cunnane 2012, Wilson and Tong 2009). The below researcher reflection highlights how the researcher felt more involved and engaged with the smaller class sized laboratory sessions than the large lectures during immersion in the L&T sessions:

> *During the lab sessions, I found myself engaged in the questions the lecturer asked the students, instead of thinking about my own research aims, which was my usual focus when attending L&T sessions. I wondered whether this involvement in the session was a result of a more intimate setting; I was not able to adopt my 'fly on the wall' role and 'blend in' at the back of the lecture theatre. In this same manner, students would not be able to sit playing with their mobile phones or falling asleep in a session like this. Do smaller groups create an increased involvement, ownership and engagement in students?*

The member of staff in session 40 revealed how smaller L&T sessions would be desirable:

> *I would much rather work with 6 or 7 of you, rather than 150-160 of you, because it's much easier to get discussion, points across, clarification all these things that effect communication it's much easier to build up empathy with you when it's a small confined group, it would be brilliant, but clearly it's never possible in university education* 40

A member of staff at the staff away day told the researcher how he enjoyed teaching on the postgraduate taught courses, because: *'you can give one to ones because of the smaller class numbers; you can't do this with large cohorts'.* He went on to say: *'and at masters there is something different about the students, for example, they meet in the pub to discuss their work'.* This difference in the students may be due to the increased contact with staff creating a sense of community, causing students to feel more accountability, involvement and ownership with their course, which in turn results in engagement. Furthermore, Larson (2000) proposes that small group work is crucial in preparing student for post HE, including the development of students' ability to talk to others outside of the classroom, cope with new challenges, and identify links between HE and the world of work.

3.6.4 Student Engagement: Summary

This section aimed to provide an investigation of issues of engagement through an exploration of the student culture within the L&T environment in order to better understand students' attitudes and perceptions in relation to the opportunities provided. The researcher highlighted three cultures that detrimentally impacted on student engagement with the opportunities provided by the SSES. The recommendations for overcoming such cultures are summarised below:

The 'Lack of Focus and Engagement in L&T Sessions' Culture

Within the L&T sessions, there was a lack of focus and engagement amongst the students in relation to the opportunities being provided. This was exemplified in the following ways:

- Mobile Phone usage
- Talking
- The 'Sleeping' Culture
- The 'Arrive Late, Pack Away Early' Culture

- The 'Blackboard Backup' Culture
- The 'Attendance' Culture

Students need to be made accountable and aware of the 'need' to engage with the opportunities provided. There needs to be an increased sense of involvement, community and ownership within the students' culture. This will result in an increase in students' focus and engagement with opportunities, and a decrease in mobile phone usage, talking, and the 'sleeping', 'arrive late, pack away early', 'blackboard backup' and 'attendance' cultures that currently exist within the SSES.

↑Accountability **+** ↑ Ownership, involvement and community **=** ↑ Focus and engagement in opportunities
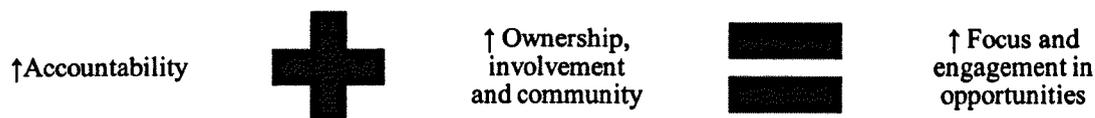
The Assessment Driven Culture

The SSES L&T culture is assessment driven, whereby students do what they need, when they need it. Assessment justifies attendance and effort. This culture prevents students from being prepared for post HE. The assessment driven culture should be utilised to engage students with preparing for post HE by creating a sense of accountability. Students need to be prepared for the requirements of the world of work. Learning outcomes need to be aligned to the world of work requirements, and students can start 'learning to drive' whilst they are at university. Students need to be made aware of the importance of the intended learning outcomes in order to perceive a 'need' to engage. Enhancing accountability enhances engagement. A sense of accountability created through the assessment driven culture can help to overcome attendance and engagement issues.

The 'A Lack of Dialogue between the Staff and Students' Culture

Despite the apparent best efforts of staff to encourage dialogue, there was a lack of engagement between students and staff, both within and outside of the L&T sessions. There is a need for a greater dialogue between staff and students from the beginning of the students' degree courses, and a need for enhancing students' involvement and engagement with their university environment. A better established support network can help to enhance engagement between the staff and students and the community within the SSES (see page 108). Smaller sized L&T sessions (laboratories, practical, seminars, tutorials, tutor time) can help overcome some of the present issues within the SSES: they can enhance a sense of community and dialogue between the staff and the students, and amongst the students themselves; enhance accountability, especially if students have to prepare for the sessions and if the sessions are marked on attendance and contribution; develop students' ability to ask and answer questions in L&T sessions, which in turn develops students confidence and ability to communicate in a group environment; and finally, but most importantly, smaller L&T sessions can enhance learning.

Phase 1
Interviews with alumni from the SSES.

Phase 2: Ethnographic Research Approach	
Part 1 involved participant observation within the SSES student L&T environment and culture.	Part 2 involved focus groups with SSES students regarding their experiences and perceptions of the L&T experience.

Phase 3
Interviews with immediate graduates.
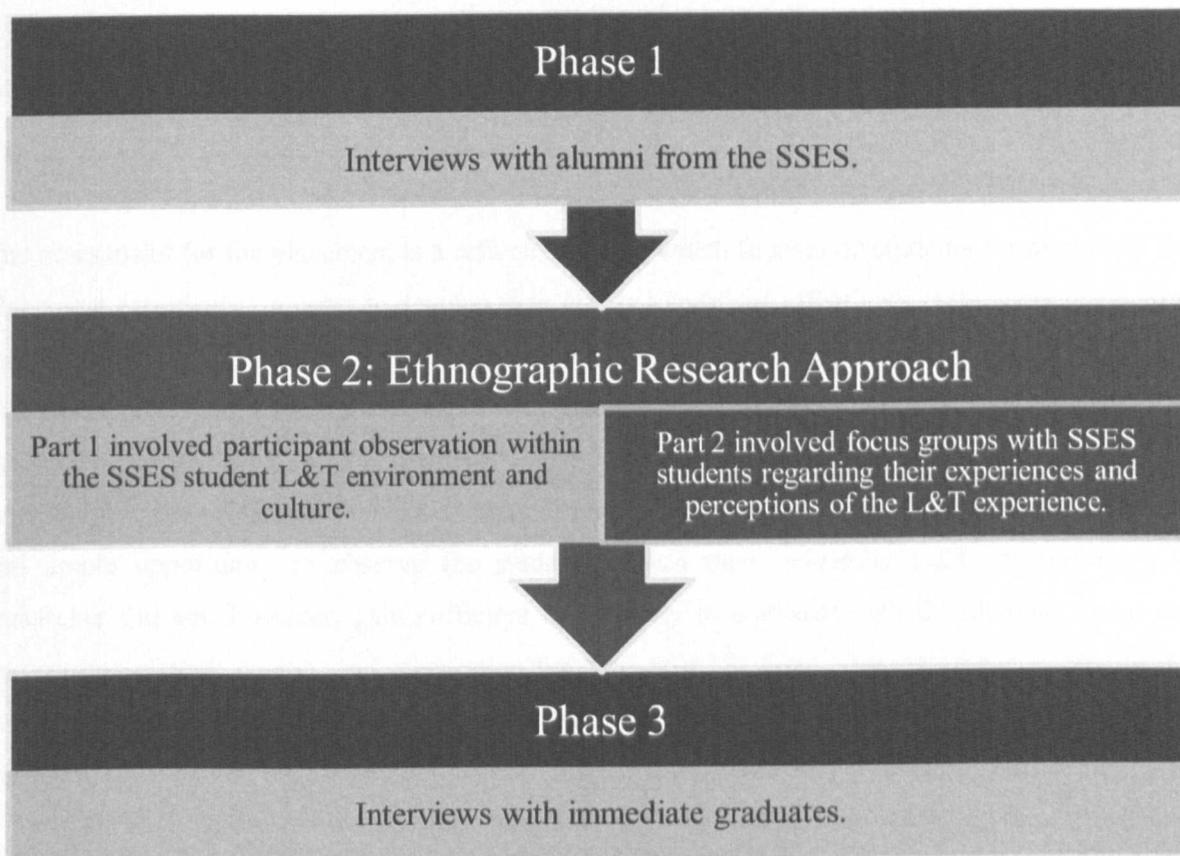
4.1 Placement & Reflection

According to the ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11 (appendix 14), the ASS3 module aims *'to provide students with the opportunity to develop and reflect on applied practice skills by engagement in a work related learning project'* (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 2). The member of staff in sessions 49 and 27 stated that the ASS3 module was *'about two main things'*:

> *One is to give you an opportunity to engage in some work related activity, hopefully in an area that you are interested in going in to when you graduate and can follow on in your career, and we're also interested in trying to get you to think about what you're doing on your placement and maximise the learning, and the process that we use to do that is reflection.*

At the end of the ASS3 module, the students engage in a placement:

> *The key concept in this module is the **engagement in** and **reflection on** sports science support as part of a small student group (4-5 students per group)* (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 8, appendix 14).

The assessment for the placement is a reflective essay, which focuses on students learning from their placement experience, in order to develop their ability to perform effectively in the work place. Since the main focus and end outcome of the ASS modules was the engagement in and reflection on a placement (see Figure 5), the researcher decided that the placement and accompanying reflective essay required investigation. Furthermore, after immersion within the students' ASS level 3, 4 and 5 L&T culture, the researcher felt that she had a good understanding of the students' L&T experience and ample opportunity to observe the students within their university L&T environment. The researcher did not, however, gain sufficient opportunity to converse with the students about their perceptions of their course, and preparation for their post HE lives. The researcher wanted to gain more insight into students' perceptions of the ways the SSES has incorporated preparing students for the world of work into the curriculum, addressing overarching research programme aim 'b':

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

The researcher addressed this aim from the perspective of the ASS3 placement and reflective assessment, and from the perspective of the general L&T methods and opportunities that students experienced over the duration of their course. Phase 2 part 2 focuses on the presentation of findings regarding the ASS3 placements and reflective assessment, since phase 2 part 1 presented the findings regarding general L&T methods and opportunities experienced by the focus group students. The researcher envisaged that phase 2 part 2 would also further contribute to overarching research aim 'c':

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

4.1.1 Data collection methods

The researcher wanted to gain more insight into the students' culture within the SSES, and understand more about students' perceptions of their university experience and how it impacted on preparing them for their post HE lives. For that, the researcher needed the opportunity to probe deeper into the students' perceptions, understandings and expectations, as this was not a possibility when the researcher was immersed in the L&T environment. Ethnography pursues what people actually do, and is orientated around observable events. What people 'think' and 'feel' requires interviewing (Silverman 2001). Krane and Baird (2005) stated that group interviews (termed focus groups) can be used to further explore findings that have emerged from observations. The researcher therefore decided to utilise focus groups to explore the students' culture and their perceptions. Focus groups can provide insight into the student culture, due to students conversing, interacting, influencing and sharing with one another, just as they would in their world (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Focus groups are beneficial in situations where the interactions between the participants will result in better information than can be provided through in depth interviews alone (Creswell 2007). Focus groups reflect social factors that are important in the way individuals perceive, experience and understand the world around them (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Focus groups are also beneficial because interaction between individuals', who share similar experiences, can encourage self-disclosure and lessen the anxiety that can accompany individual interviews (Fontana and Frey 2000).

The focus groups allowed for the cross checking of the findings from the ethnographic immersion back onto the students, by gaining students' perceptions on the issues that arose from the L&T culture. The focus groups were required in order to understand and explore the meanings and ideas behind the behaviours and practices observed in the L&T culture. Accounting for the trustworthiness criteria 'the triangulation of methods' (immersion in the L&T culture, observation, informal conversations and focus groups) allowed for the development of a richer representation of what goes on in the 'students' world' (see page 28) (Denzin 1994). The focus groups provided the opportunity to triangulate the findings within phase 2 of this research programme (methodological triangulation), but also between phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research programme (data triangulation), further accounting for the trustworthiness criteria (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

4.1.2 Subjects

Homogeneous sampling involves choosing participants who are alike is consider useful when conducting focus groups, because individuals are generally more comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas with individuals who they perceive to be similar to themselves (Patton 2002). Homogenous sampling was employed to ensure that the volunteers included in this research study were:
- Students enrolled on the Applied Sports Science 3 module (ASS3)
- Completing a placement (either external or internal to the university) as part of ASS3

- Had the intention of completing the placement report for ASS3

A recruitment email with details about the research study was sent to all 151 of the students enrolled on ASS3 (appendix 18). Participant information was attached to the email (appendix 19). Volunteers were required to take part in the research study in their final semester of their final year at university. Due to this being a critical point in the students' university lives, when students' spending time on their academic work is of uppermost priority, it was important to ensure that the time that students gave to volunteer for this research study was made worthwhile. The students were informed that volunteers would receive £150 for participating in the research study. It was also considered that the money incentive for attending the focus groups would help to minimise dropout rates for the post placement focus groups. Those who wanted to volunteer for the research study were required to respond to the email, providing the following details:

- Name
- Age
- Degree route way
- Placement details

Twenty four students volunteered to take part in the research study. It was considered important to try and represent the range of different placement options and degree pathways that are available to students undergoing the ASS3 when selecting from the volunteers.

Many group projects will have a mono-disciplinary theme (psychology, physiology, biomechanics or development and economics) (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 8, appendix 14).

Twelve students were chosen. Details of the twelve students are represented in Table 17.

Table 17: Key demographic information of the focus group participants

Group Number	Pseudonym	Age	Degree route way	Gender	Placement details
1	A	21	Physiology	Female	Nutrition, Swimming Club
1	JL	21	Physiology	Female	Nutrition, Swimming Club
1	M	21	Physiology	Female	Nutrition, Swimming Club
1	R	21	Physiology	Female	Nutrition, Swimming Club
1	H	21	Physiology	Female	Nutrition, Swimming Club
2	K	21	Psychology	Female	Psychology, Ski Centre
2	C	22	Physiology	Male	Nutrition, Rowing Club
2	EM	21	Biomechanics	Female	Biomechanics, LJMU
2	JF	24	Physiology	Male	S&C, Swimming Club
2	S′	20	Biomechanics	Female	Biomechanics, LJMU
2	EG	20	Physiology	Female	Sports Marketing, PR agency
2	D	21	Psychology	Male	Performance Analysis, Prozone (individual placement)

Table 17 presents the pseudonym, age, degree route way, gender and placement details for each of the participating students. Table 17 also highlights a group number for each of the students. As highlighted, the twelve students were split into two groups. Each of the students' names have been replaced with a pseudonym for the purpose of this research study in order to protect the anonymity of the students. Placement details included the discipline the students undertook on their placement (for example, nutrition, psychology) and where the placement took place (for example, swimming club, PR agency). Group 1 consisted of five girls who were all in the same placement group. Group 2 consisted of three males, and four females. EM and S were in the same placement group. D was on an individual placement, so was not part of a placement group. The other four students did not have any members of their placement groups within group 2. EM and S were the only students who completed an internal placement, which involved SSES based work related learning within University premises led by JMU staff (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 8, appendix 14). The rest of the students were involved in external placements, which involved working on a project with a client group based outside of the University (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 8, appendix 14).

The researcher intended to recruit students on an individual basis and not as a part of their placement group. However, when the leader for group 1 (A) replied to the recruitment email volunteering on behalf of the group for the research study, it was decided that having one focus group who were a placement group, and one focus group who were a group of individuals, would provide an interesting contrast. This proved to be beneficial since the subjects in group 1 were friends who were familiar with each other and were therefore comfortable discussing their perceptions with one another. As a result, focus group 1 produced a rich set of data.

4.1.3 Measurements – The Focus Group Guides

Three focus group guides were created for this research study. The guides were designed and utilised in the same manner as described in the alumni study (see page 35). The first guide was used for the pre placement focus groups with group 1 and group 2 (appendix 20). The questions were informed by the outcomes of the other research that has been conducted as part of this research programme (phase 1, 2 and 3, see Figure 2), the ASS3 evaluation that had been conducted within the SSES, and other literature (CETL AfL 2008). Questions for the pre-placement focus groups were constructed under two different themes (Table 18).

Table 18: Summation of the pre-placement focus group guide

Theme 1:
The questions in theme 1 aimed to identify students' perceptions, preparation, understanding and expectations regarding the ASS3 placement and the reflective assessment.
Theme 2:
Explore students' perceptions and understandings of the assessment, feedback and L&T methods that they have experienced over the duration of their course, in relation to promoting effective learning, and preparing students for the working world.

The focus group guide was designed to address the aims of the research study, by determining:

- Students' confidence, awareness and preparedness regarding the placement and assessment.
- Students' perceptions, expectations, aspirations and concerns for their placements and the accompanying assessment.
- What more could be done in order to enhance the placements and the accompanying assessment, from the perspective of the students.
- Students' perceptions of the different types of assessment, feedback and L&T methods that they experienced during their time at university.
- Insight into students' perceptions of the opportunities provided by the SSES.

For the post-placement focus groups, two individual guides were created for both group 1 and 2 based on the outcomes of the pre-placement focus groups (appendix 21 and appendix 22 respectively). However, both guides were based around the same core themes of questions (Table 19).

Table 19: Summation of the post-placement focus group guides

Did the placements meet students' expectations?
Was the reflective assessment beneficial?
What attributes were required of students during their placements?
How can the SSES better prepare students for the world of work?

The guide was created in order to address the aims of this research study through:

- Determining how successful the placements were, and if the students' expectations and aspirations were met.
- Identifying how effective the reflective assessment was in developing students' ability to evaluate their performance in the applied placement setting.
- Determining what personal attributes, skills and traits the workplace required of the students, and did the students feel confident or concerned in their ability to provide such qualities.
- Identifying whether the placement experience make students feel anymore prepared for their post HE lives?
- Determining how the SSES can assess students in order to better prepare them for the working world, and help to minimise any concerns that they may have about their post HE lives?

4.1.4 Procedure

Each of the groups underwent two focus groups; one before and one after the placement experience. A date for the pre-placement focus group was set at the convenience of the participants and arranged over email. A provisional date for the post-placement focus groups was suggested at the end of the pre-placement focus groups based on the convenience of the students and finalised over email. It was considered to be of paramount importance to organise the meetings based on the needs of the students, since they were in their final semester of their final year at university, and therefore at a critical point

in their courses where their work was the uppermost priority. D did not attend the post placement focus group as part of group 2. He was instead interviewed separately. The focus groups were held in a boardroom in the SSES. The interview with D was held in a reading room in the SSES. It was ensured that these locations were quiet and private, and yet comfortable and familiar to the students. The physical arrangement of the boardroom was prepared with the intention of facilitating discussion (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). A table with a Dictaphone and a jug of water with glasses was in the middle of the room. Chairs were positioned evenly around the table. It was ensured that the researcher could be situated as part of the group of students in an attempt to make each of the students feel that they were 'collaborators' in the research process, as opposed to 'subjects' being interviewed by the 'researcher' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The researcher felt that placing the students in such a position of power would assist them in being able to talk openly about their perceptions and experiences (Mishler 1986), accounting for the 'tactics to help ensure honesty in informants' trustworthiness criteria (see page 28). That fact that the researcher did not study for their Sports Science degree at the SSES assisted the researcher in being able to place the alumni in a position of power, as exemplified in the below extracts:

I studied Sports Science, but not at LJMU, part of my research is to get a better understanding of the undergraduate courses here, which is what I am hoping you can tell me about......

~

I didn't have to do any reflection as part of my course, so I don't really understand what it is, can you tell me what you have to do?

During focus groups, the subjects control the direction and content of the discussions, diffusing power between the researcher and the subjects (Wilkinson 1999). Wilkinson (1999) suggested that for this reason, higher quality data may be produced from focus group than individual interviews (Krane and Baird 2005). The below quotation from focus group 1 subjects demonstrates this shift in power:

R: I think you're probably more honest in a group, because a one on one interview, especially with someone you've never met, is more daunting, so you feel more official, I would feel like I couldn't say things 2.4172-4178

A video camera on a stand was at the back of the room directly behind where the researcher was sitting. All of the focus groups and the interview were completed in one session. The focus groups were facilitated by the named researcher. The focus groups were recorded using a digital voice recorder and a video recorder. Video recordings provided the researcher with the option to refer to the visual interactions within the groups if required. The interview with D was Dictaphone recorded. Dictaphone and video recordings were stored on a password protected computer in the possession of the named researcher. The dates and the duration of the meetings are presented below in Table 20.

Table 20: The dates that the focus group and interview took place, alongside the duration of the meetings

Pre placement focus groups
Group 1 - 7/1/2011 (2 hours 27 minutes)
Group 2 - 10/1/2011 (2 hours 10 minutes)
Post placement focus groups
Group 1 - 4/4/2011 (3 hours 20 minutes)
Group 2 - 1/4/2011 (2 hours 00 minutes)
D interview
7/4/2011 (1 hour 7 minutes)

Informed consent was obtained from all of the students at the beginning of the pre placement focus group, after ensuring that the students understood the purpose of the research study (appendix 5). Informed consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the possession of the researcher. It was ensured that the students understood that they had to attend both of the focus group in order to receive the £150. The students were informed that there was some structure to the content that was going to be discussed during the focus groups, and that the students were free to define issues for discussion. From the beginning of the interview the alumni were encouraged to be truthful (Shenton 2004). It was stressed to the students that there is no right or wrong answer, and that they should answer the questions based on their own feelings and be as honest as possible. Being supportive and reassuring in this manner can help any of the students who are contending in a self-efficacy manner that they have nothing important to say (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). As previously mentioned (page 27), the fact that the researcher was a recent Sports Science graduate meant that the students were able to relate to the researcher, establishing rapport between the students and the researcher and assisting the students in feeling comfortable disclosing information about their perceptions and experiences (Creswell and Miller 2000). Probing questions were used in the focus group in the same manner they were used in the interviews with the alumni, to elicit elaboration and clarification (see page 38). The students were assured that anything that they say would remain anonymous, and students were asked to keep confidential the discussed content of the focus group meetings.

4.1.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from phase 2 part 2. Content analysis is defined on page 38. Below is a summary of the procedure used to analyse the focus groups and interview data.

1. The focus groups and interview were transcribed verbatim. Line and page numbers were included. A blank space was left down the right hand side of the transcriptions to allow for note taking.

2. The researcher printed out single paged copies of the transcripts, in order to manually analyse the data.

3. The analysis was conducted around the themes and questions that formed the basis of the focus group discussions, as represented in the focus group guides (tables 18 and 19).

4. The researcher read through the transcriptions highlighting any extracts or quotes that related to the themes in the focus group guides. There was flexibility for new themes to emerge inductively from the transcribed data. Extracts and quotes that presented any new themes of interest were subsequently incorporated.

5. The researcher then moved from analysing manually to analysing in Microsoft Word. The line and page numbers on the hard copies of the transcriptions assisted the researcher in locating the desired extracts and quotes in the Word version of the transcriptions, so that they could be copied and pasted into a new Word file.

6. The extracts and quotes where then clustered together with other related extracts and quotes, creating units of similar meaning.

7. The researcher then incorporated their interpretations alongside the extracts and quotes.

8. The 'member checking' trustworthiness criteria that was outlined in phase 1 (page 39) was utilised to check to accuracy of the data from the interview with D (Shenton 2004). D was sent the same email as the phase 1 alumni with his interview transcript attached (appendix 7). D replied to the member checking email stating that 'all seems good to me', in reference to the content of his interview transcript.

9. The trustworthiness criteria 'analyst triangulation' was conducted with one set of the focus groups. The NTF project coordinator analysed pre and post-placement transcriptions for focus group 1 (see appendix 23 for the project coordinators triangulation notes). The researcher and the project coordinator then discussed and compared their interpretations and key findings. This process ensured the researcher that the analysis and interpretations of the research findings were credible.

4.1.6 Presentation of the Data

As previously stated, phase 2 part 2 will focus on the presentation of the findings regarding students' perceptions regarding the ASS3 placements and reflective assessment, since phase 2 part 1 presented the findings regarding students' perceptions of the general L&T methods and opportunities experienced by the focus group students. An overview of the aspects of the placement and reflective assessment to be discussed is presented below:

$$\text{Placement} \rightarrow \text{Reflective Practice} \rightarrow \text{A Lack of Awareness}$$

Data regarding 'placements', 'reflective practice' and 'a lack of awareness' will each be discussed in turn. The data from the focus groups and interview will be presented alongside interpretational discussions from the researcher and input from any relevant literature. The data will also be triangulated with data from part 1 of phase 2 and phase 1 of this research programme. In order to account for 'the themes, thick description' trustworthiness criteria, a lot of extracts are used in the presentation of the data in an attempt to represent the 'voice' of the students. This will allow the

reader to make their own interpretations of the data and not have to assume the reliability of the researchers' interpretations (Krane *et al.* 1997). The researcher endeavoured to highlight the range of perceptions and experiences discussed by the students during the focus groups (Smith and Fletcher 2001). This will help to prevent an 'anecdotal approach', whereby only a limited range of subject perceptions are presented, which would hinder the soundness of the research (Silverman 2001). The students' pseudonyms are included in the presentation of the data, to allow the reader to identify the corresponding student for the presented extracts and quotations (Table 17). The focus group transcripts will be numbered 1-4. Extracts from D's individual interview will be tagged. Alongside a tag for the transcript, line numbers are included after each extract, providing the reader with the opportunity to refer to the transcriptions in the data authenticity file, and clarify the context of any given extract as desired. This will further allow the reader to make their own interpretations of the data.

4.2 Placement

Data related to the placements will be discussed under the following format:

4.2.1 Identify what staff envisaged students would gain from their placement experiences	4.2.2 Identify what the students hoped to gain from their placement experience	4.2.3 Identify what the students did gain	4.2.4 Identify the world of placement requirements based on the students' experiences	4.2.5 Explore the reasons behind non-benefical placement experiences, and what more can be done	4.2.6 Placement: Summary

4.2.1 What did SSES staff envisage students would gain from their placement experiences?

According to the staff, the placement would provide students with an 'opportunity to sample career ideas':

- *'Test out' potential career path – see if you like it* [12]
- *To see whether certain environments are for you or not, whether you're interested* [49]

The placement will provide students with the 'added value' required to compete in the world of work:

- *Enhance CV* [12]
- *Get some high level professional experience that you can talk about in interviews and that you can put on CVs to give you that added value* [49]
- *You don't get jobs without experience, the placement is a good opportunity to get some concrete work experience which will impact on your CV and help you out when you start to apply for jobs* [45 25 27]

Determine skill sets required in world of work [12]

The placement is an opportunity for students to apply the knowledge that they have developed over their time at university, and develop 'craft knowledge':

- *The way that you use knowledge in practice is by using craft knowledge, which you gain from experience, so level 3 is about giving you the opportunity to engage in some work experience, it's an opportunity to apply the high amount of knowledge that you've gained* [27]
- *Craft knowledge cannot be taught, you develop it through the placement* [15]
- *At the end of your degree, you'll have oodles of professional knowledge, you'll be able to write an essay about imagery, stress and anxiety, how the respiratory system works, but what you won't have is craft knowledge, and that's what the professional training part of your development is about, you need to get out there and do the job, and yes you will make mistakes, yes it will be challenging, yes you will have to deal with difficult people, but you've got to go and tackle these complicated realities of practice, you've got to do the job, and often those types of experiences are very hard to document and capture but we do it by engaging in reflective practice* [48]

4.2.2 What did students hope to gain from the placement experiences?

Some of the students hoped to gain 'added value' to help them to progress into the world of work:

- *EM: I want to do physio, so I thought something clinical would help me best with my application and things like that,rather than doing something like Sports Biomechanics which isn't as related* [3.596-599]
- *JF: My placement is in the same career area I'd like to go into, so I thought it would improve my practical knowledge and also it would look good on my CV* [3.627-629]
- *D: I hoped to gain something good on your CV, you've got actual applied hands on experience* [3.85-86]

C and EG wanted to sample career ideas:

- *C: I wanted to see different career options, because I'm not really sure what I want to be afterwards, so I wanted to see what the nutrition side would be like, and pick up other areas of careers to see what I could go into* [3.608-610]
- *EG: I was thinking of doing marketing or primary teaching, but I think I want to do teaching now, but it's still good to see the other side, because I could change my mind at the end of this year, and then do something next year get some more experience, it helps to clarify things* [3.617-620]
- *EG: I want to see what it's like to work in the actual surroundings of practical experience, getting hands on; I'm quite looking forward to it* [3.88-89]

R was aspiring to learn and get some insight into the reality of being an applied nutritionist in the world of work:

- *R: It depends whether they just let us go in and go, 'this is how you do a food diary', we go away, analyse it and bring it back, because that's just us using skills we've already got, which is good for practice, but I hope they show us, 'oh, this is how we could have done it', or, 'this is what I do as part of nutrition', so we learn more about what actually happens, and not just what you think happens* [1.916-921]

185

4.2.3   What the students gained from their placements

Data relating to what students gained will be discussed under the following themes:

Gained from the Pre-Placement Interview	Enhanced Technical Knowledge	Gained from Working Independently	Sampling of Career Ideas	Confidence in Knowledge (and the ability to 'make a difference' in the world of work)
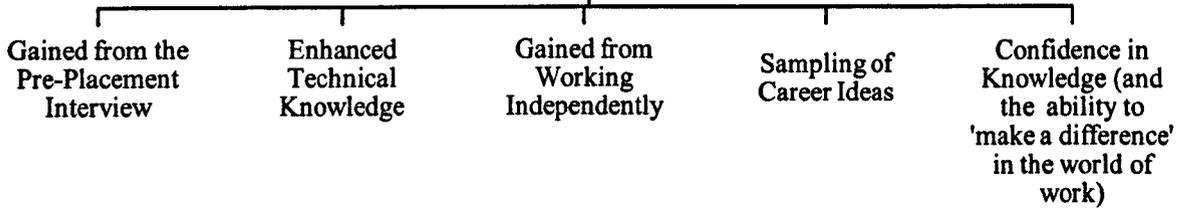
- **Gained from the Pre-Placement Interview**

As specified in the ASS3 Module Handbook (10/11: 5, appendix 14): *'a pre-placement interview will be used to assess placement preparation and suitability of learning outcomes'.*

The pre-placement interview

The pre-placement interview helped to prepare and enlighten group 1 for what they can expect from interview situations post HE:

JL: Doing the interview for the rugby club was so good R: That was the first time in the whole of uni where you presented to someone other than your tutor, because when you present to (lecturer), you know what he's like, you know what he's going to be like, you've got exapectations, whereas we'd never even met those people, we'd never even seen them before in our lives, so you go in there having to be able to adapt to how they are with you, which we'd never done before in a way $_{2.2811-2829}$

The ability to adapt and interact with a range of populations is a world of work requirement as specified by the alumni (Table 11). The extract to the left suggests that students are not being adequately prepared for this world of world requirement.

Group 1 described how they were not prepared for the interview questions they received: *M: Because they asked us questions, you have to think on the spot and answer their questions using your scientific knowledge, which we hadn't really done before, it was off the top of your head, like if they tutors were going to ask you questions, you kind of knew what topic it would be on R: We prepared for really science questions, they didn't ask us anything about that, they asked us about like stuff to do with , 'how would you present information to children?', or , 'how would you engage the families?' A: The questions he asked we could all answer really well R: Yeah but it was a shock for the questions, because basically the questions were completely different to what we expected $_{2.2831-2846}$*

EG also felt that the interview process was beneficial:

EG: The interview was quite good, I was in the board room and there was three people behind the table, and it's quite daunting, but you're just put on the spot so you've got to think of something $_{3.167-169}$

S and EM expressed disappointment at not getting an opportunity to be interviewed as part of the application process for their placement:

EM: Ours is a bit different, because we did an internal one, so we just organised it like that, we didn't have to apply to any others, it's probably simpler than everybody elses S: We actually wanted to apply to others, to have an interview and try the experience, but (lecturer) said, 'there's no point wasting their time ' if we knew we weren't going to do it, because we thought that's something that would help us, to give them our CVs and have the interview, but he said it wasn't fair on the placement providers $_{3.148-159}$

The focus group students benefited from the pre-placement interviews which supports the suggestion that interview scenarios could be utilised to assess and prepare students for the world of work (page 130).

• Enhanced Technical Knowledge

R: The placement helped me learn stuff about nutrition better than the lecture or something 2.406-407

JL: It was quite good doing the food diaries and stuff, because it made us learn things, you never really sit down and learn your work until you need to for your exams, but for the placement we were like, 'we need to know this, in case they ask us questions and stuff', so we learnt it more 2.187-192

JF: We've done other things with (our supervisor), sat down and learnt how to properly write a report from initial analysis with an athlete, and basically that's then the set standard you'd use for any athlete, so then I can carry that forward in the future, and basic session planning and things like that I've learnt 4.848-856

Some of the students reported learning technical knowledge from their placement experience:

JF described how he became more confident in his ability to —— apply his knowledge as a result of his placement:

JL describes how students do not learn unless they perceive a need to, representing the assessment driven culture within the SSES. The placement created a sense of accountability, which in turn, enhanced learning. This reflects the 'toe the line' world of work requirement discussed by the alumni, whereby employees must do what is required and be willing to learn based on the schedule and demands of the employer and the job (Table 11, page 61). As articulated by the SSES member of staff in session 30, students need to feel accountable: *if there isn't a demand to engage, then people won't do it, lack of accountability, lack of engagement.*

EM: I gained a lot of understanding and knowledge from the placement S: Because in our gait lectures we've been learning about all the theory behind it but we've never actually sat down and done it from start to finish, even though it was knackering and we found it hard, it was good, and then we sat down with (our supervisors) and went through what we thought and they told us what they thought as well, which made us realise we did quite well on our own 4.381-393

S: We've got an exam on gait and injury so we have to write an essay on gait and it's helped to do the full process, so write it down we'd just think, 'what did we do?' You get told it in the lectures, but it's good to actually apply it yourself and learn from it, so in the exam we're more familiar to it EM: I found it really useful, because if I look back on that module now and look over my notes, I feel more confident going into the exam, but if I look at some of my other modules, I feel a bit less confident, but I think it's because I've been able to practice it and go over it in my head through this placement, so it's definitely helped 4.808-826

S and EM described how the experience of practically —— applying their theoretical knowledge reinforced their learning.

JF: I've increased my coaching experience, especially working with the seniors, this is my first proper go at coaching, so it's been really beneficial, and I feel a lot more confident at it now than I did when we first started 4.856-866

• Gained from Working Independently

JF reported having to be able to self manage and work independently: *I enjoyed the aspect of being given the responsibility to do things by ourselves, as well we had times where we were problem solving, thinking on our feet, say if we couldn't get certain equipment or things like that, we'd have to change things on the spot so that was good as well, I enjoyed that aspect* 4.1225-1230

S felt that they benefitted from having to work independently: *The real thing we've benefitted from is actually having to go through all the data ourselves* 4.1311-1315

Working independently can create a sense of ownership over the task in hand and enhance students perceptions of a need to engage. Futhermore, self management and working independently is one of the world of work requirements as defined by the alumni (Table 11, page 61). For these reasons, independence and ownership should be developed within the SSES student L&T culture.

187

- **Sampling of Career Ideas**

Sampling of career ideas

For EM and JF, their placement experience helped them to confirm their career aspirations:

> EM: It's really helped me, because I want to do physio next year, it's quite related so it's given me experience and I've been able to use it in my applications, so it's been really positive because I've been able to reflect on it and learn from it, so it's reiterated that's what I want to do really 4.883-891

> JF: After this placement I've really enjoyed it and got a taste for what work you'd be doing in the applied field as an strength and conditioning coach, so I have decided that that's definitely what I want to do 4.941-944

JF even got the opportunity to gain more work experience as a result of his placement:

> JF: Out of the placcement me and one of the other lads said we'd be happy to carry on after the placements officially finished, and they've taken us up on that, so we're going to work with them throughout the summer 4.359-362

For C, the placement experience provided him with the opportunity to sample career ideas:

> C: I'm trying to be a physiotherapist, but I'm always considering what else I could be, and nutrition is a bit different and I find it quite interesting, so it could be give it a go in the future sometime, I think it's always good to try and do different careers to find which is right for you 4.871-878

> C: It's definitely a career I would probably go in to, so I got positive aspects out of mine, and seeing what the nutritionist has to do, what they have to go through is quite eye opening 4.299-309

After her placement experience S was still left with some un-answered questions:

> S: I'm still pretty indecisive, I've found the placement really interesting and I think I would like to go somewhere in that area, but I'm just not sure what is possible, I would like to learn more about what jobs are available, I've been looking but I'm still not sure, I've talked to my project supervisor a bit about it, but he's just told me about websites I can use to look for jobs, and what he did as well 4.895-915

For D and EG, their placement experiences helped them to confirm that they did not want to work in those areas:

> EG: It was quite good to go into the office and see them working, I couldn't work in that environment, it's just so noisy and people on phones and having chats across the room, so that's probably one of the only benefits I got from it, it's been an eye opener to know that I don't want to work in that industry 4.248-268

> D: I was thinking about going into something like that when I left uni, but having done this placement I've realised that I don't want to really do that, I thought it would be hands on interacting with football clubs and it's not, it's just sort of sat staring at data all day, and that's not what I want to do, so it's opened my eyes to that in a way, which is a good thing, because I'd rather do that than find out in a years time after I've got in there D.278-287

K reported how her placement experience did not provide her with any insight into potential career options:

> K: I don't have a clue what to do, because I didn't get anything out of my placement, so I don't even know if I'll enjoy that area either, so I just don't know 4.951-953

As exemplified by JF, a good placement can help students decide on what they would like to do post HE, and can even lead to work opportunities. However, as exemplified by K, poor placements can leave students feeling lost and disheartened. These two outcomes of placements were also articulated by the alumni. Alumnus 9 articulated the benefit of placements in terms of sampling career ideas, whilst alumnus 1 demonstrated the potential disadvantage of not sampling career options (see page 87). The above figure presents more students feeling unprepared for post HE, in addition to the students presented in part 1 of phase 2 (page 144). Rae (2009) stated that it is important to ensure that students' confidence regarding the HE to world of work transit is nurtured. It is important to ensure that all students gain from the benefits of positive placement experience and that students are not left with unanswered questions.

- **Confidence in Knowledge (and the ability to 'make a difference' in the world of work)**

The member of staff in session 27 stated: *Level 3 is about giving you the opportunity to engage in some work experience, it's an opportunity to apply the high amount of knowledge that you've gained*

The member of staff in session 45 informed students: *We have to make sure that you are at a certain level of knowledge and prepared to go out into the field and applying what you know*

➡

Despite this reassurance from staff, group 1 were anxious about the reliability of their knowledge prior to their placement: *R: It's daunting, I'm thinking, 'I'm like a nutritionist, I don't know anything', because when we were giving the feedback to the parents and the kids, I was like, 'oh my god, do these parents actually think I'm like a qualified nutritionist? They don't know who I am; I'm just someone that's had a few lectures!' A: It's worrying that you tell them something wrong* 2.2853-2863

➡

However as a result of the placement, the girls came to realise that they had underestimated their knowledge: *R: I was really scared that they were going to interrogating me and I wasn't going to know any of the answers, but some of them have no knowledge at all, so you think, 'actually, I do know stuff', because you forget how much you know compared to people that have never studied this A: And you think it's obvious, but it's not M: It's only obvious maybe to us R: Because we know it* 2.2865-2877 *A: You just think its general knowledge R: You just think everyone knows the same as you, and they know more than you as well* 2.2904-2907

C also underestimated the knowledge that he possessed in comparison to his placement clients: *C: To begin with I found that I was a bit too scientific, I overestimated what athletes would know about nutrition compared to what I know about nutrition, and I did try to cut it down a bit, but in my feedback I was still a bit too scientific* 4.1235-1240

The opportunity to apply their knowledge in a working world scenario made the students more aware of the extent of their knowledge. As demonstrated below, students appear to take their knowledge for granted when working within the university context alone, which reflects the member of staff in session 32 saying, *'your understanding is probably better than you think'*:

S described how the opportunity to work with people outside of the Sports Science discipline made her aware of the extent of her knowledge: *S: I always think when I'm doing a piece of coursework, 'oh, it's rubbish', and then I think, 'if I tried to do this in first year, I wouldn't have stood a chance', so I think you forget how much you have actually learnt, so when someone comes in who doesn't know anything about it, and you're telling them about it, then you realise you have actually done quite a lot* 4.1537-1542

JF described how he was required to apply his degree knowledge to a greater extent working outside of the university context as opposed to working within: *JF: Our placement has given me a taste of what it'd be like to work in the applied field, as opposed to just doing theory and being in lectures and things like that, it was interesting to get out and do stuff and working with people who aren't within the university, so they feel more like a real client, and especially with people who've never really had experience with Sports Science, people that are completely fresh to it, whereas when you work with other students or people who already know stuff, I think you get a bit lazy, because you just expect that they have that knowledge as well, so you don't explain things as fully, you assume they have a level of understanding already* 4.1370-1389

The below extracts show S and EG demonstrate a lack of awareness about the knowledge that they have gained during their degree:

S: Even just your terminology you take for granted, because you've done it in school and then college and then here, you take for granted that you know all these words, and other people don't actually know what you're on about 4.1548-1551

S: We were having like a, 'oh my god, I can't be bothered doing it any more', last night when we were all doing our work, and we were like, 'when you think about it, I didn't even know what a journal was when I came to uni' 4.1674-1677

EG: You don't realise how much you actually get out of it until you get closer to the end, I don't realise that I've learnt different skills and how much my knowledge has actually improved since first year, when people ask me questions I'm like, 'erm, I'm not too sure', but then if you actually do go away and think about it or just look back at your notes or something, you have covered it, and you do know it 4.1695-1701

Focus group 1 reported that hearing about the applied experiences of SSES staff made them feel more confident:

JL: Especially what (lecturer) was saying about the football club, because it just sounded like the players knew absolutely nothing, and they're eating just ridiculous foods that my mum and dad who do no sport wouldn't even consider, like Coco Pops for breakfast, and they're meant to be professional athletes, so when he was saying that we were like, 'oh my god, maybe we do know stuff, maybe we could actually help people'
R: I know (lecturer) is a lot better than us, but he was saying when he went into the football club, the standard was so low, that even our standard could have an influence 2.2924-2934

JL: When we went to that lecture where (lecturer) was telling us about his experiences, and he was talking about working with jockeys, and he was saying how he had to do loads of research before because he knew nothing about them, which made me feel a bit better, because I was like, that's true, you can just research it before, we know how to research 2.2950-2955

In phase 1 of this research, the alumni highlighted that 'confidence to apply ones knowledge' is a requirement of the world of work (Table 11, page 61). It is important to ensure that students gain confidence and awareness in their ability to apply their knowledge post HE. Based on the focus groups, confidence can be gained through experience in an applied context, and reassurance from insight into the applied experiences of others. The observation of others in practice and hearing about other peoples' experiences in the work place can provide students with the opportunity to learn and evaluate how they would react in those situations (Knowles 2008). The alumni felt that learning how to be effective in the work place can only truly come from experience and insight into that environment, as demonstrated in the quotation below:

You can only really learn from being around and seeing how other people do it, and gaining your own experience 11

4.2.4 What were the World of Placement requirements, based on the students' experiences?

The ability to communicate and work with others

Team work

K required the ability to communicate and work with others. She also had to be organised and able to self manage:

> K: I had to have organisational skills to get the group to go, and then hassling the placement provider with emails, phone calls which all got ignored basically, so we started to turn up and had to speak face to face, and still people weren't able to give us an answer 4.1178-1183

D developed his communication and team working ability:

> D: I'd say communication skills were a massive thing where I've been, being able to communicate with a variety of people, talking to different sort of levels as well, organising people, being able to lead people to organise meetings and set deadlines, and definitely the communication skills setting up meetings and deadlines with other students, we've had a few meetings where we've just talked about what we've been doing, refining it, I was confident in what I was doing, but arranging the group, sorting meetings with the groups and communicating with the organisation I was a bit standoffish at first, wasn't too sure of myself, what I was doing, but then at the end I just realised I might as well get on with it, rather than sit around worrying about it D.711-785

Adapt communication to meet the individual needs of clients and effectively communicate technical knowledge:

> A: You need to not be intimidating, because otherwise they wouldn't have asked questions, if we'd have gone in and gone, 'don't eat this, do this, do this', like a teacher, they'd be like, 'ok', where as we made it like conversation and made them talk to you then 2.451-455

> JL: Having to speak to the kids and speak to the parents, we've never really done that before, so even that was something different, and just trying to put what you know across to them in the most simple way possible wasn't exactly easy 2.409-412

> R: It made it hard to know where to put the level of information at, when some of the kids were 9 and some of the kids were 14, how much science and information do you give them, I don't have much experience in that 2.341-344

> M: Obviously talking to 8 year olds is totally different to talking to 14 year olds, because at first we were just treating them all as children, but then I was thinking, when I was 14, you think you're the best, you think you're really old, and you think you know everything, if someone had of come in talking to me like a child, patronising me, I would have been like, 'who do you think you are?' So we had to see what age person we had and adapt to them, because if you'd have spoken to them all the same, it doesn't really work, because there's a massive difference between an 8 year old and a 14 year old 2.463-472

> R: As well as being able to speak to the kids level, you've got to be able to have the confidence in your background knowledge to answer the parents questions, which are probably a bit more probing than the kids 2.457-459

> C: I worked with all different age groups, cultures, genders, and they all had their different types of ways that you had to speak to them, depending on what you're looking for, which I found quite interesting 4.284-314

JF became more confident in his ability to work with others as a result of the placement:

> JF: I was a bit apprehensive at first, especially because I'd never worked with kids before, so I didn't really have any idea what to expect, but then as time went on, I got more and more used to it and more and more comfortable, and then by the time we finished with the juniors I was fine with them, and I was the same with the seniors and again by now I'm like happy working with them, don't have any problems with it now, so that's something I've really taken from this, not only working with different age groups, but also my own confidence in coaching 4.1323-1338

The placement effectively developed students ability to communicate and work with others, which is a world of work requirement as defined by the alumni (Table 11, page 61) and the staff in phase 2 (page 124). The above extracts demonstrate that discipline knowledge was not enough to get the students through their placements; they also required 'craft' knowledge. Craft knowledge is *'knowing how to do something, its ok understanding the respiratory system, but can you then go and do a VO₂max with a 10 year old? Can you do a bleep test with a 40 year old?'* 48 (see page 127 for more on craft knowledge).

As stated earlier, the guest lecture from sessions 14 and 42 revealed that he is, *'quite happy to take a 10% drop in technical knowledge, for a 10% gain in the craft. It doesn't matter if you have the biggest brain in the world, the coach would rather have 10% less knowledge and someone that can get the message across to them'.*

As a result of the placement, R supported the notion that craft can hold more importance than technical knowledge in the workplace: *it made me appreciate that ok, you can know everything in the world, but if the athlete doesn't listen, it doesn't mean anything, so actually, you can be right in everything you say, but the real task is getting it appreciated by people, otherwise it means nothing* [2.423-430]

The students were required to have more personal as opposed to discipline specific attributes. It was notable that the factors that impacted on preparing the alumni for the world of work were related more to the process of the university experience as opposed to the SSES technical content (page 58). In the above quote, R demonstrates that she appreciated that the requirements of the work place are focused around 'craft' knowledge and the ability to apply the discipline specific knowledge that they have developed during their time at university. In session 48, the lecturer referred to developing craft knowledge as one of the biggest learning experiences that students have on placements:

One of the biggest learning experiences that students have on their third year placements is dealing with misbehaving kids, pushing over equipment or fighting etc. We can't give you that experience, we have to send you out there to do it, so its knowing how to do these things, I'm sure everybody could recite an essay about how to do a VO_{2max} by the time you graduate, but how do you actually do it? How do you engage those people that don't want to do it? How do you engage the child that knows he's got to do it but is on a heap on the floor crying because he doesn't want to do it? How do you deal with that?

You might have set up this wonderful battery of physiological tests and then you have twelve kids instead of two, or the junior turn up instead of seniors and everything has to be changed, it's about making those decisions in practice

The importance of gaining experience and in turn craft knowledge was discussed by the alumni (page 86). Alumnus 17 exemplified how being effective in his workplace comes from experience and learning how to deal with different situations:

There will always be a first time you come up against a situation, and every time after that you know how to deal with it, one of my bosses always used to say, 'you know you're a coach when you've got 20 kids running over the hill, 1 football, 2 cones and you know what you are going to do'

Guest speaker 39 attempted to engage students with the importance of the experiences gained from placements:

I cannot push the placement stuff enough, I never really valued it enough when I was at uni, but I can tell you that when you get out into the real world, people start asking you what you have done, rather than what you can do

In this sense, students need to be able to provide potential employers evidence and examples of things that they 'have done'.

4.2.5 Non-Beneficial Placement Experiences

Some of the students reported that they did not gain from their placement experiences. The students' reports of not gaining from their placement experiences were due to:

Not spending enough time at the placement	A lack of engagement with placement provider	A lack of challenging tasks	A conflict for time	Placement preparation	Placement options
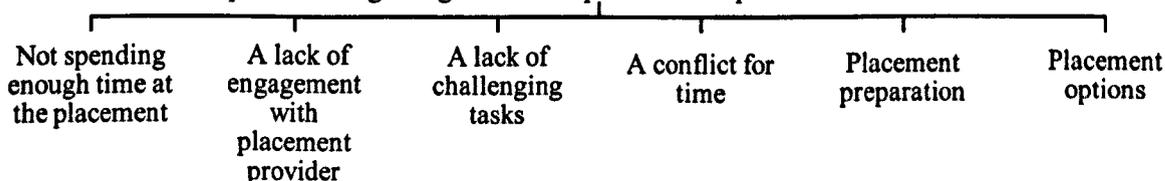
Each of the reasons that the students' gave for not positively gaining from their placements will be explored. On the following page, 'not spending enough time at the placement', 'a lack of engagement with placement provider', and 'a lack of challenging tasks' will be discussed.

Not spending enough time at the placement:

PL1: We haven't been involved enough in the project, we needed more time spent there to be really immersed in it to get the most out of it

M: It worked out well for us because we had so much on, and if we'd have had one of those placements where you go every single week, we would have been even more stressed, whereas ours was quite chilled, so it was quite good in that way, but not to get stuff out of it 2.808-811

M: That's where I think our placement's really bad, because I don't think we're going to learn anything, we're not going to realise whether we want to work in a club like that, because we're not going to be working there, we're just going in twice 1.911-914

R described how students will gain more from spending more time on placement: *we only took one group, we could have done it with all the groups, and we would have had more work, but we would have went more times and got more of an idea* 2.856-858

D: I've not had much contact with them, that's the big thing that as a group we've said we've been lacking a little bit, I would have preferred to have gone every week, because it never felt like a real placement, it was just like any other assignment that I'd done, rather than an actual real world work D.61-75

PL2: We don't spend enough time on placement, and it's like we're observing ourselves

Adecco Group (2012) felt that work experience is inadequate and a broader programme of employability training that goes beyond a two week placement should be employed.

A lack of engagement with placement provider:

K: It ended up a bit rubbish, it was a bit of a shame because we wanted to get something out of it, we went six times, we gave them dates saying when we'd be there and what we'd do, but we'd turn up and they'd say we don't have access to this and you can't go up the ski slope, and it's up to you what you do, it's not for us, it's for you 4.122-144

D: I feel a little bit disappointed in it, because we've tried to get in touch with them three, four, five times, they've just not replied to us, and then it's like a one word email back to us, and we've got the feeling we're not very high on their priority list, like they're doing it because they have to rather than they value what we're doing, which puts us off trying and working, if our works not being appreciated then why should we put the effort in D.670-683

The placement provider suggested that if the girls got time, they should write a nutrition based article for the swimming club's newsletter. However, the provider's relaxed attitude towards the newsletter, combined with the fact that the girls had very little contact with the provider, resulted in the them not perceiving accountability and a need to 'toe the line' ('toe the line' is a world of work requirement as defined by the alumni Table 11): *R: We could have emailed the placement provider and been like, 'we've done the bit for the newsletter, here it is', but because we never had regular contact or we never saw him, he never reminded us* 2.172-175
(see the discussion of 'a conflict for time' for more insight into group 1's lack of engagement (page 195)).

K feels that both the placement providers and the students need to engage and commit to the placements: *they need to look into the actual placement providers and see if they're definitely going to commit to you, as well as the student committing to them, they need to make sure they are committed for us to go in and work with them basically, it's just finding the right connections that work* 4.1560-1581
Alumnus 14 also suggested that both the placement provider and the students should gain from the placement experience (page 82).

A lack of challenging tasks:

EG: I felt a bit like their slave doing their dirty work for them, as soon as they give you the task you'd just look at each other and go, 'now we've got to spend another hour of our lives, when we could be doing work or something', I didn't do anything challenging 4.1258-1273

PL2: It feels like they got us in to do their marketing for them, as opposed to getting a marketing placement experience, It feels like we just come and waste an hour sometimes

H: I feel like it's just volunteer work that I did in sixth form, I feel like I did more in sixth form than I'm going to get from this placement 1.939-940

D: It's not been hands on enough D.133

The graduates in the study by Crebert *et al.* (2004) were satisfied with the range and number of opportunities their employers provided for professional and skill development, and subsequently developed and gained from their experiences, highlighting the need to ensure that developmental opportunities are provided within work related scenarios.

Group 1 felt that it was important to ensure that students gain from their placements: *H: I don't think they should keep the contact if the students aren't getting anything from the placement M: Yeah it's not great having a big name if they're not doing anything for you, they obviously just use that as a way of saying, in first year, 'you can do all these placements, you can go with Sale Sharks or whatever', but it's not that great if you can't actually do it H: Even our placement, I've not learnt anything like skills wise that I didn't already have before, so if students aren't getting anything from it, try something else, don't just settle* 2.3392-3403 Alumnus 16 also felt that it is important to ensure that students learn from their experience (page 80).

- **A Conflict for Time**

The time frame the placement is allotted in the academic year resulted in the groups feeling conflicted between engaging with the placement, and completing their academic and other responsibilities:

A Conflict for Time

Prior to the placements, students from group 2 revealed that they felt conflicted about having to do the placement, due to other university work commitments:

C: We're too busy with too much work, especially with our major project coming up in the next few months, we are still doing our research and stuff, and to go off to do more effort with our placement as well, we could use that time to put on to our major project, which I think is more important 3.47–51

JF: On the one hand, I'm looking forward to getting more practical experience, but at the same time it's a bit of a burden, with our major projects we need as much free time for labs and just general work at this time of year, so it's a bit conflicting to how I'm feeling about it now 3.53-57

EG: I'm quite looking forward to it, but it's their expectations as well, like how much time they want you to give, they've got to understand that we've got other work as well, so I hope they're flexible 3.89-92

Group 1 articulated that prioritising other university commitments and a lack of accountability to their placement provider prevented them from fully engaging in the placement and gaining from the totality of the experience:

R: Our placement provider was really understanding that we were in third year, because he was always saying to us, 'I know you've got loads of work on', and in a way, if he was less understanding, we probably would have done more, even though he was nice and understanding, it meant that he doesn't mind that we didn't do the newsletter because we were busy M: We felt no pressure at all, so it was just like, 'yeah, we'll do the placement whenever we can fit it in' 2.796-804

M: Because we had other work to do we put that first, if he'd emailed us and been like, 'you need to do this', we would have been like, 'oh shit, we need to do it', but because he didn't bother we were like, 'well, fine, we've got other more important things to do, and it pushed the placement to the back R: It was low in our priorities 2.179-185

One of the students from PL1 described how a conflict for time resulted in her being unable to engage and gain fully from the placement opportunity:

PL1: I work for 25 hours a week, I have to complete all my deadlines, and I'm expected to do 75 hours for both my placements, I just can't do it, I can't get involved enough to get the most out of it

There was a sense from the team leader in PL3 that her group had to sacrifice more than other placement groups: *We put in a lot of time and effort, some groups only go twice, and then moan about having to travel to wherever they have to go.* She felt that university work was the priority, and that other groups get more time to spend on that priority.

Due to the conflict for time, the groups suggest that the placement should be conducted at a different time during the degree:

M: They didn't introduce the whole placement idea until November or December, and from September, we had no work on, so if they'd said maybe in May, 'apply for your placement now', and then when we came back in September, had a placement straight away while we had no coursework, we could have spent so much more time on it, whereas you don't start until January, then you've got coursework for every single module, so you just think, 'well, placement, least important, so that can go straight to the back,' and then obviously you're not going to spend as much time on it, and that's why you don't get as much out of it, whereas if you've done it from September to December, you can spend like all your focus on that
2.703–713

K: Maybe at the end of second year, so then you do it in the first semester of third year because, yeah you have work, but it's not as built up as what we have got now
3.1622-1627

PL1: We have two placements, both requiring 75 hours, both in the final semester, it would be much better to have one first semester and one in the second semester instead

PL2: It's at the wrong time, if we sorted all the placement details at the end of the second year, then started at the beginning of the third year, you can come into third year knowing what you're going to be doing

K: I was talking to my friends, and we all thought it would be better to have the whole year to do the placement, rather than rush it in semester two, with your dissertation and exams
D: Maybe do it in the second semester of second year rather than actually in third year, because that's when it counts
JF: Yeah because you're really pushed for time the second half of this year, and then you've got to do the placement on top of that as well
K: Or maybe do it in the first semester of year three instead of second, everything seems to build up at the end of semester two, and that's when we are doing placement as well 3.24-39

The students prioritised their other university work over their placement, as demonstrated in this quote from M:

You just think, 'well, placement, least important, so that can go straight to the back,' and then obviously you're not going to spend as much time on it, and that's why you don't get as much out of it 2.709-711

However, this meant that they did not gain as much from the placement as they potentially could have. As demonstrated, the working world requires that graduates have other attributes asides from technical knowledge, including craft knowledge, which can only be gained from experience (page 127). Students need to be made more aware of the requirements of the world of work, and the importance of experience and placements in preparing them for post HE. Students need to be made to feel accountable and aware of the urgent need that that exists regarding engaging with experience, as highlighted on page 141.

• Placement Preparation

The girls felt that they did not have enough information to make an informed choice about the placements that were available to them: →

R: Initially we weren't sure which placement we wanted, because you don't get a lot of info about the different placements A: About what you do on them R: And maybe you had to be more proactive and go and ask the people in the uni who knew about it, which we didn't do, we sort of just picked them on paper M: But then they did say to us at the beginning that it's up to you to go and speak to the contact before you decide which ones you want to do, but then we were like, 'oh no, we know which ones we want to do, so we'll just apply', but we should have really gone and asked, because then we would have realised we should have applied for different ones JL: I think they did say that we should have gone to speak to them, but they didn't emphasis it that much R&M: They didn't really stress it enough JL: They didn't really emphasise the importance of doing that, they sort of just said, 'yeah, you should probably do it' l.145-191

The girls ended up 'picking the best' placements, despite the member of staff in session 12 advising, *'think about how your placement choice can help you get into desired careers'.* →

JL: You just pick the best, you pick the ones which you think are the highest standard R: The one that you think you'll get the most out of JL: Rather than what suits you l.2620-2623

However, the girls revealed that they felt pressured and rushed when they were applying for placements, and this hindered them from making a decision about which placement would best suit their needs: →

JL: We just think, 'placement, yeah, we want one', and they were like, 'bang, bang, bang, get it done, get a placement,' so then we were like, 'oh my god, pressure, pressure, pressure, just apply' R: We felt dead rushed, because they were like, 'you've got to get it in by this date', and obviously there's got to be a deadline, but they were really like, 'get it in, quick, quick, quick, quick' A: At first we didn't care, as long as we got a placement l.2604-2616

Group 1 felt that more time and guidance was needed to help students decide on the most appropriate placements. to suit their needs. Group 1 highlight that it would have been beneficial to provide more information about the placements and emphasise the importance of going to see the relevant staff for more information. The NSF (2010) advised that a structured and phased approach to the delivery of information and guidance about work placements is required, with support during the preparation phase, support during and help with evaluation post placement.

- **Placement Options**

Group 1 felt that more information about the different placement options that are available is needed, so that students can make a better informed choice to suit their individual needs.

→

H: It would definitely be beneficial to know a bit more about them, than them just saying, 'sign your name up on a board and hope for the best', type thing 1.2478-2480

→

Group 1's experience of the placement process caused them to believe that the placement options were very male orientated. They went through the application process for a placement at a rugby club, which involved a presentation and an interview. After the event, they were told that a contributing factor to them not getting the placement was their gender.

↓

H: It says it all when (placement supervisor) says, 'you didn't get the placement because you were girls', it's just like well, that surely paints a picture of the placements 1.2574-2575

M: When we spoke to (the placement supervisor) about the rugby placement after the interview, he admitted that that was one of the reasons why we didn't get it, and maybe if they'd have said that in the first place, we could have applied for ones we would have stood more of a chance to get 2.3104-3107

R: We didn't put that much effort into finding out about the placements, but they have literally never mentioned it, we never really have female lecturers, which isn't a problem, but either the male lecturers aren't aware, or just ignore it, or it's just not worth bringing it up, but when we leave uni, this is what you're going to experience 2.3136-3143

R: There are a lot of girls on our course; they should be put in lectures and stuff 2.3109-3110

↓

There was a gender issue that was mentioned on several occasions throughout group 1's focus groups. The group 1 students felt that there needs to be an increased awareness about the reality of the Sports Science sector among students, and an increased range of placement options to reflect the reality of the world of work and the range of employability needs of students. The alumni support that the reality of the world of work needs to be reflected in the placement options that are available (page 81).

→

JL: A lot of the placements are for guys, but don't do so many, if they had a wider selection........A: They're wasn't anything like dance or gymnastics or ....JL: Like there was a ski one, which like, come on, ski! Realistically athletics or gymnastics and stuff would be much more appropriate M: Or even women's netball or basketball, there's so many clubs that you could go to A: Or even school clubs M: A lot of the colleges have a thing called the academy, and they all play against different colleges, and they train every single day of the week at college, and obviously clubs like that would be interested in nutrition, why can't we go do stuff with people like that? 2.3112-3132

↓

H suggests that students' contacts could be utilised to set up placement opportunities, in order to broaden the range of placement options.

→

H: If they'd have done things like gymnastics or netball and dance and all stuff like that, then everyone's got a contact, if we'd have done netball I could have said at the big tournaments, 'does anyone want to take us, anyone at all?' Where as I feel like they've just said, 'oh, we've called in a favour,' type of thing, and just palmed you off 1.2541-2550

↓

Not only will a system utilising and developing students' contacts increase the placement opportunities and hopefully diminish any gender issues, but it will engage students more in the placement process, enhancing ownership, accountability and engagement.

→

The importance of contacts is highlighted by the staff in phase 2 and the alumni in phase 1 (pages 137 and 88 respectively). All of the 15 alumni that were employed at the time of interviewing gained employment through contacts. Redmond (2010: 201) acknowledges the important role contacts plays in the employability of graduates: *'It's not what you know, it's not who you know. It's who knows you'.*

In session 49, the member of staff said: *I would have thought there would be one or two placements that would be of interest to all of you, I'd be shocked if there wasn't*. The students were offered 27 different placements, from 9 different placement providers.

→

The students did not reflect the positive attitude of the member of staff: *A: When they went through the placements he was like, 'there's definitely going to be placements here for everyone, there's such a wide variety', and I sat waiting like, 'no, next, next', and it got to the end and I was like, 'I don't want to do any of them'* 1.2591-2594

→

The girls felt that there needs to be a wider variety of placement options on offer.

↓

H: It would definitely benefit from having a wider variety of placements, definately a bigger range of sports 1.2478/2437

R: Or even just people who play in the teams at sports centres and stuff, it doesn't have to be a big name like sale sharks, even though they're more attractive 2.3345-3347

M: There was only like ten things max, and when you think how many people there were on the whole course, there's not that many, and then they're not varied enough, because there's loads of football clubs and loads of rugby clubs JL: I think they think that quite high standard places are better than having variety R: It's better to have big names than actually be useful A: The Exercise Science people got different placements to us, and what I would want to do working with overweight children and nutrition in that area, it's like assuming that because we're doing Sports Science we want to just work with elite athletes, where as I'm doing Sports Science just because it's more known than Exercise Science, but I would much rather go work with one of those other companies that were offered to Exercise Science, because that's what I'd rather do, I don't want to work with athletes, I want to work with exercise 2.3281-3304

→

The girls felt that there needs to be an increase in the range of placement options that are available; to account for the range of individual needs that the undergraduate students in the SSES have. Out of the 17 alumni interviewed for phase 1 of this research programme, only four chose to do a Sports Science degree because they wanted to work in the Sports Science industry. As mentioned above, the alumni support that the reality of the world of work that graduates will be entering into needs to be reflected in the placement options that are available (page 81). Increasing the range of placement options will also increase students' awareness of the wide range of post HE options that are available to them. As stated by the NSF (2010), it is important that students develop reasonable expectations regarding their post HE options.

As discussed earlier, individuals have a variety of reasons for going to university, and a variety of hopes and dreams for their post HE lives (Brennan *et al.* 2005). Such factors need to be accounted for in order to make sense of the employability needs and aspirations of students and account for them accordingly (Barrie 2007, Brennan *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010, O'Regan 2010, Yorke 2006). In support of this, the alumni from phase 1 suggest that the SSES should encourage students to engage with work experience and placements based on their individual post HE requirements (page 91). As previously stated, it was intended the ASS3 placement would give students the, *'opportunity to engage in some work related activity, hopefully in an area that you are interested in going in to when you graduate and can follow on in your career'* (page 176). In order for the ASS3 placements to be in areas that students are going to pursue post HE, the range of placement options needs to be increased.

In order to ultimately overcome the factors that prevented students from gaining from their placement experiences, the focus group students felt that students need to spend more time on placement, as presented below:

The students felt that they should spend more time on placements

Some of the students suggested making time for block placements:

D: I finish at the end of April, if we did the placement throughout May, so we get all our work done and then have the placement, because we don't graduate until July, so maybe we could go out full time throughout May ₃.₁₇₉₇₋₁₈₁₈

D: At this university we have like six months off, rather than just saying you've gone completely at the beginning of May, if they say for six weeks you're still in uni, but you've got to find a placement, and if you do you get an extra 5% added on D.₈₀₆₋₈₁₁

M: I don't know why we haven't done placements every year to be honest,, it's not that difficult to add an extra week onto the end of the year when we finish so early anyway, add a week on so we can do a week's solid placement in first year and second year ₂.₈₆₄₋₈₆₇

R: We got told about the placement in October, and then you spend the whole of November applying, the deadline for applying is not for ages, so you sit and wait, where as it would have been a lot better if we'd have got straight in there in September, they could have cancelled uni for three weeks, literally no one was doing anything at that time, and we could have gone to the placement everyday for three weeks ₂.₈₁₃₋₈₂₀

M thinks that students should spend the adequate amount of time at their placements that is required to ensure that they gain and learn:

M: Our course needs something like other courses, people who do social work and things like that have a block of placement for like three months, and that's so much better, and I would love it if our course did that, because that's what I thought it was when I thought we had placement third year, I thought we would just be going off for like three months to do like a placement in one place, just be working there every day and not be at uni, where as our placement just isn't that ₁.₉₂₉₋₉₃₅

M: They should specify that all the placements are the same, like all of them should go once a week, because I know it would be better for us work wise, because we will have more time, but I don't think we're going to learn that much, I don't think we're going to gain as much as some of the other placements, where you do more hands on things and go into the club and work with the people and learn about what they do and stuff ₁.₂₀₂₋₂₁₃

More work experience will help students to determine what they want to do post HE:

H: I feel like it's just volunteer work that I did in sixth form, I feel like I did more in sixth form than I'm going to get from this placement, it would have been better to do like a block thing where you go into a work place and think, 'yeah, I want to do this' ₁.₉₃₉₋₉₄₂

JL: So many other courses do like a year out, or they do like placement throughout the year, because that's the only way that you find out what you want to do, is by doing a placement on it ₁.₉₀₇₋₉₀₉

Alumnus 12 also felt that gaining experience can help students decide what career paths they want to pursue: 'until they actually go and experience it, they're not going to be able to make up their own minds on which way they want to go (page 87).

More placement experience will allow students to trial the broad range of potential career options available:

R: It would be good if you had them throughout your course, a block placement would be good, but also it would be good to have a few little ones, so you can do different things, because as we said, our course doesn't lead you to one route, it's really open and you can chose, so if you had experience in different things you could go, 'oh, I don't want to do that, oh, I do like that' M: Yeah because if you'd have done a placement in first year, we might have chosen something completely different to what we do now, which although it could be bad, it could be kind of good too, like, 'well, I've also done this,' as a bit of an extra knowledge ₁.₉₅₂₋₉₆₃

EG: Maybe you could do more than one placement throughout the three years, say like you do a smaller one even just two weeks or something in second year, and then you get your like major one this year, and then you'll have more experience in different fields ₃.₁₇₈₀₋₁₇₈₃

Some of the students suggested that placements should be conducted throughout the course of the degree. However, the ASS curriculum model states that students will only be ready to engage with an applied work setting in their third year of university (see Figure 4):

S: If we did have to do a placement even last year, I wouldn't have felt like I had a clue what to do, you can only really do it this year, because you haven't done any practical experience, so you can't just go into a club and just turn up and be like, 'errr, well I don't really know what to do' ₃.₁₇₇₄₋₁₇₇₈

R: We have got a lot more knowledge this year, this year's like the main year we've learnt in our whole degree, so I'm not sure I would have been able to do this food diary thing in first year, because I wouldn't have had enough knowledge to say to the swimmers, so I would have felt stupid ₂.₈₈₅₋₈₈₈

The students suggest alternative ways that SSES students can engage with work experience throughout their degrees, in order to account for the FSE model (Figure 4):

R: In first year you could go.... M: Shadow someone, JL: Go and observe ₂.₈₈₉₋₈₉₃

JL : In second year we chose two route ways, it would have been good if you could have even two days placement in each job, and then that would help you chose your route way for final year R: Even if say five people went off to a sports club or some kind of environment, and spoke to people about the different kind of jobs, observed people doing their job, you'd have ideas of what jobs there are ₂.₉₁₂₋₉₁₈

JL: Even if you were to go and have like a day at a club, R: Even just watching, JL: Just to see like the atmosphere of the club, and get the feel of like, 'this could be my future', because a rugby club and a swim club, it's two completely different atmospheres, which I don't know now, I'm saying, 'well, I'd rather be inside talking to these little kids', but I don't really know if I would prefer that ₁.₂₄₈₂₋₂₄₉₃

A: We want to do nutrition, I think it would be better to follow a nutritionist round, and then you went and did your own thing, R: And got a taste of different things, A: Or like just saw what they did, JL: Yeah like you follow them round for week or something and then they give you your own tasks which you almost work through with them and then they could give you feedback on them as well, A: To see what it would be like if you were a nutritionist, that's what you would be doing sort of thing ₁.₂₄₉₇₋₂₅₀₉

Group 1 suggested that the first step should be providing students with insight into the types of jobs that they can go into is via shadowing and 'informational interviewing', which mirrors the suggestions made by the staff on page 14 2.2.

200

4.2.6 Placement: Summary

For part 2 of phase 2 of this research programme, the focus groups intended to address the following overarching research programme aim:

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

Aspects of the placement process that the students found beneficial and gained from can be combined with suggestions that the students gave for ways the placement provision could be enhanced. This will develop and enhance the placement curriculum intervention. Part 2 of phase 2 therefore also contributes to the following overarching research programme aim:

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

What was gained from the placements?

Confidence in Knowledge (and the ability to 'make a difference' in the world of work): The students benefited from the opportunity to apply their knowledge in a working world scenario. The placement experience made the students become more aware of the extent of their knowledge. Students appear to take their knowledge for granted when working within the university context alone.

Gained from the Pre-Placement Interview: Prepared students for interview situations post HE.

Factors related to the placements that the students gained from:

Enhanced Technical Knowledge: The placement created a sense of accountability, which in turn, enhanced learning. The experience of practically applying theoretical knowledge reinforced learning.

Sampling of Career Ideas: A good placement can help students decide what they would like to do post HE. Poor placements, on the other hand can leave students feeling lost and disheartened.

Gained from Working Independently: Working independently can create a sense of ownership over the task in hand, which in turn enhances engagement.

Effective Placement Experience Recommendations

Whilst students gained from the placement in the manners reported above, some of the students reported that they did not gain from their placement experiences. Not spending enough time at the placement was a reason the students cited for not gaining from their placements. Students should spend more time on placements in order to gain insight into the world of work, trial different post HE options and learn from the experience. Ways of incorporating more placement and experience could involve shadowing, 'informational interviewing', and making time for block placements and placements throughout the three years of the degree programmes. The students reported that a lack of

engagement with placement providers also negatively impacted on their placement experiences. Both the placement provider and students need to be engaged with placements. It is important that students gain from the placements. The students reported that there was a lack of challenging tasks involved in their placements. Placements must reflect the true nature of the working world, by being 'meaningful' and having a purpose that both the students and the placement providers can gain from. This will provide students with a true experience of being an employee in the world of work, and also enhance students' sense of accountability, which in turn will enhance engagement. The quote below from D demonstrates how a lack of accountability and involvement in placement can negatively impact on students' engagement:

D: If our works not being appreciated then why should we put the effort in D.682-683

Due to reports from students that there was 'a conflict for time', the placement should be conducted at a different and more appropriate time during the degree programme. With regard to placement preparation, more information, time and guidance is required to allow students to make an informed placement choice based on their needs. Since the students perceived there to be a lack of placement options, there needs to be an increased range of placements options to reflect the reality of the world of work and the range of employability needs of students. This will increase students' awareness of the wide range of post HE options available to them. There needs to be an increased awareness among students regarding the reality of the world of work, including the Sports Science sector. Students need to know what post HE options are achievable. Students' contacts could be utilised to set up placement opportunities. Not only will this increase the placement opportunities and develop students' contacts, but it will engage students more in the placement process, enhancing ownership, accountability and engagement.

4.3 Reflective Practice

The importance of reflecting on experience for developing employability and learning has been articulated in the literature (Crebert *et al.* 2004, Denholm 2011, Harvey 2003, HEA 2006, NCIHE 1997, Pegg *et al.* 2012, UKCES 2009).

Data regarding the reflective practice assessment will be discussed based on the following themes:

4.3.1 Identify the intentions of the SSES for the reflective assessment.	4.3.2 Identify students perceptions and experiences with reflective practice.	4.3.3 Summary: Identify reflective practice recommendations based on researcher interpretations from the data presented, followed by recommendations from the students and the staff.
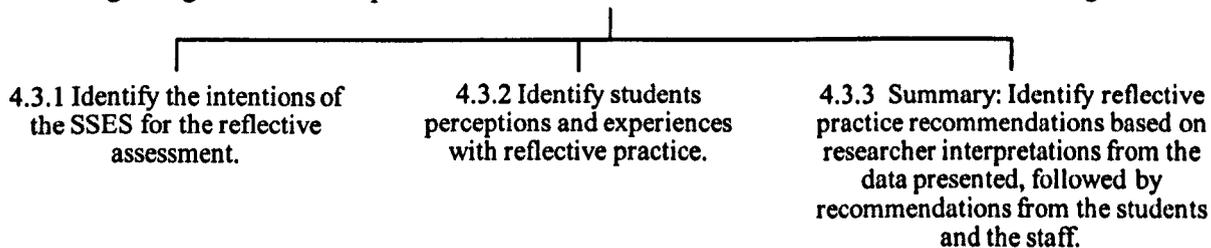
4.3.1 SSES Reflective Practice Intentions

As stated in the ASS3 Module Handbook (10/11), the assessment for this module is based on a reflective practice placement report (appendix 14). The manner in which the placement is marked is presented below:

Part A: Supervisors Mark (10%)

This group mark will be based on the performance of the group throughout the project engagement and supervision process ASS3 Module Handbook (10/11: 9, appendix 14).

Part B: Individual Reflective Essay (90%)

During the module you will undertake work on reflective practice, which is key to completing this assignment. Reflection will underpin the group tutorial support you engage in and help you to complete an individual reflective diary, both of which are to be used in formulating this essay (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 10, appendix 14).

Guidance will be given for this task at the appropriate lecture session and through your group tutorials with academic supervisors. It is expected students will use their Reflective Diary to support the development of this reflective essay (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 10, appendix 14).

See appendix 14, ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11 pages 9 and 10 for more information on the reflective practice assessment procedures and assessment criteria. As highlighted in the lecture slide below (presented in session 29), the SSES intend to train students in reflective practice from level 4 to level 6:

During L&T sessions the staff expanded on this slide, as demonstrated below:

We train you in reflection from level one all the way through to level three, because the reflective cycle is the process we want you to use to try and make maximum benefit of the WRL activity 49

At level 4 – familiarisation with the conceptual idea behind reflective practice

At level 5 – explore the process and techniques of reflection

At level 6 – engage in reflection, in a group placement project and individual diaries 29 30

Reflection can be used throughout your life to help you grow, improve and develop as a professional 29 30 34

Reflection is a guided process to get you to think about your learning and your experiences in more detail, you can apply it to any walk of life, and it is a useful technique once you master and understand it 44

Reflective Practice:

Use reflection to try and think about things that have happened to understand and make more sense of it, the outcome of reflection is a change in practice or better understanding or confirmation of a theory or skill 44

Reflective practice allows you to connect knowing about things to knowing how to do things, for example, knowing how to do a VO_{2max} to knowing how to do a VO_{2max} with different people in the population 29

Reflection helps you assume responsibility for your own learning, so instead of relying on supervisors and being taught from lectures, you can go out and learn from practice 30

It develops your ability to understand what you're improving on and what can be learnt from different experiences 30

We develop your ability to reflect, which helps you self evaluate your own performance and ability, and identify weaknesses to develop 30 26

Fully analysing an event and coming to a conclusion as to why that happened through reflection, think about what you've learnt from the process 49

The SSES staff intended that the reflective assessment would help students to make maximum benefit of their placement experience by: ➡ Developing students' ability to understand the attributes they were learning and enhancing. ➡ In turn, helping to develop students as professionals.

The staff stated that it was important that students engage with reflecting on their placement experience, in order to learn and gain knowledge in the intended manner:

It's about learning from the placement experience, reflective practice provides you with a vehicle to learn 30

We expect you to learn from the placement experience, and the way you will learn is through reflection 29

You have to reflect on the experience in order to gain knowledge 48
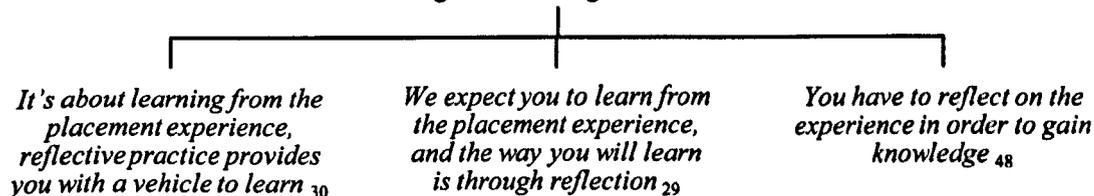
4.3.2 Students' Perceptions of Reflective Practice

Some of the focus group students were unable to recognise the intended benefits of the reflective assessment:

When group 2 were asked 'what do you think about doing reflection?' there was a slight pause, followed by laughter from the group:

D: It seems like a bit of a chore JF: Yeah on the one hand, you can see why you have to do it, but like D says, it's seen as a bit of a chore, and a bit tedious at times 3.243-246

Group 1 described reflective practice as 'pointless':

R: I think they should scrap reflective practice H, A: Yeh M: I think it's so pointless, and everyone agrees R: Every single person hates it 2.3904-3910

Students' perceptions and experiences of reflective practice will be discussed under the following themes:

Falsifying Essay Content	Assessment Driven Culture	Inability to Recognise Preparation for Post HE	A Conflict between Scientific Training & Reflection	Staff Lack of Understanding & Engagement	A Lack of Content	A Lack of Guidance	The Students Question the Current Assessment Method
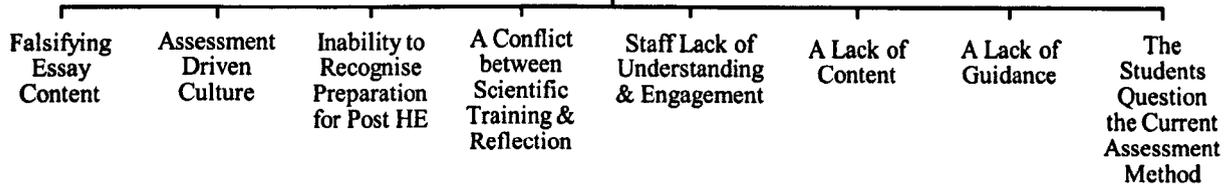
- **Falsifying Essay Content**

Group 1 revealed that students did not like writing about their 'feelings' and that people 'made things up':

→ *M: Most people find the reflective practice annoying; no one really wants to do it, everyone feels stupid writing down their feelings and stuff, like last year when we had to do it for coursework, everyone made stuff up, none of us wrote about stuff we had actually done, because none of us had done anything, so if we had of wrote about stuff we had have done in class it just would have been boring JL: It's just embarrassing, because you're writing like, 'I was really nervous, I was so embarrassed' M: And you don't really think any of that when you are in class, it's just like, 'I'm tired, I want to go to bed', but you can't just write that, so everyone just made stuff up, which just seems so pointless R: The practicals we were meant to be reflecting on last year in the coursework, only one person did each practical A: Everyone else just watched R: It's not very hard to reflect on being a spectator, so everyone just made up, 'I did the practical, I was nervous, I was embarrassed' JL: We were just more embarrassed writing about feelings, because it just felt really weird and she was going to read, 'I felt really nervous in front of the class', it sounds weird, it sounds geeky, and we didn't want to write it, but I guess everyone had to* 1.337-402

Group 1 described how they did not properly complete the reflective diaries that they were required to fill out after each placement visit (2.3856-3874). The girls also admitted to 'bending the truth' in their reflective essays:

→ *R: We definitely bent the truth, the things that happened were correct, like, 'we went there, we gave the food diaries', but I said things like, 'I was so nervous,' because of all these reasons M: Yeah I definitely padded mine out with stuff R: And to say the stages of reflection, sometimes it's so much easier to make it sort of like, 'the first time we went, we all went dressed as if we were going to a job interview, then when we got there, all the coaches were in trackies, next time, we all wore trackies to fit in', I definitely lied about a lot of things* 2.3884-3894

Group 1 described the reflective assessment as 'forcing' reflection, which resulted in things being 'made up':

→ *M: It's more forced, when you force yourself to do it I think you end up making stuff up, where as when you come straight out of placement and talk about things, if we've just done it, then obviously that's what you really feel about it, where as the fact that you're sitting down and consciously thinking about it, I think you just force yourself H: Yeah and you write stupid things then A: Try and sound intelligent trying to type M: Whereas you don't actually think like that* 1.446-459

The fact that the students reported falsifying the content of their reflective assignments, suggests that the current reflective assessment does not truly capture reflection and is therefore not aligned to the intended learning outcomes. As discussed on page 128, *'assessment needs to be aligned to learning outcomes and what we want students to learn'* (SAD). Since the purpose of the assessment is to develop students' ability to understand the attributes that they were learning and enhancing as a result of the placements, it is unnecessary for students to fabricate the content of their essays. Students should be focusing on what they gained and learned from the experiences, and how such attributes can be

applied post HE. As suggested by Philip (2008), clearer guidance can help ensure that reflection is more genuine and beneficial. Unless students are given clearer guidance, they will not genuinely reflect (Philip 2008).

- **Assessment Driven Culture**

The content of S and K's reflective essay was driven by the assessment criteria as opposed to the intended learning outcomes:

S: I don't want anyone to read it, it's embarrassing, all the points they've said to try and prove that you've reflected in all these different ways, I was just trying to prove that I had, so I was just like 'I don't care what I write I just want to get the marks' 4.1097-1102

K: I don't mind reflection really, because we did it last year as well and I did ok on it, so I'm not really that fussed this year about doing it 3.259-260

It is of interest that K reports not minding doing the reflective assignment, because she *'did ok in it last year'*. For the students in the focus groups, it seemed that the content of their essays was driven by the assessment criteria, resulting in essays that were not representative of genuine or beneficial reflection. This exemplifies how the focus on a final summative mark can hinder the learning experience, due to students focusing on the outcome as opposed to the process (Burgess 2007, Knowles 2008). A member of staff attempted to overcome the assessment driven culture, by highlighting that reflection is not just a mode of assessment; it provides the opportunity for preparing for post HE:

No doubt the purpose and outcome of reflection for yourselves is assessment, but we'd also like to think that you'd invest in this notion for self growth beyond your degree, for professional development 29

I understand that the purpose and outcome for yourselves is assessment, you want to know how to get the best mark for this assessment, but think about it long term as well, you will come across reflection in the professional world, reflective practice makes you capable of assuming your own responsibility for learning, so instead of relying on supervisors and being taught from lectures, you can go out and learn from practice, and as you progress along a professional development route, you want to learn and understand about you and your performance 30

- **Inability to Recognise Preparation for Post HE**

Despite the member of staff's attempts to enhance students' awareness of the benefit of reflection, the students were slow to recognise how reflection can enhance future professional development:

M: I don't feel like that's going to help you in your future when you're getting a job, because in what kind of job do you have to write in a diary and give it to your boss? I just think it's so pointless 1.419-421

JL: Maybe it's to help you do it naturally in the future H: But I do that anyway JL: I mean obviously in the future I'm never going to write it down, I guess I'm trying to like justify them doing it 2.3944-3949

It is apparent that the students do not recognise the intended benefits of reflection. The quotes below demonstrate both A and D referring to the placement and reflection as being *'just like any other assignment'*:

A: This is just like any other piece of coursework for us 1.2509-2510

~

D: It never felt like a real placement, it was just like any other assignment that I'd done, rather than an actual real world work D.67-75

According to the alumni, students need to be aware of the benefit of engaging in order to fully engage (page 75). Based on the assessment driven culture, students do what they need when they need (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008). Therefore students need to perceive a 'need' to engage. Students need to be aware of the purpose, 'pay off' and 'need' involved with engaging in the placement assessment. According to Marzano (1992), it is important that students are clear regarding the learning goal and how staff will evaluate such learning. Students must also perceive such goals to be meaningful and worth engaging with (Marzano 1992). It is important that students are aware of and can identify with the purpose and benefit of curriculum interventions, in order to ensure that they fully engage and reap from the entirety of the intended experience. If students are not aware of the purpose and benefit of a given curriculum intervention, then they will deem it 'pointless'. As stated by Browne (2010), increasing students' awareness of the reality of the world of work will close the gap between skills taught in university and the requirements of the world of work. See the 'a lack of awareness' section below for a more in depth discussion into this matter.

- **A Conflict between Scientific Training and Reflection**

A potential reason why the students may find reflective practice a difficult concept is because it goes against the scientific nature of their degree training, as demonstrated below:

EG: It seems quite simple S,D,JF: Yeah S: But then you feel like you are doing the wrong thing JF: Yeah like at times when we had the piece of work on it last year, I was like, 'it can't be this simple' when I was writing it S: Yeah I did that piece of work in a night, and I was like, 'surely that can't be right' 3.263-272

R: It's easy, but it's so difficult to make it good, and normally our coursework's are like introduction, methods, results, discussion, the reflective essay is a different format, we have never done anything like that before 2.78-80

K: It was more annoying, because it was so simple, but when you read over it, compared to other work you've done that's scientific, it just sounded like a kid had written it or something, because it was just so simple, but it was hard to write it because it was simple if that makes sense? S: No references or anything, I was doing a Biomechanics essay at the same time, so I was switching between proper scientific to....and it was quite weird EG: I think that mine sounds quite rubbish, but then I don't know if it is, because last year when we did the essay it sounded really basic but I got like 80% on it K: I think that's what they look for though isn't it EG: Yeah so I don't have a clue what it's going to be like, it was rushed and it's different to what we usually do 4.1021-1042

In the above quotations there is an essence of uncertainty and doubt among the students. They discuss how the assessment, 'seems quite simple', which makes them feel like what they are writing 'cannot be right', and they must therefore be 'doing the wrong thing' and 'writing a load of rubbish'. The ambiguity among the students appears be due to the fact that the reflective essay goes against the scientific nature of the training that the students have received within the SSES. If the students do not fully understand the curriculum intervention, it could cause them to perceive it as being 'tedious', a 'chore' and 'pointless'. A better understanding of the purpose of the intervention will result in the students feeling more secure in engaging with the assignment.

- **Staff Lack of Understanding and Engagement**

At the staff away day, the staff revealed that they have difficulties assessing reflection due to a lack of understanding, which results in variations in staff marking criteria:

The problem is that you need staff's specialist knowledge for some placements, but all staff aren't necessarily geared up to evaluate that SAD.EZ

Part of the problem is some of the assessments that we use on the applied modules, I don't think I'm qualified to assess, because I know nothing about reflection, if the assignments purely on reflection, it would be like asking a Biochemist to mark Biomechanics SAD.EZ

I know that module, it's being farmed out for different people to mark, they have given it 70%, and in my opinion it's never been a 70%, I think someone needs to take charge of that module and just accept responsibility for all the marking, and then free their workload up in other places SAD.EZ

K from focus group 2 articulated that her placement supervisor lacked engagement with reflective practice and demonstrated inconsistencies with the marking criteria:

(My supervisor) doesn't really believe in reflection, he was saying, 'don't put this in, don't put that in', but the outline says we have to say, 'I felt this', like, 'I felt angry' for example, but he was like, 'I don't want you putting stuff like that', but we were like, 'we have to', so eventually we came to terms with what he wants us to put in, but I hope he doesn't mark us down just because he doesn't like it 4.1070-1081

If the staff lack understanding and engagement with reflective practice, then it is difficult to subsequently expect students to be able to understand and engage.

- **A Lack of Content**

Not spending enough time on their placements (page 193) made the reflective assessment difficult for students due to a lack of content to reflect on:

K: All we were concerned about in the end was what we could actually reflect on in our diaries, because every week it was the same things coming up 4.728-731

D: I found it quite tricky, if I'd been going down every week I'd have a lot to talk about, but I didn't really have that much to reflect on, so I was struggling to find significant time points to talk about D.136-142

Group 1 came up with a solution to having a lack of information to complete their reflective essays' from the two occasions that they visited their placement: *JL: I remember saying, 'what are we actually going to write in this assignment, for 8 pages, when we have been twice?' and you can just blab R: Make up stuff JL: Yeah I mean fine we did only go twice or three times, but you could just make that two pages long M: They don't know what you did JL: Yeah it's not like they come out and see you ever, they don't actually have a clue what we did R: And you're getting marked on your understanding of reflection, you can lie and be like, 'oh, this happened,' and reflect on it well* 2.724-738

Having a lack of content to reflect on made it difficult for the students to engage with the intended learning outcomes of developing students' ability to understand what attributes they were learning and enhancing in preparation for post HE. As stated by the member of staff in session 29, *'you can't reflect if you don't have an experience'*. Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) argue that the quality of a students' reflection is an indication of how engaged students are in the experience, suggesting that students lacked engagement with their placement. A link between engagement and reflection has been further demonstrated in the literature (Boud and Walker 1990, Duffy *et al.* 2008, Moon 2004).

Philip (2008) defined reflection as a threshold concept. According to Smith (2006), understanding a threshold concept may entail a shift in learner subjectivity, which is likely to take place over time. Providing students with more time to reflect will help them to understand reflection, present them with more content to reflect on, and in turn enhancing the opportunity for quality reflection to occur.

- **A Lack of Guidance**

The staff articulated that it was important for students to have supervision during the placement and reflection process:

Guidance will be given for this task at the appropriate lecture session and through your group tutorials with academic supervisors (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 10, appendix 14).

It's good to share reflection between a group, but also with supervisors, it's important that other people are involved [48]

As very inexperienced practitioners, you will find that when you first go out there, you can't make sense of why things are happening, you don't know why something worked or didn't work, and your supervisor will say, 'talk me through it, talk me through what you did, what were you thinking then? How did that make you feel?' [48]

We will force you to engage in conversational reflection, force you to work with supervisors and groups, and write reflectively, the reason that we do that is that if you want to go and train along a professional route way, you will have to do and demonstrate that [48]

Whatever profession you go into, you will have to undergo a mentoring process, the placement mentoring process attempts to reflect this [13]

The students' experiences and perceptions of the mentoring process that was intended to guide and support students through the process of reflecting on their placements is presented below:

Mentoring Process

Prior to their placements, there was an uncertain response from group 2 when they were asked whether they were going to get any feedback from supervisors whilst doing their placements:

JF: I don't know D: They've not said it as such, but I think it's expected of you to keep in touch K: Just to say what you're doing and how it's going, because we've had to do exercises that we're going to take to try and do with the athletes, so we have to confirm it with the supervisor before we actually go in, and send it to the person who's looking after us there as well, to agree that he's happy with what we are going to be doing EM: Ours is a bit different, because we're internal so were working with (our supervisor), so I think we're going to sit down with him and go through what we've done [3.367-393]

D: My supervisor was just involved in the interview, and I was surprised when we spoke to him a few weeks ago about a presentation we had to do for the placement, we all had quite a lot of work on, and our supervisor just said, 'look, other work has got to come first', over the placement, so that was the only feedback I've had from (my supervisor) about it really [D.651-660]

Post-placement, group 2 reported having contact with their supervisors, but not in a reflective manner:

JF: We were left to get on with it on our own, but in a way I preferred that rather than constantly reporting to someone, we were left to get on with it and manage it ourselves, and then just had formal and informal chats with (our supervisor) now and then as to how things were going, and I preferred that, made us feel more independent and we were actually doing it ourselves [4.461-470]

K: We saw (our supervisor) three times, before we went, halfway between and then at the end, he was really supportive, he's guided us well [4.612 620]

EG: I only saw my academic supervisor about two times, I didn't really feel the need to go and see him, although looking back I could've gone and reflected with him about what was going on a bit more, but at the time I was just getting on with it, and whatever they asked of us we'd do it, even if it was good or rubbish [4.585-593]

The staff refererd to a limited staff capacity to support the placements:

We have integrated it, we have built massive support for these placements for employers, but we haven't got staff capacity to service them, that is the big problem [SAD.EZ]

As previously stated, reflection can be defined as a threshold concept (Philips 2008). The understanding of a threshold concept may entail a shift in learner subjectivity, which is more likely to be recognised initially by others than by the individual in question, signifying the importance of guidance in the process of understanding reflection (Smith 2006). In the same manner, the member of staff in session 48 describes how during the placements the students will require guidance because they may not be able to *'make sense of why things are happening'*. According to Moon (2004), reflection should be modelled by a supervisor.

- **The Students Question the Current Assessment Method**

As highlighted, an essay was used to assess whether students understand the attributes that they were learning and enhancing as a result of their placement experiences. The focus of the reflective assessment is highlighted in the below quotes:

We expect you to engage and learn in the placement experience, and the way you will learn is through reflection, and demonstrate it through the essay [29]

You get marked on whether you show you know how to use the reflective cycle [44]

Some of the students questioned the current structure of the reflective assessment:

R: Some people like to write things down, some people like to ring their mum, some people just like to think about things themselves, and you just already know, I don't think it helps anyone, I'd be surprised if it helped anyone [2.3973-3976]

R: I don't think that assignment helped my reflection JL: You do reflection automatically with your friends; I just don't think you need to necessarily write it down [2.3848-3851]

S: I feel like I do it a bit anyway, but then with this diary writing down thing, I don't know if I'm writing a load of rubbish, I feel like I reflect anyway, but there's a whole process you have to go through, which seems a bit...... [3.248-257]

R: I don't think you need to structure it [2.3961]

H: I don't personally see the point in having to write it down, because I know obviously you learn from it, but I'm not going to go back to it in a couple of years and read, 'I felt nervous' because of course you did, I just don't see the whole point in it [1.414-417]

As previously stated, students must be able to perceive that assessment is meaningful and worth engaging with (Marzona 1992). Students' lack of awareness regarding the value of the reflective essay means that they cannot perceive a 'need' to engage. The following extracts reveal the students' perceptions regarding the focus of the assessment:

JF: From what I can gather, the idea of this is that you're getting more practical hands on experience, and then the final assessment isn't really looking at that, it's only going to be sort of 10% of it, the rest is your reflections on the process [3.216-219]

M: Part of it is seeing what you'd be like in the practical world of sport, that's what they say they are preparing us for, but they're really not, they're preparing us to write an essay [2.3462-3464]

R: We get marked on the assignment about reflecting, we don't get marked at all on what happened at the placement, you have like no real motivation to prioritise that, even though you're probably going to get a lot more out of that than doing another coursework, but you get marked on reflecting [2.715-718]

The girls felt that not getting marked on the applied work that they carried out as part of the placement, meant that they were had 'no real motivation to prioritise' such work. Knowles (2008:20) described this phenomenon as students *"focusing on the outcome as opposed to the process"*. This resulted in the students not gaining and learning from the totality of the placement experience, meaning that the reflective practice assignment is not accounting for or encouraging the intended learning outcomes. Due to the assessment driven nature of students whereby students 'focus on the outcome as opposed to the process', the intended learning outcomes need to be aligned to the assessment in order to encourage engagement in the process (Philip 2006).

4.3.3 Summary: Reflective Assessment Recommendations

For part 2 of phase 2 of this research programme, the focus groups intended to address the following overarching research programme aims:

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

It appears that currently the reflective assessment is not enabling students to learn from the experience of reflection in the manner intended by SSES staff (page 203). Reflective practice recommendations to enhance learning and preparation for post HE have been created based on the findings presented. Clearer guidance is required to overcome students falsifying essay content, and ensure that reflection is more genuine and beneficial (Philip 2008). Due to the assessment driven culture of students, assessments need to be effectively aligned to the intended learning outcomes. The focus of the assessment needs to be realigned to encourage reflecting and learning from the placement experiences in preparation for the world of work. Students need to be fully informed and understanding about the benefits of engaging with any given curriculum intervention in order to engage and gain from the totality of the experience and its intended benefits. Since students found it difficult to write the reflective assignment due to the scientific nature of their degree training, more training and guidance is required, ideally from the first year in a developmental holistic programme approach. The issue of the staffs' lack of understanding and engagement with reflection needs to be addressed, potentially through developing staffs' specialism. Since reflection can be defined as a threshold concept, it therefore needs to be taught accordingly. Increasing the amount of time that students are engaging with reflection will increase students understanding of reflection. Students have to be provided with more content to reflect on. Given that the understanding of a threshold concept is more likely to be recognised initially by others than by the individual in question, students need to be engaged with an effective mentoring system to help students understand and become aware of the learning and development process that they are undergoing.

4.3.4 What more could be done?

The students and staff made suggestions for alternative ways that the placement could be assessed. Such suggestions will result in the focus of the assessment being realigned to better encourage reflecting and learning from the placement experiences in preparation for the world of work:

Alternative Placement Assessment

Some of the group 2 students felt that the more marks should be allocated to account for the effort that they put into their placements:

D: *The weighting of the reflection should be different, maybe 50/50 with the supervisors mark*
JF: *Yeah because if you did really well at your placement, but then say you weren't as good at the reflective practice process and your write up wasn't as good, your work in the placement would be a bit wasted, because it wouldn't be reflected in your overall mark* 3.330-342

D: *I'd say it'd be better if it was weighted a bit differently, so that your actual performance at the placement got more than 10%, because you're putting all this effort in and then you're not getting marked on it, because it's only 10% that you get from the supervisor, and if I'd been travelling down once a week, I'd want more than 10% for all my effort* D.207 217

EG: *It should be more from the supervisor, because some people might not be very good at writing reports, and writing up their own feelings* 3.209-210

A from group 1 suggests assessing students' on their attitude:

A: *Maybe if we got a mark from the person at the placement, because they don't know in the reflection if we've worked hard or not because you can say what you want really, or if they broke it up, so it was like 10% on your attitude, maybe if they said like, 'they were enthusiastic', because we could go and just be like, 'oh, we don't really care, and we actually haven't done the food diaries, there's nothing like saying that we have to do it* 1.2666-2695
This suggestion reflects the 'good work ethic/attitude' world of work requirement that the alumni discussed in phase 1 (Table 11, page 61). Employers are often more interested in attitude and personality than skills, as it allows for the differentiation between graduates, and skills can be developed once employed (Adecco Group 2012, Burgess 2007, Talabi 2012).

JF suggests that students could receive feedback about their performance from their placement provider:

JF: *Even if you got marked like 10 or 20% for actually completing the placement, and feedback from the coach, and proof of what you did* 2.751-752

This suggestion supports the alumnus 5, who suggested that the students would benefit from an evaluation of their placement: *In terms of the evaluation, you do a reflective practice journal, you don't actually get assessed on your contribution to the applied Sports Science, also somehow evaluating what you have done on the placement gives you a measure of how good you were practically, as opposed to writing a theoretical reflection, they would maybe benefit more from some practical evaluation from that placement, what they did well and what they didn't do so well*

EG suggests that students could be given targets to achieve whilst they are on their placements:

EG: *When my friends at other unis go on placements they get assessed on how they did and they get given lists of things they've got to do, and they've got to meet those targets, and then they'll get assessed on how well they did* 3.225-228

A and R suggested that observations could be used to assess how effective students are on their placements and enhance students' accountability and engagement:

A: *I reckon if we got observed rather than just doing reflection* R: *You'd probably put more effort into the placement then* 2.3457-3460

The staff suggested alternatives for assessing the placements:

We should be given more time, we should think a bit better how to assess more effectively, and then we can go in one day and watch them doing something, because we're the experts here, supposedly SAD.EZ

You could get the students to video what they are doing and bring that back and then a supervisor can assess it, that's what I use in supervised experience, I don't go out and see them SAD.EZ

Alternative Placement Assessment: Summary

More marks should be allocated to account for the effort that students put into their placements. Evaluative feedback about students' performance in their placement should be provided from the placement provider. Students could be given targets to achieve whilst they are on their placements. Observations can assess how effective students are on their placements, and enhance students' accountability and engagement. Video observational assessment could be used if the staff members cannot be there in person.

212

4.3.5 A Lack of Awareness

Data regarding a lack of awareness will be presented under the following format:

1. A Lack of Awareness Exemplified	2. The impact of the focus groups on reflection and an examination of students' reflective essays.	3. The Importance of Awareness	4. A Lack of Awareness: Summary
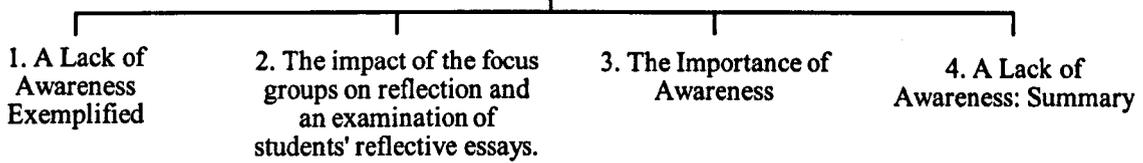
1. A Lack of Awareness Exemplified

It has been demonstrated that group 1 in particular were unable to recognise the intended benefits of reflection in terms of learning from the placement experience and developing professionally. Despite this, throughout their post placement focus group, the girls talked through their placement experience in a reflective manner, evaluating what more could be done to improve their conduct as applied practitioners. However, as mentioned earlier, reflection can be described as a threshold concept, and the understanding of a threshold concept may entail a reconstruction in learner subjectivity, which is more likely to initially be recognised by others (Philip 2006, Smith 2006). The girls appeared to be unaware of the learning and development that they had gained from their placement experience. This notion will be discussed in more depth, after extracts of the girls reflecting on their placement have been presented:

Post-Placement Reflection

JL and A discussed how they could have better introduced themselves to their clients:

JL: At the beginning we could have taken a different approach, like gone in and done a presentation and brought loads of food and props A: Made it interesting JL: And been like, 'right everybody, what did you have for breakfast this morning? I had these', and interact a bit more rather than just casually sitting besides the pool where you can't hear, they've no idea who we are; to them we're probably just like teachers coming in to hound them 2.628-641

M felt that conducting a needs analysis would have allowed the girls to provide feedback to meet their clients individual requirements:

M: We never really got told much, if they'd have sat down and spoke to us about individuals, like who does what stroke, who does what competitions, because they were saying, some of them do competitions where they are doing stuff all day and other ones don't even do competitions, and if we knew more about them as an athlete, they told us there was different levels in there, but they didn't say, 'this person is at this level, and this person is at this level', so we had no clue, because we never got to speak to them about it 2.351-360

R felt that spending more time on the placement would have provided more of an opportunity to build rapport with their clients, and get a better idea of their nutritional needs:

R: If we'd have gone to the placement more times and got to know the kids, we could have got more out of them, because one of the girls I gave the feedback to didn't open her mouth through the whole thing, so I was just talking and talking, I was trying to engage her, asking her questions, 'do you like this? do you like that?' But I got no response, which meant I couldn't gauge what she knew at all, and I don't know whether it was because she was shy or not interested, but maybe if we had gone more times and got like more of a rapport with them 2.619-626

The alumni in phase 1 defined the ability to build rapport and be personable as an important world of work requirement (Table 11). This links to the students' discussion that it would be beneficial to spend more time on placement (page 199).

A: It would have been good if we'd have gone back, told them it all, gave them all the ideas, and then gone, 'do another food diary now with the new ideas', and see if they made an improvement R: And then maybe you could say, 'do this before your training session, and then come back and tell us whether it made you feel any better when you were performing', because some of them had like a day long competition, and according to the food diary, some of them hardly ate, so then , 'next competition, if you eat, and then tell us if you think that improved you' JL: When we think about nutrition we just think, 'ok, we do food diaries', and you don't really think about that much else, so until we actually sit now and think, 'well, actually we could have done this, or we could have done that', because we had done the food diaries so late in the year, it really didn't leave that much time to do anything else, so I think if we were to do it again, it would be wise to do it immediately with the food diaries at the very beginning of the year, and then you have time to speak to the supervisor and be like, 'ok, we didn't really know what else to do, can you help us' 2.682-701

The girls felt that more time on the placement would have given them the opportunity develop their clients' performance:

R: When we went first of all to give out the food diaries, there was quite a big group of people, so we split of into groups of a few kids each, because the swimming pool is really noisy, and literally, for most of us, we felt like no one was listening, the parents were listening a bit, but the kids were just like, looking at the pool, looking at the wall JL: They had their swimming lesson after so they were just like, (jumps around in seat) dying to get in the pool R: They just wanted to swim, they just weren't interested, weren't listening A: They just weren't listening at all, and you'd ask them questions, and they just wouldn't answer 2.278 – 290

Group 1 discussed difficulties that they encountered whilst on their placement, and how they would make improvements to their future practice:

R: It would have been easier if we'd have had it in a separate room maybe, but these are things that we didn't know before we went, but in hindsight, doing it at the side of the pool, doing it at seats that are A: Tiered R: So I'm sitting here and one of the kids I'm talking to is like two seats above me, and one of them is down there H: And when they're looking at the pool thinking, 'I just want to get in' R: Yeah other people are swimming in the pool ,and it's an absolute distraction A: It's good, because they obviously feel comfortable in there but.... JL: Yeah I guess it's like their comfort zone I guess in a way A: Even if you were in the changing room where it's quieter 2.643-660

During sessions X2, the placement group also displayed effective reflective practice skills, as demonstrated in the below research reflection:

I arrived at the care home to find the students dealing with an angry home manager. The placement students had prepared to do a gardening session and the care home had prepared for table football. The confused situation was handled effectively and quickly so that the session could get underway. The students decided that the first half of the session would be football, because the equipment for had been set up, and the second half would be gardening. As we were leaving, a few of the students engaged in a very professional chat with the home manager regarding next week's activities. In the car park, the students reflected on the events of today, 'we would have been better doing gardening as the first set of activities'. They demonstrated learning from their practical experience and reflecting on how they could develop and improve their workplace performance next time.

The above extracts demonstrate students effectively reflecting and learning from their placement experiences and identifying ways to improve their professional conduct. As R highlighted, 'hindsight' meant that group 1 were only able to recognise the reality and requirements of the situation after the event and determine how the process could be better managed in the future. This relates to the defintion of reflection from Biggs (1999: 7):

"A reflection in a mirror is an exact replica of what is in front of it. Reflection in professional practice, however, gives us back, not what is, but what might be, an improvement on the original".

It therefore appears that the placement experience has accomplished the SSES's intended learning outcome of *'developing students as professionals'*. Based on the above examples of group 1 reflecting in the focus group, it is surprising that group 1 felt that they had to falsify content to put into their reflective diary.

However, when asked directly, *'did doing your placement make you feel any more prepared for after university?'* H, A, R and M simultaneously replied, *'no'*, suggesting that the intended learning outcome of *'developing students' ability to understand the attributes that they were learning and enhancing'* was not achieved.

The girls lacked an awareness of the attributes that they had gained and developed as a result of their placement experience:

H: I've not learnt anything skills wise that I didn't already have before $_{2.3401-3402}$
M: Although we learnt how to do real life food diaries, as part of one of our courseworks last year we had to do a food diary, so we knew how to use the software and everything like that already, the only thing that was a bit different was that that was for an athlete, whereas this was for children, and this got us used to overcoming the obstacles, like when they don't put in exactly the right information, how to get round that, but still, I don't think we've learnt that much, because we've learnt the whole process before $_{2.394-401}$

It appears that group 1 do not recognise the professional development that they underwent as a result of their placement. In the focus group scenario, the researcher was able to recognise the attributes that the group had developed but were unaware of. This supports of the notion that reflection can be initially recognised by others before the individual (Smith 2006).

2. The Impact of the Focus Groups on Reflection

The staff articulated that it was important for students to share reflection with supervisors and within the placement groups:

Group based work related tutorials will assist students in preparing for placement and subsequently supporting them through this experience. These tutorials will allow students to use their analytical and group reflective skills to address specific issues and enhance their own learning (ASS3 Module Handbook 10/11: 5, appendix 14).

However, as demonstrated on page 208, it does not appear that this intended supervision was implemented. On page 214, JL stated that *'until we actually sit now and think, 'well, actually we could have done this, or we could have done that'*, suggesting that the focus group stimulated the girls to reflect on their placement experiences, and evaluate what they could have done to improve their conduct as applied practitioners. According to Knowles (2008), the discussion of experiences after the event can create the opportunity to evaluate practice. Knowles (2008) states that reflection can be an

individual or shared activity, and that reflecting with others as well as reflecting on our own promotes learning. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) stated that focus groups can encourage and support reflection and development, and the researcher was intrigued about whether the reflections that the girls demonstrated in the focus group differed to the content of their reflective essays. The researcher emailed all members of group 1 to ask them for a copy of their reflective essays. Three out of the five students replied, consenting to the researcher reading and making reference to their essays (A, JL and R). JL and R commented on the focus groups in their reflective essays, as presented below:

JL's Reflective Essay Extract

Prior to completing the two focus group sessions, I was more excited than nervous to be able to give my honest opinion on the both the process and outcome; perhaps assisting future development. The recorded sessions were of an informal nature, and as our group were close friends, we found it relatively simple to express our thoughts and emotions. I believe that completing the focus group was very beneficial, as it gave us the chance to be honest and express both our positive and negative opinions about the placement in a confidential environment. In the future, I would aim to get involved in a similar setting, as I feel it helped me to expand upon my previous reflection.

R's Reflective Essay Extract

The final focus group allowed us to record the different things we had learned throughout the placement. Initially, we each recorded any theoretical (explicit) knowledge we had gained through nutritional research [researchers note: this did not happen]. However, when the PhD student encouraged us to consider skills we had gained further to academic understanding; it was evident that much craft knowledge had been acquired, such as organisational, communication and efficiency skills. I would not have realised I had gained these abilities had it not been for the focus group, and this further enabled me to appreciate the role reflection has in respect to improvement and learning. In addition, I was able to realise the wide availability of the range of reflection methods and how each can play a different, yet important role in personal and professional development.

Copies of JL and Rs' essays can be found in appendix 24. The researcher was aware not to take extracts from the essay at face value, based on the fact that the group 1 students had admitted to *'bending the truth'* in their reflective essays (page 204), and the note in R's consent email to the researcher that stated:

Yeah, its fine for you to refer to my essay, although I must say that the majority of what I wrote wasn't true - it's easier to reflect if you make things up!

The researcher emailed R and J to ask them to confirm the authenticity of the above essay extracts about the focus groups. Extracts from their email responses are presented below:

JL's Confirmation Email

At the time I think that was just written for the essay. Although when I think about it, it is a lot easier to just talk about reflection in a group and talk about your thoughts and feelings of the processes, rather than record them and write an essay about them, which feels kind of embarrassing.

R's Confirmation Email

To be honest, that is a bit exaggerated. I think the focus group helped me in terms of really thinking about what was good/bad about our placement process and what I enjoyed/didn't enjoy (and it definitely helped me write the essay!), but I don't think it made me realise any skills I'd gained..........I definitely didn't appreciate reflection (from the focus group or the essay) and by the end still thought of it as

The researcher concluded that JL and R were unaware of the factors that they had learned and enhanced from their placement and reflective experience, and how that relates to the world of work. It is questionable whether an essay can do justice to the very individual, personal and complex nature of reflecting. The fact that the students claim to reflect anyway (page 209), and that they demonstrated the ability to reflect in the focus groups, suggests that the nature of the essay is in their words, 'forcing' them to reflect (page 204), which is in turn suffocating the creative and individual essence of reflection.

3. The Importance of Awareness

The importance of self-awareness was highlighted in the literature review (page 9) and discussed in the phase 2 world of work requirements section (page 124). LJMU's consultation with employers revealed that employers want students who have a self awareness of their own skills, attributes and values, rather than simple the possession of 'skills' (Thompson *et al.* 2008). Students need to be made aware of the factors that they have developed alongside their placement, and how these factors are important and can be applied in the world of work (Leitch 2006, NSF 2010). Gaining an awareness of the learning and development that occurred as a result of their placements will result in students' improved conduct as practitioners if absorbed. Group 1's lack of awareness regarding the learning and development they underwent as a result of their placement resulted in them being unable to reflect on and learn from their experiences. Awareness is required in order to reflect and learn from a given experience. Based on the perceptions of the alumni and the focus group students, gaining experience and applying their attributes helps to enhance awareness:

The alumni only became aware of the attributes that they possessed, when they started to put them into practice in the work place (page 70), and in the same sense, only became aware of the requirements of the world of work upon entering the world of work and learning what was required of them.

This reflects the students in the focus groups who benefited from the opportunity to apply their knowledge in a working world scenario. The placement experience made the students become more aware of the extent of their knowledge, and more confident in their ability to 'make a difference' in the world of work (see page 189).

However, gaining experience is not always enough. The fact that the attributes gained by the girls could be recognised by the researcher but not by the girls themselves, suggests that students need to be engaged with an effective mentoring system which ensures that students are informed and made aware of the learning and development that they are undergoing and how that relates to the world of work requirements. The staff need to approach students in the same manner they approach their athlete cliental:

The Sports Science environment deals with interpersonal relationships, one day is never the same as the next, the environment that you work in changes constantly, it's like being a nurse on a ward, patients are different, peoples conditions change, it's the same with Sports Science, it's a constant changing environment, you have to have the ability to make changes in practice 45 48

The above description of the Sports Science world of work environment resembles HE, whereby *'students are different'*, and *'students' conditions change'*. This needs to be accounted for. Staff need to approach students in the same manner they approach their athletes and clients. For example, staff should effectively communicate at an appropriate level of understanding with students as they would with clients. Also, as demonstrated in the below quotation, the staff referred to the importance of making athletes aware of why given assessments are being conducted:

You have to be able to rationalise to athletes why you have done the assessment you have done and what the importance and benefits of that assessment are, and you have to have the ability to present scientific information in a format suitable for a non-scientific audience 17 44

This assessment notion needs to be applied to students. It needs to be made explicit to students what they are gaining and developing as a result of curriculum interventions. As demonstrated on page 106, the SSES staff referred to PDP being utilised to develop students' awareness of the attributes that they posses, in order to increase students' marketability:

PDP develops your ability to recognise, value and evidence your learning experiences, so that you can demonstrate to others what you know and can do, some students are great academically, but they can't communicate it in interviews, and they don't have the written CV, we want you to be able to demonstrate to others that you are good and attractive, you need to make yourself stand out from others, and that's a skill in itself 45 26 5 10

However, based on the above data from focus group 1, awareness and subsequent marketability has not been accounted for. If students are unaware of the requirements of the world of work, they will fail to recognise what they can offer. As highlighted on page 88, students require self awareness in order to effectively market themselves to potential employers, and effectively apply and continue to develop their attributes post HE in the world of work. Students must be aware of the skills and knowledge they are developing and how to successfully articulate the applicability of such attributes to potential employers (Denholm 2011, Harvey 2003, NSF 2009, Rae 2009). As stated by the UKCES (2009: 7), one of the most valuable skills is the ability to transfer ones skill.

↑ Awareness of the world of work requirements **+** ↑ Self awareness of attributes and how they relate to the world of work requirements **=** ↑ Marketability
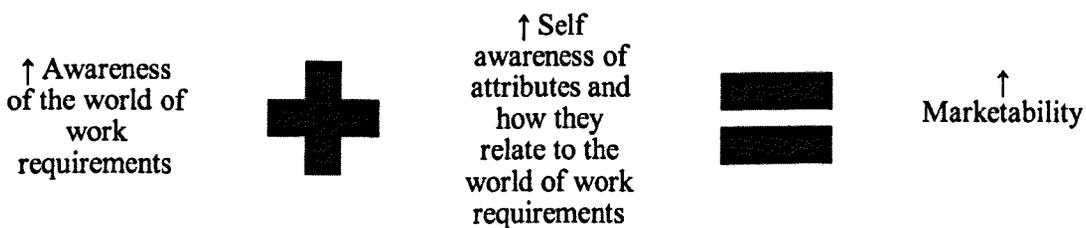
As stated by Browne (2010), increasing students' awareness of the reality of the world of work will close the gap between the skills taught in HE and the world of work requirements.

4. A Lack of Awareness: Summary

In summary, students need to be made self-aware of the factors that they have developed alongside their placement, and how these factors are important and can be applied in the world of work. Students need to be engaged with an effective mentoring system, which ensures students are informed and made aware of the learning and development they are undergoing, and how that relates to the world of work requirements.

4.4 Phase 2 Summary

Through an ethnographic research approach, including focus groups, phase 2 part 1 of this research programme aimed to address overarching research programme aims 'b' and 'c':

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

The SSES has responded to the demand of the competitive graduate job market and developed a three stage employability model for curriculum design, which involved opportunities to prepare students for post HE, including PDP, careers sessions, guest speakers, placement, and reflection. The SSES are proactive in providing opportunities; advice and encouragement to help students develop personally and professionally, yet students are not engaging, highlighting a dissonance between the perceptions, understandings and expectations of staff and students within the SSES. This dissonance was explored by gaining a better understanding of students and the students L&T university culture, in order to determine why there was a lack of engagement. This understanding and subsequent recommendations can be utilised to diminish the dissonance between what staff provide and what students engage with, and determine how the SSES can promote effective learning and post HE preparation within the SSES curriculum. Such recommendations will be summarised in the synthesis of this thesis.

Recommendations to ensure students gain effective placement experience have been created, as well as recommendations for the use of reflective practice within the SSES curriculum (pages 200 and 209 respectively). The figure below provides a summary of the post HE preparing assessment orientated recommendations that have been made by the students and staff involved throughout phase 2 of this research programme:

The central node reads "Post HE Preparing Assessment Recommendations" with surrounding nodes:

- Mock Interview Scenarios
- Inter-disciplinary Group Work
- Oral accounts for hard to convey 'wicked competencies'
- Video observational assessment for placements
- Evaluative feedback
- Assess 'good work ethic/attitude' (a phase 1 world of work requirement)
- Targets to achieve whilst on placement
- Observation and Q&A E.g. observations of practical work, placements, mock work scenarios
- Presentation and Q&A (Viva or conference style)
- Seminars with marking for attendance and contribution

Q&A = Question and answer

Phase 1

Interviews with alumni from the SSES.

Phase 2: Ethnographic Research Approach

Part 1 involved participant observation within the SSES student L&T environment and culture.

Part 2 involved focus groups with SSES students regarding their experiences and perceptions of the L&T experience.

Phase 3

Interviews with immediate graduates.

5.1 Phase 3 Rationale & Study Aims

It is important to assess students' employability needs and aspirations and the effectiveness of their university experience whilst at university, immediately after university, and once in work (Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010). Since phase 1 of this research programme focused on graduates in work, and phase 2 focused on students whilst at university, the researcher decided to interview students who were at the end or immediately after their university experience, addressing the following research question:

What are immediate graduates perceptions of the HE experience in relation to post HE preparation?

The phase 3 interviews further investigated the issues raised as a result of the phase 1 alumni interviews and the phase 2 ethnographic immersion in the SSES L&T environment. Interviews are considered to be an important supplement to ethnographies (Alvesson 2003), since they can be utilised to follow up issues and findings that arise as a result of ethnographic immersion (Krane and Baird 2005).

"Interviews are at the heart of doing ethnography because they seek the words of the people we are studying, the richer the better, so that we can understand their situations with increasing clarity" (Ely 1991: 58).

After gaining insight into the students' L&T culture and experience through the phase 2 ethnographic immersion, interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of how the students perceive their L&T culture and experience (Krane and Baird 2005). Phase 3 aimed to address the research question through overarching research programme aims 'a', 'b' and 'c':

a. Gain a better understanding of students' needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

5.1.1 Subjects

Phase three involved interviewing SSES graduates at the end of their university experience. The graduates had undertaken a BSc (Hons) Sport Sciences related undergraduate degree within the SSES and graduated in the summer of 2010. All of the graduates completed their degree on a full time basis. A sample range of 11 graduates volunteered for interviewing. 8 were male and 3 were female. Initially, the researcher recruited recent graduates based on the personal contacts that had been made as a result of phase 2 of this research programme. This accounted for the three female graduates that

volunteered for interviewing. A recruitment email was then sent to all final year SSES students at the end of the academic year in 2010 (appendix 25). However, this recruitment attempt was unsuccessful. The researcher then attended the SSES graduation ceremony on 13th July 2010 and distributed recruitment letters to SSES graduates (appendix 26). This recruitment attempt was also unsuccessful. As previously mentioned, there is a large postgraduate cohort within the SSES. Many of these postgraduate students are alumni from the SSES's undergraduate courses. In a manner known as convenience sampling, the researcher utilised this postgraduate resource to recruit the eight male graduates that participated in this study (Cresswell 2007). These graduates were recruited via email (appendix 27). Table 21 represents the degree title, degree classification, gender and age of each of the participating graduates. A pseudonym was assigned to each graduate, allowing the reader to refer to the individual demographic information of the graduates' whilst protecting their right to anonymity.

Table 21: Key demographic information of the graduates in phase 3

Pseudonym	Degree Title	Degree Classification	Gender	Age
GD1	Sports Science (Physiology)	2:1	Male	22
S	Sports Science (Physiology)	2:1	Male	23
SM	Sports Science (Physiology)	1st	Male	22
N	Sports Science (Physiology)	2:1	Male	21
CT	Sports Science (Physiology)	1st	Male	22
AT	Sports Science (Physiology)	1st	Male	21
GD2	Sports Science (Physiology)	2:1	Female	22
KT	Sports Science (Development and Economics)	2:1	Female	20
C	Sports Science (Development and Economics)	2:2	Female	22
DM	Applied Sports Psychology	2:1	Male	21
DF	Science and Football	2:1	Male	21

As mentioned, the eight male graduates were SSES postgraduate students at the time of interviewing. The three female graduates were in the processes of applying for jobs at the time of interviewing. Table 22 presents the postgraduate degrees being undertaken by the male graduates.

Table 22: Postgraduate degrees being undertaken by the male subjects in phase 3

Graduate	Postgraduate Degree
GD1	MPhil
S	MSc Sports Physiology
SM	MPhil
N	MSc Clinical Exercise Physiology
CT	MPhil
AT	MPhil (with PhD Transfer)
DM	MSc Sports Psychology
DF	MSc Sports Physiology

Providing subject demographic information helps to account for the triangulation criteria 'thick description' of 'the subjects' (see page 27).

5.1.2 Data Collection Methods

An in depth interview method was used, based on the same rationale described in the data collection methods section in phase 1 (page 35).

5.1.3 Measurements – The Interview Guide

An interview guide was created using the same guidelines as specified in phase 1 (page 35).

Table 23: Summation of the Phase 3 interview guide. Questions for the interview were constructed under five different themes

Theme 1:
Identify subjects' perceptions of the general purpose of HE alongside their personal reasons for going to university and their reasons for choosing a Sports Science related degree.
Theme 2:
Identify graduates perceptions of the Sport Sciences course that they underwent. This involved discussing the graduates' courses with them in an evaluative manner, identifying potential improvements. There was a particular focus on the assessment, feedback and L&T methods that subjects experienced.
Theme 3:
Identifying which L&T and assessment methods promoted learning for the graduates.
Theme 4:
Assess how prepared the subjects felt for the world of work, and identify the impact the SSES university experience has had on preparing students for post HE.
Theme 5:
The students were asked what their advice to current and future SSES students would be.

The interview guide was designed to address the aims of this research study. The construction of the interview guide was based on the findings from phase one and phase two part one of this research programme.

5.1.4 Procedure

A meeting was arranged at the convenience of the subjects who volunteered to take part in the study. The male subjects were sent an email copy of the interview guide and the participant information prior to the meeting (appendix 28 and 29 respectively). Subjects were informed that reading the participant information may help them to formulate their thoughts and ideas in preparation for the interview (appendix 30). The three female subjects were informed of the purpose of the interview via text message (appendix 31). During the recruitment process, the researcher refrained from using the word 'interview', using words such as 'meeting' and 'chat' instead. In an attempt to account for the trustworthiness criteria 'tactics to ensure honesty in informants' (see page 28), the researcher wanted to try and conduct the interviews in a relaxed informal atmosphere, and felt that connotations related to the word 'interview' may be detrimental to this quest. Interviews with the three female graduates took place in May and June 2010. Interviews with eight male graduates took place in October 2010.

Upon meeting, it was ensured that the subjects understood the purpose of the meeting. Subjects were informed that there was some structure to the content that was going to be covered during the meeting, but that it would take a conversational type form. Subjects were informed that the meeting did not have to be based around the questions that the researcher asks, and that they have the freedom to 'chip in' to the 'conversation' at any point if they feel like they have something to add. From the beginning of the meeting the subjects were encouraged to be truthful in an attempt to account for the trustworthiness criteria 'tactics to ensure honesty in informants' (Shenton 2004). It was stressed to subjects that there is no right or wrong answer, so they should answer the questions based on their own feelings, and be as honest as possible. Being supportive and reassuring in this manner can help any of the subjects who are contending in a self-efficacy manner that they have nothing important to say (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). As previously mentioned, the fact that the researcher was a recent Sports Science graduate meant that the subjects were able to relate to the researcher, establishing rapport between the subjects and the researcher and assisting the subjects in feeling comfortable disclosing information about their perceptions and experiences (see pages 27 and 37) (Creswell and Miller 2000). The researcher endeavoured to make each subject feel that they were 'collaborators' in the research process, as opposed to 'subjects' being interviewed by the 'researcher' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The researcher felt that placing the subjects in such a position of power would assist them in being able to talk openly and confidently about their perceptions and experiences (Mishler 1986). That fact that the researcher did not study for their Sports Science degree at the SSES (see pages 28 and 37) also meant that the researcher was able to place the alumni in a position of power, as exemplified in the below extracts:

I studied Sports Science, but not at LJMU, part of my research is to get a better understanding of the undergraduate courses here, which is what I am hoping you can tell me about

~

I didn't have to do any reflection as part of my course, so I don't really understand what it is, can you tell me what you have to do?

Probing questions were used in the same manner as described in the procedure section for phase 1 (page 38). Subjects were interviewed individually, and anonymity of responses was ensured. The interviews were completed in one session. The interviews took place on the premises of LJMU, as specified by the subjects. It was ensured that the interviews were conducted in a quiet and private location. Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects, and informed consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the possession of the researcher. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 1 hour 57 minutes (average interview time = 1 hour 11 minutes). Times were rounded to the nearest minute. It was ensured that a member of the project team knew where the interviews were taking place and what time they were expected to finish, adhering to LJMU risk assessment requirements.

5.1.5 Pilot Study

After conducting the first interview (KT), the researcher felt that the questions on the interview guide were too structured, making the interview process difficult and complicated. The researcher felt unable to adequately articulate the intended questions, which resulted in the subject becoming confused. Furthermore, upon transcribing the interview, the researcher became aware that potential avenues for discussion that had been initiated by the subject had not been thoroughly pursed and explored. The researcher attributed their lack of focus on the topics of conversation initiated by the subject to be due to a preoccupation with asking 'the next question'. As a result of this initial interview, the researcher was reminded not to rely on the interview guide. This revelation was also highlighted to the researcher in the phase 1 pilot study (page 36). The interview guide was re-structured and simplified accordingly. The researcher wanted to allow the direction and content of the interview to be determined by the subjects themselves, based on the issues that were important and relevant to them. Interviews subsequent to the pilot interview did not rely on the interview guide so heavily, and were treated more as conversations with a purpose (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The researcher focused on listening to the subjects, and discussing issues that appeared to be of importance to them. The initial and re-structured interview guides can be found in the appendices (appendix 32 and 28 respectively).

5.1.6 Data Analysis

1. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. A blank space was left down the right hand side of the transcriptions to allow for note taking.
2. The analysis was orientated around the five themes in Table 23.
3. The researcher worked through the hard copies of the transcriptions; looking for any responses in the interview data that related to the deductive analysis themes (such responses could consist of phrases, sentences, paragraphs or sequences of paragraphs).
4. In MS Word, the researcher then copied the noted transcript extracts into a new word file, under the heading of the relevant analysis theme.
5. The researcher then clustered each of the five themes into relevant smaller themes and units of similar meaning (such themes will be accounted for in the presentation of the analysis findings).
6. The researcher then concentrated on arranging and presenting the data appropriately. The end product is the results and discussion section presented below, which has been broken down into five parts, based around the deductive interview guide and analysis themes (Table 23).
7. Trustworthiness criteria 'member checking' was used to check the accuracy of the initial interview data that the researcher analysed in the same manner as in phase 1 (see page 40) (Shenton 2004). As demonstrated in the interview guide (appendix 28), the purpose of member

checking was discussed with subjects during the interview. Subjects were sent the same email as the phase 1 alumni (appendix 7). 7 out of the 11 subjects responded to the researcher's member checking request and confirmed the accuracy of their transcriptions. The subjects' member checking emailed responses can be found in appendix 33.

8. In the same manner described in the phase 1 alumni interview study, trustworthiness criteria 'analyst triangulation' was employed to test the trustworthiness of the results from the interview analysis process (page 40). Notes from the additional analyst can be found in appendix 34.

This phase of the research programme is orientated in the post positivist qualitative research paradigm, as was phase 1 of this research programme (see page 42).

5.2 Phase 3 Results & Discussion

The five interview guide themes that were presented in Table 23 form the basis of the results and discussion section. The process diagram below depicts an overview of the phase 3 results and discussion section structure:
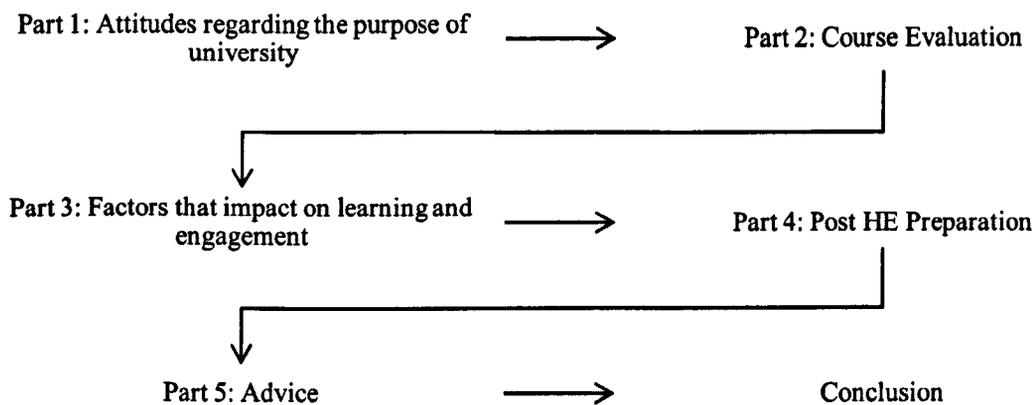
The findings for each of the five themes will be presented using summary analysis tables in a similar manner to phase 1. These tables will be described, discussed and subsequent recommendations will be made. References to phases 1 and 2 will be made to support the phase 3 findings where relevant, accounting for the trustworthiness criteria 'data triangulation' (see page 28). Data triangulation is explained by Patton in the below extract:

"Triangulating data sources means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods" (Patton 1999).

Consistency in the data findings from different sources contributes to the credibility of those findings (Patton 1999). Subscript letters represent the pseudonyms' of the subjects that referred to each theme (see Table 21), and subscript numbers refer to the corresponding transcription page that the theme originated from. Subscript letters and numbers have been provided in this manner to allow the reader to refer to the transcript origins and contexts of the derived themes and extracts as desired, accounting

for the trustworthiness criteria 'thick description' of 'the themes' (page 27). Transcripts can be located in appendix 35. The inclusion of the pseudonyms also demonstrates the dominance and level of support for the themes within the interview data (Smith and Fletcher 2001). The researcher endeavoured to highlight the range of the perceptions and experiences discussed by the subjects during interviewing (Smith and Fletcher 2001). This will help to prevent an 'anecdotal approach', whereby only a limited range of subject perceptions are presented, which would hinder the soundness of the research (Silverman 2001).

5.2.1 Part 1: Attitudes regarding the purpose of university

Part 1: Attitudes regarding the purpose of university

Personal Reason & General Purpose | Reason for choosing degree subject
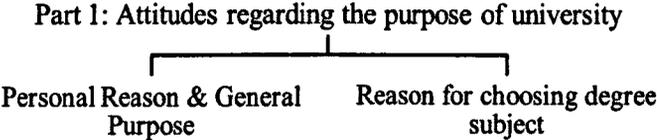
Part 1 has been broken down into the two themes presented above. For each of these factors, a summary figure of the outcomes of the analysis process will be presented and discussed, starting with the subjects' personal reasons for going to university and their perceptions of the general purpose of HE. A frequency table will also be presented for the 'personal reasons and general purpose' theme, representing the frequency of mentions and the numbers of subjects that referred to each of the personal reasons and general purposes of university. This demonstrates the dominance and level of support for the themes within the interview data (Smith and Fletcher 2001).

Personal Development (P.Dev.)
- To better myself $_{N13}$
- Find more stuff that I'm interested in $_{GD2.6}$
- To gain independence $_{AT15\ SM3\ GD2.7\ N13\ DM3}$
- To learn more about myself $_{SM3\ GD2.7}$
- To gain knowledge $_{DF5\ N13\ AT14}$
- To further prospects $_{AT14}$
- An understanding of other ways of living and city life $_{AT15}$
- To move away from home $_{GD1.32\ GD2.6\ CT13\ AT15}$
- Confidence $_{AT15}$

Career Related Reasons (C.Reasons)
- I didn't know what I wanted to do $_{GD1.32\ N13\ DF5\ DM3}$
- Better jobs once graduated $_{GD1.31/32\ DF5\ AT15\ S3\ N13}$
- Delay the world of work $_{GD1.31\ DF5}$

Outside Influence
- Quite a lot of people told me, 'you've got to go', and, 'it's the best years of your life', and, 'you'll be missing out on an experience', and, 'if you've got the chance to do it and move out, then you should go for it' $_{DM3}$
- I always had this sort of thing from my mum that, 'you will go to university,' and that was very much a strong focal point, both my parents came from academic backgrounds $_{S3}$
- My parents always encouraged me to go to university, they felt that it was important to get away, see the outside world $_{GD1.31}$

Social Experience (S.Exp.)
- Interested in the social side $_{S3}$
- I wanted to experience the nightlife, which was meant to be booming $_{CT13}$
- Building another social life $_{AT15}$
- Meet new people $_{S3\ GD1.32\ GD2.7}$

Life Experience (L.Exp.)
- Build life experience $_{DM3\ GD1.32}$
- To experience university life $_{CT13\ DMC3}$
- To get out into the wider world $_{AT15\ GD1.31}$
- Go somewhere new $_{GD1.32}$
- The opportunity to go places $_{S3}$
- The chance to do different things $_{CT13\ AT15}$

Subjects were asked to discuss their personal reasons for going to university, and the general purpose of HE. The above figure depicts a summary of the personal reasons and general purpose factors that were discussed by the subjects.

Table 24: The frequency of mentions and the number of people that referred to each of the personal reasons and general purposes of university

Reasons	Frequency of Mentions	Number of People
Personal Development	19	8
Career Reasons	11	6
Life Experience	10	5
Social Experience	6	5
Outside Influences	3	3

Table 24 shows that 'personal development' reasons was the most dominant reason the subjects gave for going to university, from the perspective of both the frequency of mentions and the number of people (19 and 8 respectively). 'Careers reasons' was the second most dominant theme, being mentioned 11 times by 6 people. Both the themes 'life experience' and 'social experience' were referred to by 5 people. 'Life experience' received 10 mentions, and 'social experience' 6. 'Outside influences' was the least most dominant theme, being referred to by 3 subjects and receiving 3 mentions. Phase 3 and phase 1 subjects produced the same personal and general purposes of HE, although the phase 3 interviews produced the theme 'life experiences' which the phase 1 interviews did not. The dominance of the reasons discussed in phase 1 and phase 3 bear consistency (see Table 8, page 44 for phase 1 findings).

A Combination of Factors

As stated by CT and S, it is a combination of factors that result in individuals deciding to go to university:

It was a combination of things; everything was gearing up to go to university $_{CT12}$ *It was a combination of those things that made me decide to do a degree* $_{S3}$

In order to do justice to the combining of factors, the reasons that each of the subjects gave for going to university and their perceptions of the purpose of HE presented. The researcher felt that presenting large amounts of raw data would allow the reader to make their own interpretations from the research findings and not have to rely on the interpretations of the researcher, accounting for the trustworthiness criteria 'thick description' of 'the themes' (Krane *et al.* 1997) (see page 27).

It was just a case of wanting to better myself, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do, it's just a way to go really, I didn't really consider not going, it was always just, 'I'm going to university', and if I hadn't gone to university, the job opportunities are pretty slim $_{N13}$

The purpose of university is to get a decent job to have a good career that you want, but there are also the personal things, like the independence, which are also quite beneficial, but ultimately the most important thing is to gain knowledge and just to better yourself $_{N13}$

P.Dev.:	C.Reasons:	C.Reasons:	P.Dev.:	P.Dev.:
Better myself	I didn't know what I wanted to do	Better jobs once graduated	To gain independence	To gain knowledge
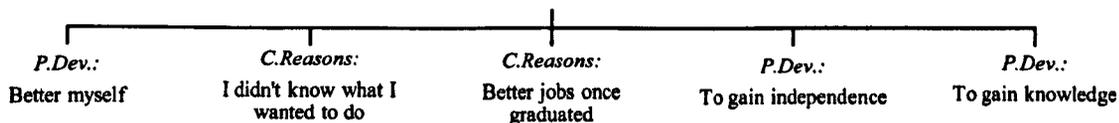
I always had this thing from my mum that, 'you will go to university,' and that was very much a strong focal point, both my parents came from academic backgrounds, and always thought that university's a very good advocate of education and a way of increasing your chances of getting a very good job $_{S3}$

I went to look at a few different universities, obviously something I was quite interested in was the social side as well as the academia and learning experience, I think people who don't go to university miss out on a very good three to six years, plus the opportunities of going new places, meeting new people, and then the work obviously the Sports Science background, it was a combination of those things that made me decide to do a degree $_{S3}$
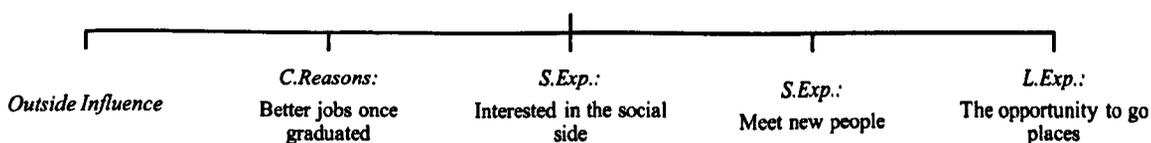
Outside Influence	C.Reasons:	S.Exp.:	S.Exp.:	L.Exp.:
	Better jobs once graduated	Interested in the social side	Meet new people	The opportunity to go places

My parents always encouraged me to go to university, they felt that it was important to get away, see the outside world, have some life experience, or delay going into actual work, finishing 'A' Level it's a scary prospect to think some people would be starting a job which they'd then be in until they retire, so it was partly to delay having to go to work GD1.31

I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, I just wanted to get away, go somewhere new, meet new people which I suppose was the main kind of reason I came to uni to start with, and then obviously it is also important that its leading on to something, a degree's a good thing to have in as though it sets you out a bit higher up, you're looking at hopefully better jobs once you've graduated GD1.31/32

Outside Influences	L.Exp.: To get into the wider world	L.Exp.: Build life experiences	C.Reasons: Delay the world of work	C.Reasons: I didn't know what I wanted to do	P.Dev.: To move away from home	L.Exp.: Go somewhere new	S.Exp.: Meet new people	C.Reasons: Better jobs once graduated
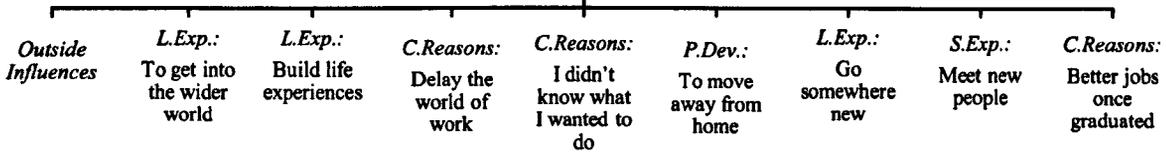
One of the reasons that GD1 came to university is to delay the world of work due to apprehension and not feeling ready. GD1 stated, *'finishing 'A' level, it's a scary prospect to think some people would be starting a job which they'd then be in until they retire'.* This apprehension and perception of 'not feeling ready' needs to be addressed whilst students are at university, by making them more aware of the realities of the working world and ensuring they are adequately prepared for post HE. As previously discussed, 'cradle to grave' employment is now outdated, with graduates having numerous jobs and careers in a post HE lifetime (AGR 2010).

I actually applied to uni the year before, but then I deferred my place and took a gap year, and then I thought, 'to get away I might as well go to uni and get a degree at the end of it and see what I'm interested in from there' GD2 6

It's a chance to grow up and find yourself and move on, because it's that chance to go away and do something you're interested in and it's all your own doing, whereas if you carry on at home where you've always been, do what everyone tells you, whereas uni you start making your own choices, so it's a chance to grow up and work out what you want to do GD2.7

It's a chance to get away and meet all different people that are all walks of life that you may never meet, new people that open your eyes to different stuff GD2.7

P.Dev.: To move away from home	P.Dev.: Find more stuff that I'm interested in	P.Dev.: To learn more about myself	P.Dev.: To gain independence	S.Exp.: Meet new people?
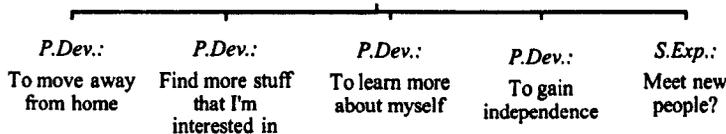
GD2 described university as, *'a chance to find yourself, start making your own choices, work out what you want to do for the rest of your life, find the stuff that you like and the stuff that you dislike'.* GD2 demonstrates that for many students university is a big step in their maturation and personal development. As stated, the HE experience can be life changing, as it is a time when knowledge, skills, values and personality are developed (HECSU/AGCAS 2011). This further supports the notion that students require nurture and guidance through their university experience (page 59).

A lot of it was independence, I relied far too much on my family back home for doing everything for us, I wanted to learn a bit more about myself as well, because when you're put in a situation where you're on your own and you've got to fend for yourself and be self-motivated, it is a good way to actually find things out about yourself SM3

P.Dev.: To gain independence	P.Dev.: To learn more about myself
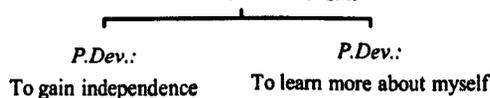
It is notable that SM only gave personal development reasons for going to university.

I didn't really know what else to do, I didn't fancy getting a full time job I just wanted to go on learning a bit more, develop my knowledge, and hopefully lead to a better chance of getting a job, I didn't really know what I wanted to do DF5

C.Reasons:	*C.Reasons:*	*P.Dev.:*	*C.Reasons:*
I didn't know what I wanted to do	Delay the world of work	To gain knowledge	Better jobs once graduated
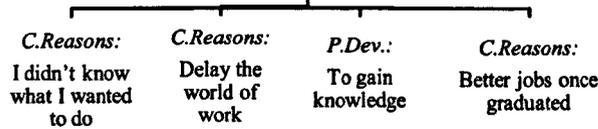
It was to experience university life, living somewhere away from home, I'm quite used to being independent, I just wanted to go to a university far from home for something different, and I'd heard Liverpool was a good city, I wanted to experience the nightlife which was meant to be booming CT13
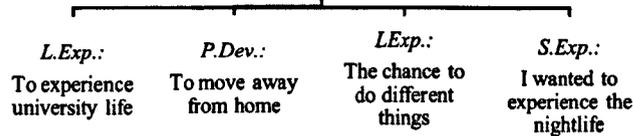
L.Exp.:	*P.Dev.:*	*LExp.:*	*S.Exp.:*
To experience university life	To move away from home	The chance to do different things	I wanted to experience the nightlife

Quite a lot of people told me, 'you've got to go', and, 'it's the best years of your life', and, 'you'll be missing out on an experience', and, 'if you've got the chance to do it and move out, then you should go for it', plus I didn't know what I really wanted to do DM3

Build life experience, a lot of people move out and learn to do their own washing and they're on their own two feet DM3
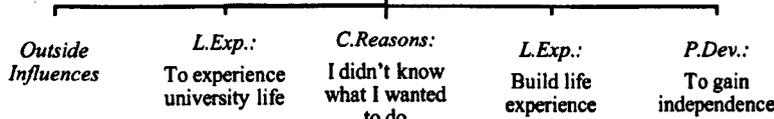
Outside Influences	*L.Exp.:*	*C.Reasons:*	*L.Exp.:*	*P.Dev.:*
	To experience university life	I didn't know what I wanted to do	Build life experience	To gain independence

I always wanted to come to university, I never had any other real focus of anything else or anywhere else I wanted to go or be really, it was to some extent getting out and doing something different and going somewhere, and trying to get the best career that I could out of things, trying to be something, have a decent pay and have a life where you're comfortable, so furthering prospects, and being able to get out into the wider world and to some extent building another social life apart from what was at home

Moving away from home and getting out of the family home, being able to live on my own, do my own thing whenever I wanted, not having any questions

To take that first step of moving away from home and have the chance to do other things

Here you've got the variety, there's so much more to do, and the ability to develop an understanding of other ways of living and city life AT15

The main purpose of coming to uni is building your knowledge base, building your confidence, the two in some respect go hand in hand, if you have the knowledge of an area, then you're going to be confident in talking about it and using what you've learnt AT14

P.Dev.:	*C.Reasons:*	*P.Dev.:*	*L.Exp.:*	*S.Exp.:*	*P.Dev.:*	*P.Dev.:*	*L.Exp.:*	*P.Dev.:*	*P.Dev.:*
To move away from home	Better jobs once graduated	To further prospects	To get out into the wider world	Building another social life	An understanding of other ways of living and city life	To gain independence	The chance to do different thing	To gain knowledge	Confidence
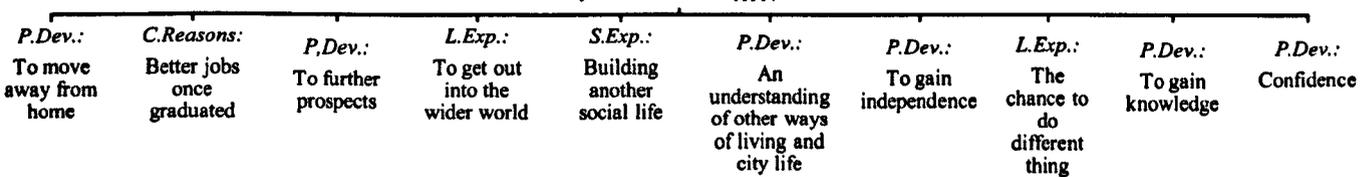
AT and N both revealed that they had an expectation that they were going to go to university:

I always wanted to come to university, I never had any other real focus of anything else or anywhere else I wanted to go or be AT15

It's just a way to go really, I didn't really consider not going, it was always just, 'I'm going to university' N15

This suggests that students may not consider the range of different options that are available to them, and require better support and guidance from as earlier as the HE application stage to determine the most appropriate options to suit their individual needs (O'Regan 2009). This suggestion is further supported by the quotations below from C, who felt that she did not choose the right course:

232

It wasn't what I initially expected, I'd have been better on a Sports Development course, when you pick this course, you don't realise how much theory's actually in it, but I think that's just the age you are when you come out of college and just see Sports Science and think, 'that's what I'm going to do', I don't think many people at that age would really look into what it actually is, you just think, 'I'm going to go to uni to do that course', so it was a bit of a shock when we first got here, because there was six of us all from my college, and we were all like, 'this isn't what we expected!' C2

~

If you want to do Sports Development, you need to go to the other campus, but that just comes down to picking the right course, and you only learn that as you go through it C14

Focus group 1 also highlighted the need for better support at the beginning of the degree journey in phase 2 part 2 of this research programme (page 150). The quote below from focus group 1 member H expands on this issue further:

H: At the open day they need to stress that there are other courses, because even though you get the booklet, you get like a billion booklets from every uni and you don't really read through them, you just go for the main courses, that's why everyone always goes for the main courses, whereas my sister went to do a main one, and then her tutor said, 'will you not prefer to do the more Sports Nutrition orientated course?' So in the first week she transferred and she absolutely loves it, and I know I probably would have loved it too if I'd had done that

l.1757-1764

5.2.1.2 Reasons for Choosing Degree Subject

Interest & Enjoyment Reasons

You choose something that you're going to enjoy, because obviously if you don't enjoy it, you aren't going to get anything out of it $_{AT14}$

I was interested in sport, I always wanted to be a PE teacher $_{C1}$

I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do, I enjoyed 'A' level PE, and thought, 'why not pursue that' $_{N2}$

I've always been very interested in sports, I played a lot of sports the whole time I was growing up $_{S3}$

Sport was the only thing I've ever been interested in......I wanted to do Sports Science because it's something I'm interested in $_{GD2.6}$

I thought I'd be more interested in it if I could relate it more specifically to football, probably hold my interest a bit longer than just general Sports Science $_{DF1/2}$

I'd always been interested in sport and always played sport from a young age, and then I became interested in 'why? Why can he jump further than he can?' $_{AT16}$

I was always dead good at PE in school and liked the practical stuff and then I found the academic stuff dead easy, so then I did it at college $_{DM16}$

Career Related Reasons

I wouldn't want to spend the rest of my life in a laboratory, but I wouldn't want to spend the rest of my life in a tracksuit coaching athletes either, so that was the happy medium between the two $_{S3}$

I knew that there was quite a lot of options to go with Sports Science, you weren't tied down to a certain job at the end of it, so if stuff took your fancy as you went along you could kind of branch off in those routes $_{GD2.6}$

Even when I was maybe sixteen I wanted to work in elite sport, I wasn't ever good enough to play a professional sport, so the next best thing was working in player and athlete development, so to give myself the best opportunity of doing that, I need to get a degree $_{CT11}$

A lot of me wanted to do Sports Science, but then it's quite a limited area of work to go into, if you've got a Sports Science degree then after that you've got to go onto something sporty/science-y, whereas if you've got a psychology degree, it's quite broad, so I thought that was the best route to do Applied Psychology with Sports Science $_{DM16}$

Choice influenced by pre-HE education

My 'A' levels were Physics, Chemistry and Physical Education, so Sports Science is quite a happy medium of the three of those $_{S3}$

The BTEC Sports Science at college to some extent narrowed my options down, even though I knew there was other avenues available, it was pretty much, 'I've done this for two years, I might as well continue', there was never any other question of what I wanted to do at university, it was a pretty easy decision $_{AT16}$

Because I run, I thought I may get some knowledge to be able to help me in my performance $_{N2}$

The figure above represents the reasons the subjects gave for choosing their given degree subject. As highlighted in Table 21, all the subjects underwent a Sports Science degree, apart from DF and DM, who did BSc Science and Football and BSc Applied Psychology with Sports Science respectively. Seven of the subjects attributed choosing their degree subject to 'interest and enjoyment factors', four to 'career related reasons' and two stated that their choice was influenced by 'pre-HE education'. A factor that contributed to N undertaking a Sports Science degree was that the knowledge gained from the course could enhance his sporting performance. 'Enjoyment' as a reason for pursuing a given degree subject is supported by Browne (2010), NUS (2008) and Lexmond and Bradley (2010). As demonstrated in the table below, the reasons that the phase 3 subjects gave for choosing to study their degree disciplines are consistent with the reasons that the phase 1 alumni gave (see table 7, page 43).

Table 25: The number of phase 1 and phase 3 subjects that referred to each of the reasons for choosing to study their degree discipline

Reasons	Number of Phase 1 Alumni	Number of Phase 3 Graduates
Interest & Enjoyment Factors	8	7
Career Related Reasons	4	4
Pre-HE Education	1	2

5.2.2 Part 1: Summary & Recommendations

Part 1 addressed overarching research aim 'a':

a. Gain a better understanding of students' needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

Part 1 aimed to identify the students' perceptions of the general purpose of HE, alongside their personal reasons for going to university, and their reasons for choosing a Sports Science related degree. It is a combination of factors that result in individuals deciding to go to university. 'Personal development' reasons was the most dominant reasons the subjects gave for going to university, closely followed by 'career reasons', reflecting the dominance of the reasons given by the alumni in phase 1 (see page 43). As with the alumni, the career reasons that the subjects referred to were related to career in general as opposed to career in specific. The subjects support the finding from phase 1 that Sports Science students do not necessarily pursue a Sports Science degree due to aspirations to work in that industry (see Table 7, page 43), adding credence to the recommendations that the SSES needs to cater for the wide range of post HE needs of Sports Science students (page 51). Furthermore, there needs to be an increased awareness of the realities of the working world among students, supporting the suggestion from phase 1 (page 89). One of the subjects referred to the daunting prospect of entering a job that you will be in for the rest of your life, which does not reflect the reality of the world of work, since graduates have numerous jobs and careers in a post HE lifetime (AGR 2010). For many students, entering HE is a big step in their maturation and personal development, and therefore support and guidance throughout this process would be beneficial, if not essential (O'Regan 2010). Students require better support and guidance from as earlier as the HE application stage to determine the most appropriate options to suit their individual needs.

5.2.3 Part 2: Course Evaluation

Part 2: Course Evaluation

```
┌─────────┬─────────┬──────────┬──────────┬─────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
First Year  Practical  Placement:  Assessment  Large    Feedback   Staff and   Personal   Careers and
            Work       Postitves               Cohort   Evaluation  student     tutor      Guest
                                                                    engagement  system     Lectures
   │                       │                             │
   │                   Placement:                     What
 Broad                 Negatives                     Should
 Subject                   │                        Feedback
 Range                                               be like?
                    Placement: What
                    more could be done?

                        │
                        Placement:
                        Reflective
                        Assessment
```
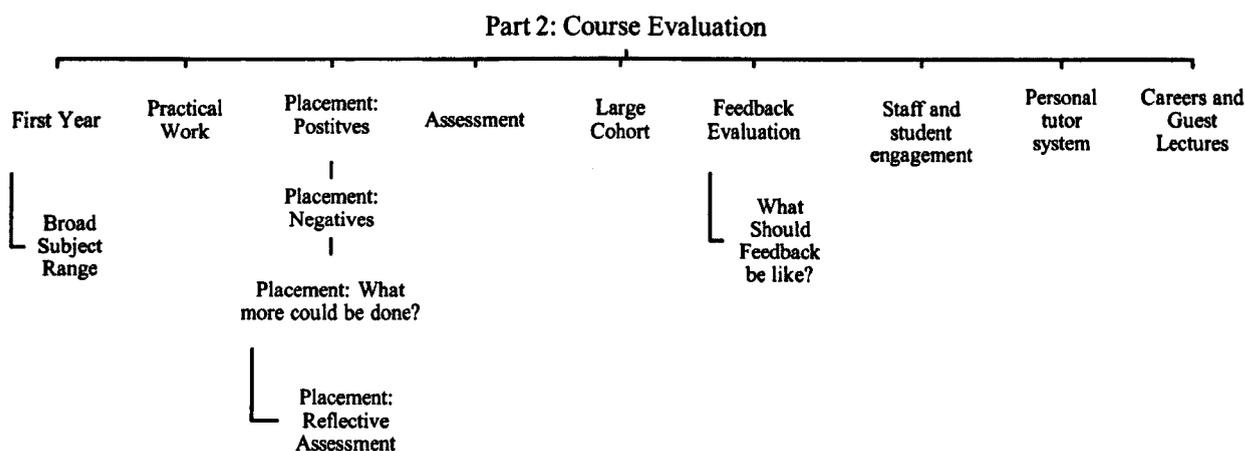
Part 2 has been broken down into the themes presented above. The themes highlight the course components that the subjects evaluated and shared their perceptions on during the interviews. The subjects' perceptions of each of the stated course components will be discussed. For each of the components, a summary table of the outcome of the analysis process will be presented. A description and discussion of each of these figures will occur. The analysis of the 'placement' course component will be represented in four analysis summary figures, due to the large amount of relevant data. 'First year' and 'feedback evaluation' will be represented using two analysis summary tables.

5.2.3.1 First year

Broad subject range*

Lack of knowledge gained

First year was like 'A' level knowledge.........I didn't feel like it was a massive step up $_{SM13}$

First year was a bit of a piss-take in the way it was so easy..........it was a lot easier than the last year of college $_{DM8}$

I found it quite boring......a lot of it was going over old ground......and the stuff that I wasn't interested in at 'A' level, I still wasn't interested in at first year......it was a bit dull going over the same old ground $_{GD2.4/5}$

A lot of it, you do it once in the first year and then you don't really do it again for the rest of the degree $_{GD2.5}$

Knowledge gained

The good thing about first year was that they taught you exactly how to write a scientific piece of writing, so when you had to do it in the second and third year, it was a lot easier to write like that than it is to write any other way, because you know it's got to have an intro, method, results, discussion sort of thing $_{GD2.12}$

A lot of the first year was just getting in to those good habits in terms of my writing style, so then in second year it was less of a problem, because I had that full year of doing it and finding out where I was going wrong $_{SM18}$

Knowledge: What more could be done?

I've heard now they're doing everything in first and second year, and then in third year you get to pick, I think it would be quite good, because some of the jobs, you need to have a good knowledge of everything anyway, like as a coach you need to know physiology, biomechanics, psychology, and I only got biomechanics in first year, so don't know a lot about biomechanics now, I've had to do my own reading on biomechanics, so I think it does actually work better that way, not for every single job that you're going to do out there, but a lot of them you will have to have a lot of knowledge on everything $_{SM12/13}$

First year was like 'A' level knowledge......I didn't feel like it was a massive step up from college to the first year of degree, so I think a further year on everything would actually be really good in terms of knowledge $_{SM13}$

40% mentality

I worked a bit too hard in first year, I was in the library quite a bit, and you don't need to; you can just get 40% and pass....and I was doing a bit too much to just pass $_{N5}$

I knew I could've put more effort in and done more work, especially more background reading on all areas, I knew where I wanted to go and that was down the physiology route, so I generally focused more on that side of things, and the other stuff was, 'as long as I get through this year, then I'm not too fussed' $_{AT3}$

I put the work in, but you didn't feel as though you had to put all your effort into it, 'only need 40% to get through to the next year, and then this year's pretty much forgotten and counts towards nothing', so it did make you wonder, 'why put all your effort into it if it's not going towards anything?' $_{GD1.30}$

It possibly gets you into bad habits, because you're just aiming for 40%......and then you could do what you want with your life, you could look at an essay three quarters done and think, 'that's definitely 40%, that's a pass in that module' and then just hand it in and you haven't even got any guilt towards it, because it doesn't go towards your degree or anything like that, plus you know second year it changes $_{DM8}$

There's this whole cliché of, 'just get 40% in first year', but if you're doing that, it's too late, because you don't know how to concentrate properly when it comes to second year $_{SM4}$

40% mentality: What more could be done?

Make first year count for something, because everyone's like, '40%, that's all you've got to aim for', as long as you pass it, it's not going to give you any consequence if you get 60% or if you get 40%, so what's the point in putting all the effort in? Apart from personal satisfaction (laughs), it's not going to be written on your degree, 'only got 40% in first year' $_{KT13/14}$

Drunken Culture

First year was mainly a piss up......I only just passed first year......first year was probably the best year in terms of having a social life, getting to meet different people and being in a new city $_{CT8/9}$

Generally as a first year you're going out quite regularly, so quite often hung over and things $_{AT3}$

I wanted to go out and you still want your social life.....you definitely learn, you think, 'I can't go out tonight' $_{C16}$

Opportunity to adjust to university structure

It's quite good that it's so broad, it's just to get you used to it, people can mess around if they want, and get used to the course, get used to the structure of university and deadlines, get used to being on a new course, new tutors, new people, it was completely different to college, because we were always in a classroom, not like a big lecture theatre $_{C15/16}$

They must do the 40% pass rate in first year for a reason, there's people who are moving from all different parts of the country, I suppose they go through a lot more stress than I do, and there's people who've never done Sports Science before that do it, so it's a lot about getting everyone to an even level $_{DM8/9}$

The figure above depicts a summary of the subjects' perceptions of the first year of their degree course. The broad subject range that the subjects experienced in the first year will be discussed in more detail below (see page 239). SM, DM and GD2 described how they felt that there was a lack of knowledge gained in the first year of their degrees in comparison to their pre-HE education. GD2

went on to described how a lot of the knowledge covered in the first year was not utilised again throughout the remainder of the degree, resulting in it being perceived as surplus and unnecessary. GD2 and SM both made reference to first year having a positive impact on their ability to write scientifically in preparation for second and third year. The QAA referred to the importance of the first year for developing effective study habits required for success in a degree (QAA 2011). SM felt that gaining more knowledge in first year will enhance students' preparation for the world of work. However, it is important that students understand the importance of gaining the wide range of knowledge that SM described in his quote, and the relevance of the knowledge to the world of work (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Brewer 2009, Leitch 2006). As has been previously discussed (pages 174 and 206), students need to perceive a 'need' in order to engage (see page 278 for more on the impact of accountability on learning and engagement). N, AT, GD1, DM, SM and KT demonstrated that a 40% mentality existed within their first year cohort. This mentality was based on the fact that students only had to obtain an overall year mark of 40% to pass into the second year, and their first year mark would not contribute towards their final degree classification. The 40% mentality impacted on subjects' learning and engagement (see page 274, the 'assessment driven culture' for a further discussion of the impact of grades and assessment on learning and engagement). KT suggested that making students feel accountable will enhance engagement in the first year. As KT stated, currently there is no 'consequence' to deter the 40% mentality, *'it's not going to be written on your degree, 'only got 40% in first year''*. However, as stated in the Burgess (2007) report, all UK HEIs offer students an academic transcript which contains detailed information at individual module level. DM highlights that in first year students do not feel any 'guilt' if they do not fully engage with their work, *'because it doesn't go towards your degree'*. DM warns that the 40% mentality can get students into *'bad habits'*, and SM feels that not engaging adequately in the first year will negatively impact on students' effectiveness in their subsequent degree years. In phase 2 (page 161), D from focus group 2 agreed that the 40% mentality should be avoided:

I've got a lot of friends who scraped the 40% in first year but they've not been able to turn it round since, if you've got the 40% mentality, then you're going to get that throughout, but if you start as if first year counts, it puts you in a better place for second and third year D.1350-1358

Students need to be made aware that their first year grades do appear on their degree transcripts, and that they will have to present such transcripts to employers during the job application process. Students also need to be made aware of the importance and impact the first year degree content will have in their subsequent degree years and also post HE. Enhancing students awareness of the 'consequences' of the first year L&T content, will enhance students sense of accountability which will in turn enhance engagement. Page 278 further discusses the impact of accountability on students' learning and engagement. CT, AT and C demonstrated that for them, social aspects formed a major part of their first year. C articulated that she 'learnt' from first year and did not socialise as much in the subsequent years of her degree. C and DM felt that first year allows students to adjust to the

structure of university life. The QAA referred to the importance of first year for adjusting to the new environment and responsibilities associated with university life (QAA 2011). The below quotation demonstrates that C felt that the opportunity to adjust to university life is important due to the generally young age of students entering HE:

It's quite good that it is so broad, just so that people can mess around if they want to, get it out their systems and get used to the course, and you're still young, you don't realise how young you are when you first come out of college C15/16

The above statement from C refers to the generally young nature of the students that enter HE, which reinforces the need for providing students with support, guidance and nurture through their HE experiences in preparation for their post HE lives (as discussed on pages 59 and 231).

Broad subject range

Getting everybody to the same level

There's people who've never done Sports Science before, so it's a lot about getting everyone to an even level DM8/9

It was getting everybody to the same level, because different people come from different backgrounds, some people do 'A' levels, some do BTECs, some do other things, you don't do the same things on those courses SM13

There are so many people coming from different backgrounds......it gets everyone to a baseline CT8

It brings everybody together, there were certain areas that I knew a lot more than my friend did and vice versa AT4

Everyone gets the basic, so you all cover the same ground, because obviously coming from different areas, but it wasn't highly exciting GD2.4

Subject taster

It is a good idea the way they structure it, you get a taster of everything, I knew where I wanted to go with it, whereas a lot of people may have come in and gone, 'I've come here to do this, but I'm not really sure yet whether I want it', and I might have found something in one of the subjects that may have changed my mind and sort of gone, 'I want to do this now' AT4

You get a taste of everything in first year CT8

It was really broad, but you need that broadness, because I went into it not knowing what I wanted to do, so to have a taste of everything was quite beneficial to make you understand what you want to do N5

It was interesting to have a view of everything, and it's probably useful for some people who didn't really know what they were interested in, if you come to do this course and you didn't really know what you wanted to do, or some people might even change their mind, they might come thinking they'll do physiology and then find psychology really interesting GD1.11

Even though I didn't like all of them, it was good that I got to look at them, because otherwise I wouldn't have known that I didn't like them KT14

Creates a lack of engagement

I did Sports Science BTEC......so I'd done some background on a lot of the stuff......that was where I got my mindset of what I liked and what I didn't like, and that made me work harder in some and not so hard it others AT3/4

From the start I knew I'd be interested in the more physiology part of it, so some of it, you did the work, but it was like, 'this isn't really what I'm interested in, I'm not going to need this in what I'm going on to do', so did the work, but didn't learn it GD1.11

There was a lot of things I didn't enjoy doing with it being very spread out, I don't enjoy doing psychology......I was sitting there going to myself, 'do I have to be here? Really?' AT3

I wasn't that interested in first year, because I wasn't really doing what I wanted to do, I was doing everything KT8

In first year I was going to quit, because I wasn't enjoying the course, the only module I enjoyed was Sports Marketing KT3

I found it quite boring......a lot of it was going over old ground......and the stuff that I wasn't interested in at 'A' level I still wasn't interested in at first year......it was a bit dull just because it was going over the same old ground GD2.4/5

Five of the subjects felt that the broad subject range in the first year ensured that all students had the same level of knowledge base. Five of the subjects felt that the first year provided students with an

opportunity to sample different subjects and clarify interests. JL from focus group 1 in phase 2 part 2 concurred with this notion:

JL: It's good to come in and do different things, because when you come out of school, you really don't know what you want to do $_{1.835-836}$

However, four of the subjects reported that the broad subject range in first year created a lack of engagement because they came to university knowing what they were interested in and what they were not interested in. Subsequently, the aspects that the subjects were not interested in they did not enjoy and found boring, which resulted in a lack of engagement and learning (see page 282 for a further discussion about the impact of interest and enjoyment on learning and engagement). Furthermore, GD2 felt that first year was 'boring' and 'dull' because it was covering content that she had covered during her pre-HE education:

I found it quite boring, because I did 'A' levels that were quite specific, like Biology, PE and maths, a lot of it was going over old ground, like all the anatomy and research methods $_{GD2.4}$

5.2.3.2 Practical Work

Impact on learning
- I learn better by doing things......I do pick up stuff in lectures, but I feel that by actually doing it I learn better DF5
- I learn better doing it rather than sitting reading about it......actually practicing what they've told you......it just confirms it in your head GD2.2
- I've always learnt more by having discussions with people and actually doing practical things, when I'm actually sitting down it can take me five or six reads of the same paragraph and I still won't know anything about it SM15
- I'd say the major project will teach you more than potentially some of the modules......the major project teaches you a huge amount S6

Impact on post HE preparation
- If you're wanting to stay in the academic route way then it's more focused on a knowledge, but for people who want to go into more applied jobs, practical skills might be more useful for them GD1.17
- You hear about these people getting 12 A* at GCSE, and quite often they're very academically focused, you ask them to repair a leaking tap and they don't know where to start AT11
- It's getting the balance between the perfect academic and the perfect practical student, and understanding that sometimes the first class student might not be the best practical student......you need to balance the theoretical stuff with practical skills AT12
- There could be more opportunities to do experience at earlier points throughout the whole degree course, because a lot of employers are asking for three years of experience, and it's pretty tough to do three years of university and then try and get three years of experience before you're going to get paid in a decent job, nobody wants to be doing that SM8/9

Evaluation of practical work

A lack of adequate practicals
- I enjoyed the fact that it was loads of practical stuff in the cardiac module, none of the others have really done much practical in GD2.2
- The level two name 'skilling up', I don't know how much skilling up there is in terms of the practical side, because I took the skilling up as you learned how to do things in a practical sense AT20
- The practicals that they do, especially second year, the labs were not particularly interesting......I don't think they were very good S14
- From first year through to third year we've had lab practicals, getting introduced to new techniques, getting introduced to data collection procedures and methods, the university is good for that CT16/17

What more can be done?

There is a need for more practical work
- There could be more lab or practical sessions to supplement the lectures......it'd cater for more learning styles, it's very lecture based currently DF5
- There needs to be more in terms of applying the theory practically, maybe through looking at the placement process DF12
- There needs to be exposure to some more interesting laboratory work earlier in the degree S14
- Although in first and second year you don't necessarily have a lot of knowledge on the theoretical issues, it would be a good idea to get people to help out with physiological testing during that process, getting used to learning what you need to do in field and lab testing, and then when it comes to leaving university it's a bit of extra experience, forcing more people to engage in actually getting experience during the whole three years SM20

There is a need to assess practical
- The practical side of it gets put a little bit to the side, because there are no marks available for it AT12
- Do some of the assessment based on something practical GD1.17
- If they got more practical elements into coursework that would be quite good, because when you come out of university you want to be prepared for going into work, so using the lab practicals to their advantage and doing assessments on that would be quite good SM16

The figure above depicts a summary of the subjects' perceptions of the practical components involved in their course. DF, GD2, SM and S stated that they learnt better by doing things, with GD2 giving an example from the course of how practical work impacted on her learning:

The cardiac module was one week theory, one week practical throughout the year which was quite good, because we got to actually see what they were talking about the week before, we got to put it in practical GD2.2

GD2 also advised that future students took the cardiac module, *'because there are hardly any people there, and it's loads of practicals'* GD2.17. S felt that students learn a lot from the practical, investigative nature of the level 3 major research project. R from focus group 1 also felt that the practical major project experience promoted learning (page 131):

R: I learned more from my dissertation than I did from any other coursework or any other lecture or anything, so it would be good to do something different, and you'll get really knowledgeable about a different thing 2.2238-2243

GD1, AT and SM articulated that in order for students to be adequately prepared for the world of work, practical knowledge as well as technical knowledge needs to be developed, in concurrence with the phase 1 alumni (see Table 13, page 74). AT felt that the SSES course was, *'very theoretically based'* AT12, and that practical learning is important for post HE preparation:

Your theoretical versus practical skills, the more every day type of skills, there'll be people who'll get a first, but don't know how to run a VO_{2max} test for example; they're very sort of theoretically AT12

~

At the end of the day, you're here to get a qualification, but also, you want a knowledge base as well to help you go on to further yourself, so you can sit and have a discussion with somebody who's maybe a bit more expert in the area, you want to engage with somebody at a decent level AT11

SM described how providing students with the opportunity to gain practical experience throughout their degree course can enhance their preparation for and alignment to the requirements of the world of work. As stated in phase 2 of this research programme, students require craft knowledge and experience alongside technical knowledge in order to be prepared for post HE (see page 124). Three of the subjects felt that there was a lack of adequate practical course components throughout the duration of the course. AT questioned the appropriateness of the 'skilling up' label associated with the second year of the SSES undergraduate courses (Figure 5), due to the lack of practical components. Three of the subjects stated that there is a need for more practical work within the SSES undergraduate courses. DF felt that currently the courses are very lecture based, and practical sessions will cater for more learning styles. DF suggested practical skills could be developed by enhancing the placement process. S and SM feel that students should be exposed to more practical work throughout the duration of the degrees. AT, GD1 and SM stated that more practical assessment is required. SM described how incorporating practical elements into assessments will help to prepare students for the world of work. Assessments should be aligned to the requirements of the world of work, as was discussed in phase 2 (see page 134).

5.2.3.3 Placement

Positives	Negatives	What more could be done?	Placement Assessment: Reflection
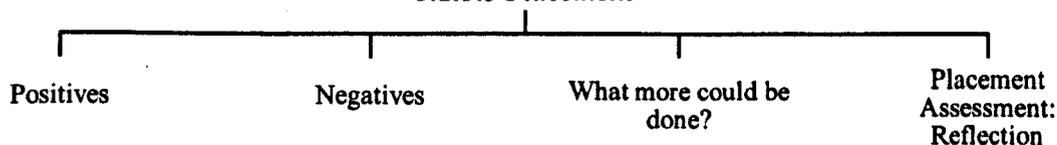
The analysis for the 'placement' course component has been presented using four analysis summary figures, as highlighted above. A description and discussion of each of these figures will occur. The first figure highlights the positives aspects that the subjects discussed in relation to the placement.

NB: The placement process that DF underwent as part of the Science and Football programme differed from the placement process involved with the Sports Science programmes, as will be explained in more detail. DM did not have a placement as part of his course.

242

Placement

Good Evaluation

It was really good KT18

I thought it was great, it's nerve wracking at first; you're going to a new environment that you're not used to, you've got a load of kids staring at you and their parents are there in the background the whole time, so it's a bit nerve-wracking but at the end of the day it's an invaluable experience CT18

The placement was good, it gives you more applied experience towards the end of your degree DF5

I know a lot of people got a really good experience at their placements SM8

It was really good the time that we were there GD2.8

I really enjoyed the Sports Development placement, better than the applied C5

Learnt from placements

I learnt more through my placements than any other methods, because you've got to think on your feet and you've just got to get on with it and you're thrown in at the deep end, I quite like learning on the job......it's the real world, and you've just got to deal with it......it's the reality of it, and it's what it's going to be like when we leave KT10

Gained from the placement application process

We went through the whole cover letter, CV and interviews, so prepared you for that side of it AT7

Gained Confidence

Before I'd gone there I thought, 'I've done Sports Science, but I don't actually know anything', but when we went there, we did know the same as the coaches, we were able to have a professional conversation about what we were doing and why we were doing it, so it was good to know that I'd actually learnt something as such GD2.11

Gained contacts

A lot of the other guys who did the S&C placements gained a huge amount from it and certainly picked up good contacts, networking's quite a good thing to be able to do on a placement module S15

It's in our favour doing that placement, because the woman's emailed me this week, and there's a job going at Everton, she keeps in contact with us, so it was a good experience to go C3

Placements are important because they open up doors for you, contacts, and it's not just what you know, it's who you know KT12

I applied for a job where I did my placement, and my placement provider recommended me for the interview after I'd given my CV in and stuff KT17

I did a nutrition placement with academy players, and I'm going there next Wednesday to do some S&C work which is from knowing the guy who I did the placement with, so it's given me a contact in a way CT18

Gained insight into the world of work

I liked how a professional set up is, I like how organised it was and the fact that even though it's organised, it doesn't have to go to plan and things GD2.11

It was good to see how they work, and what their job roles were, because one person had loads of different roles C3

I learnt a lot about working with coaches S15

Gained insight into potential career options

It's a good thing to do because it shows you that actually a Sport Science degree can get you somewhere GD2.22

I'd also thought about going down the S&C route way, and then did that placement and our main contact there was the S&C coach, so got to see a bit of what he did, and he changed my mind, I decided that wasn't something that I was particularly interested in, so it was helpful to give you some idea of working in that applied situation GD1.22

It gives you the opportunity to try something, because you don't really get the opportunity once you finish university, unless you can afford to not have a job and think, 'right I'll go and do a bit of work experience here and then decide' C8

I went into a school for my Sports Development module......I really enjoyed the Sports Development placement, better than applied, because it gave me a good insight into teaching, and it was just so much more structured, because you had a name when you went in there C5

KT, CT, DF, SM and GD2 made positive comments about the placement course component. However, SM referred positively to the placement experiences of other students, and not his own, and GD2 described how the placement was good the time that she went, but felt that she did not go enough (to be discussed in more detail below, see pages 245-246). DF and KT spent a lot more time

on their placement than the other subjects. KT described how she learnt more from her placement than any other L&T methods. AT felt more prepared for job application and selection processes as a result of the placement application process that the students underwent. GD2 felt more confident in her knowledge and the applicability of that knowledge to the world of work as a result of her placement. The focus group students also reported becoming more aware and confident in their knowledge base as a result of their placement experiences (page 189). S, C, KT and CT made reference to the benefit of gaining contacts as a result of the placements. S referred to other students who benefited from contacts they themselves had gained from their placements. KT, CT and C demonstrated how they had gained from the contacts they made. C's placement provider informed her of a potential job opportunity, KT's placement provider recommended her for a job interview, and CT gained the opportunity to engage with additional work experience. GD2, C and S described how their placement experience gave them some insight into the reality and cultures that exist within the workplace environment. GD2, GD1 and C felt that the placement experience gave them an insight into potential post HE options available to Sports Science graduates, and the opportunity to experience prospective career ideas. The quote below shows GD1's further discussion of the benefit of experiencing potential jobs:

I know quite a few people did their placements in schools, and I think they found that helpful, because a lot of them planned to go on to do a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) and it had given them some idea of whether that's what they wanted to do, and a few of them changed their minds and decided not to stay on, so it was helpful with that, and some people will have found what they did interesting and focused more on whatever area they were doing GD1.22

C felt that the placement she experienced as part of her Sports Development module was better than her ASS placement, because it gave her a good insight into the job she hoped to pursue post HE. Good practices should be shared between modules within the SSES, to ensure that all students gain from placements.

Placement

Bad Evaluation
- Our placement didn't go particularly as planned......it was quite disappointing......we didn't have a great experience $_{AT7}$
- Ours failed miserably, it was a bit of a nightmare......hugely disappointing, because it was something that I was quite looking forward to doing $_{S15}$
- We kind of had a placement, but that didn't really work out......it wasn't too great......so it was a bit disappointing $_{GD1.19/20}$
- It ended up not as useful as I had hoped for $_{N6}$

Did not gain what hoped to gain
- In terms of actual experience within the field, we didn't actually do that much $_{AT7}$
- What we were actually doing it for, which was for S&C experience, we didn't get to do $_{S15/16}$
- The whole purpose of it was to let us experience the football environment, and professional environment and we were in a centre of excellence, so it was a little more sheltered, but it was still useful $_{DF3}$
- I was thinking about dietetics so I was hoping to gain a better understanding of how to go about that and how to interact with people and things like that, but it didn't go too well $_{N6}$
- I was thinking that it would be really useful, but it ended up not as useful as I had hoped for $_{N6}$

Bad Timing
- Everyone knew we had our major project and everyone was trying to get that finished, the placement was something we could do without dealing with having to try and arrange, that should've been done a month or two ago $_{GD1.20}$
- It was hard because it clashed with the Sports Development placement, and there was another coursework or dissertation due in, so it was quite stressful $_{C3}$
- They tried to organise for us to go in at a later date, but it was a week before our dissertation was meant to be handed in, so we couldn't really afford to lose a day that close to hand in time $_{AT8}$

Lack of time spent on placement
- We didn't go as much as we'd have liked to have gone $_{CT18}$
- Most of them only went in the three times......so I'm not sure actually how much they got out of it $_{DF2}$
- There was only one time that we got to go, we were supposed to have four sessions $_{GD2.8}$

Lack of placement provider engagement
- They just kept cancelling dates $_{GD1.20}$
- We always had cancellations......it was just one thing after another $_{AT7}$
- The coach wanted a lot, but he didn't have the facilities, he said he had a lot more stuff than he did, he also was just a bit of a nightmare to contact, we didn't actually get to deliver any sessions to the kids, he pulled the plug on it before we started $_{S15}$
- A lot of physiology groups didn't end up going on placement because the provider pulled out $_{GD2.10}$
- They pulled out, and we didn't go again $_{GD2.8}$
- We didn't feel as though we were part of the organisation, which we weren't, but I think it's important that when you go there you feel like you're part of the set up $_{CT20}$
- It didn't seem that organised from the placement provider, it was like he just didn't really want us to be there, it was like he was just doing it as a favour to one of the lecturers or something, so we didn't really gain that much out of it $_{N5/6}$
- We were hoping it'd be a bit more proactive on their side $_{N7}$
- They were really unorganised......we were finding out like a couple of days before where we had to be, the guy really wasn't organised at all $_{SM8}$
- I don't think they could give us as much time as we wanted, because they had so much other stuff going $_{C3/4}$

The figure above highlights the negative aspects that the subjects discussed in relation to the placement. AT, SI, GD1 and N gave negative statements about their placement experiences. AT, S, DF and N reported that they did not gain the experience and insight into the world of work and potential career options that they had hoped to gain from their placements. GD1, C and AT felt that since the placement was during the second half of the final year, it was put at a bad time during the degree. CT, DF and GD2 felt that students did not spend enough time on their placement. GD2 only

got to attend one out of the intended four planned placement sessions. As mentioned, the placement process DF experienced on the Science and Football programme differed from the placement experience on the Sports Science programme. DF discussed the lack of time spent on the placements in relation to the Sports Science as opposed to the Science and Football placements. He felt that the Sports Science students did not spend enough time on their placements to fully gain from the entirety of the experience. In the below extract, DF explains how much time he spent on his placement:

Ours was undefined really, it was how much or how little you went in and there weren't any restrictions in terms of hours, it was left very open, down to yourself and what the club wanted you to do, it ran throughout the year, we applied for the placement in October, and it runs until the end of the year or end of the football season DF2

~

It was three times a week, two or three hours at a time DF3

In contrast, GD2 reported only going to her placement once. Below, CT describes the amount of time he spent on his placement:

We went in for three months, two sessions a month, about an hour and a half a session, so we only went six times, maybe that's not really long enough, maybe three times a month might've been just that bit extra, obviously the more experience you get the better CT19

GD1, AT, S, GD2, CT, N, SM and C reported that the placement providers lacked engagement in the placements. GD2 revealed that the she only went to her placement for one out of the intended four placement sessions, was because her placement provider *'pulled out'*:

It was really good the time that we were there, but there was only one time that we got to go, we were supposed to have four and they just pulled out and we didn't go again GD2.8

In the quotations below, GD1 and GD2 demonstrate the disappointment they experienced as a result of the lack of placement provider engagement:

We were really prepared for going......we'd been really planning up until the time we went, practicing speed gaits and all that sort of stuff, and we just didn't get the chance to do it again, which was a shame GD2.8/9

From the start we'd been really motivated to get in there first, get this good placement, work hard, sorted everything out, and then when it actually came to the placement, it kept getting cancelled and stuff like that, so it was a bit irritating to be honest GD1.21

Placements: what more can be done?

Re: Bad Timing
- It should've been done at a different time in the year $_{C8}$
- It was too much at that time $_{C16}$

Re: Lack of time spent on placement
- It'd be interesting to do something a bit longer......maybe spend a week or two shadowing someone in some capacity......just to get an idea of what work you could be doing after you finish your degree $_{GD1.22/23}$
- Obviously the more experience you get the better $_{CT19}$
- Each group was so different, because we went quite a few times, whereas I know a group who only went twice, and I think when it comes to writing the report or like the course, everyone should be doing the same type of thing $_{C4/5}$
- Put work placements throughout the three years $_{KT19}$

Re: Lack of placement provider engagement
- They need more cooperation between them $_{N7}$
- More communication between the placement provider and ourselves $_{CT20}$
- They'll have to come up with an actual contract, to make sure that not only we are doing what we should be doing, but they are also giving us the opportunity to do it $_{GD1.21}$
- Drawing up an actual contract before going in and saying these dates need to be sorted and this is what we're going to stick to $_{AT8}$
- Make sure that they understand our situation, because I suppose for them it's just some uni students wanting to do some testing, 'it's nothing very important for us', you know, 'they can come along whenever' type thing $_{GD1.22}$

More responsibility
- It would've felt a bit more meaningful if there was a bit more communication between ourselves and the placement provider, there was probably too few questions asked by them, I would've preferred it if they had kept asking us things, 'can you do this? What is this?' Made more use of us $_{CT20}$
- The placement didn't really know what to do with us, we were just sat about waiting to be told to do something, so sometimes we felt it was pointless to go there when you could be doing your other work $_{C8}$
- I really enjoyed the Sports Development placement, better than applied, because it was just so much more structured, because you had a name when you went in there $_{C5}$

Increase Placement Options
- It was all geared towards applying sports coaching knowledge, say you wanted to be a cardiologist or something like that, there was no connections with any hospitals or health departments or anything like that, that could've gone and shadowed or overlooked somebody for a few days just to get a feel of what something like that may be like, because I know there was a fair few from our course who wanted to go on and do something like be a cardiologist or within the NHS, but there was no actual health kind of practitioner placements available $_{AT9}$
- There wasn't the option of going to like a cardiac unit if I wanted to do that......it would've been better if it was more specific to what you personally want to do......if you do have a thought that you do want to go off and do something, you shouldn't be stopped from doing that $_{GD2.18/19}$

The above figure highlights the suggestions the subjects made for what more could be done to enhance the placement course component and overcome some of the issues discussed on page 245. C suggested that the placement should be conducted at the different times of year in order to overcome the 'bad timing' issues:

Maybe it should've been done at a different time in the year, and then it wouldn't have felt pointless......we felt guilty for just sitting in the room $_{C8}$

~

It needed to be a bit more structured and just at a different time in the year $_{C8}$

~

A few of us always moaned that it was too much at that time, so I think the time could definitely change $_{C16}$

GD1, CT and KT suggested ways of overcoming the issue of students not spending enough time on their placements. GD1 suggested utilising work experience which involved 'shadowing', whereby students gain insight into the everyday working lives of people in the world of work. C felt that the placement course component should be unified so that all students spend a similar amount of time on their placements. Unifying the placement could be used to ensure that all students spend an adequate

amount of time on their placements to gain from the totality of the experience. KT suggested that placements should be incorporated throughout the three years of the degree courses. These suggestions reflect the recommendations the phase 2 focus group students made to ensure students spend more time on placement (see page 199). The Adecco Group (2012) felt that work experience is inadequate, and a broader programme of employability training that goes beyond a two week placement should be employed. N, CT, GD1 and AT suggested ways of improving placement provider engagement. N and CT suggested that there should be more 'cooperation' and 'communication' between the placement provider and the SSES. GD1 and AT suggested utilising a contract to help enhance placement provider engagement. NSF (2009) advocates the use of a formal agreement with placement providers that stipulates what students need to learn on their placement. According to GD1, ensuring that placement providers have an understanding of what the students' hope to gain from the placement experience is essential. CT and C articulated that they would have preferred to have been allowed more responsibility whilst on their placements. C described how the lack of responsibility made the time that she spent on her placement seem 'pointless'. CT stated that the placement would have felt more 'meaningful' if the placement provider *made more use of them* and their expertise. In her quotation, C describes how she preferred the Sports Development module placement to the Applied Sports Science module placement, because she *'had a name'* and felt involved when she went into her placement. As previously mentioned, good practice should be shared between modules within the SSES. The subjects' positive placement experiences should be utilised to develop and enhance the placement course components. Based on the experiences of C, students should have more responsibility within their placements. This reflects the suggestion from alumnus 14 that placement experiences should be more 'meaningful' and have a purpose in which both the students and the placement providers gain (see page 80). Placements must reflect the true 'employer-employee' reality of the world of work. AT and GD2 felt that there needed to be an increase in placement options to account for a wider range of potential post HE options for Sports Science graduates. GD2 tried to initiate gaining a placement in the area she hoped to pursue post HE, but was unsuccessful:

There wasn't the option of going to like a cardiac unit if I wanted to do that, people who did Exercise Science got to go there, but because I did Sports Science, I wasn't allowed to do it, and I emailed the woman to ask her if there was any way that she could get me in contact with these people, but because I didn't do the right degree, I couldn't apparently GD2.18/19

GD2's desire to pursue placements involved with the Exercise Science degree course reflects the desires of student A from focus group 1 (see page 198). The NSF (2010) advocate that students should be able to set up their own placement if one is not offered that suits their needs. Students need more support in gaining placement experience to account for their individual post HE aspirations and needs. In the quotations below, GD2, GD1 and KT state further reasons why students require support in gaining placements and work experience. As demonstrated in the quotations from GD1 and GD2,

students often lack the contacts to begin developing networks and subsequent work experience opportunities:

Because I'm not from round here, I don't really know the places that you'd go to find that information GD2.19

I suppose you could arrange it yourself outside of the university, contact people and say, 'do you mind me coming in every Wednesday and just shadowing you?' But again it's so difficult because the majority of people don't really want you, they're kind of, 'why should I have this student following me around?' They can't be bothered GD1.23

I suppose I could have gone and found my own placement, but you don't really think like that in first year KT20

The above quote from KT bears resemblance to the focus group students' perceptions of work experience (see page 141):

JL: They said in first year you should be going out and getting a placement, but in first year you don't care because you feel like graduation is a million miles away 2.895-897

~

JL: If we wanted to do a placement we could have gone out and found one ourselves, but in first year you don't realise that
R: You don't think that in first year
M: At the time you don't realise the importance, where as if you were stressed out a bit more you might have been a bit more proactive 1.988-996

~

D: In first year you're not clued up enough......in first year if you drill it in that you need to go out and get a placement......the emphasis of going out and getting related work needs to change D.831-842

As suggested by D in his quotation above, 'the emphasis' on students gaining work experience needs to change. The focus group students felt that students need more support to help them gain work experience (page 141). The recommendations the phase 3 subjects gave to enhance the placement course component are consistent with the recommendations given in phase 2 part 2 of this research programme (page 200).

Negative perceptions of reflection
- Pile of crap......nonsense $_{S17}$
- Didn't gain from the reflection $_{GD2.11}$
- I thought it was a load of shit $_{CT20}$
- I hate reflection $_{SM9}$
- I'm not a fan $_{AT9}$
- I don't see the point in it $_{N7\ GD2.9}$

Positive perceptions of reflection
- I thought it was quite good......I enjoyed it $_{KT18}$
- It was quite useful towards the end $_{DF4}$

Disagree with the reflective writing model
- I found it quite hard fitting it in the way they wanted it to be written, hard to apply reflection and thoughts to the model......writing thoughts is hard $_{GD2.9/10}$
- I'm not particularly a fan of, it's having to write down what you think and having to go through this whole kind of process of thinking $_{AT9}$
- Reflection is, yes write it down, yes take points from it, but I think it's common sense, the reflection model and all the extra processes of it, I'm not sure if I agree with......I don't think necessarily that you need a functional model of reflection $_{S17}$
- In terms of the reflective aspects, not something I'd document really, I'm doing coaching sessions at the moment, I write down something that needs to be changed or something didn't go well, but that's as far as it goes $_{DF4}$

'I reflect anyway'
- A lot of it I find common sense......generally most people would think after they have done something, 'that didn't go too well, next time...', it's putting that in an actual structured format that makes sure you do it, but having to actually write it, it's like, I'm doing this anyway, do I really need to write it down? $_{GD1.23/4}$
- It helps you learn how you can improve in similar situations, but I feel as though you do that anyway, not necessarily in a structured format, if you do something and it goes a bit wrong, you generally understand where it's gone wrong.....I think a lot of it is just common sense stuff, which you do anyway $_{GD1.25}$
- I do that anyway, I'll do something with one of my athletes or something, and then I reflect upon it immediately, 'should I have done that or not?' I don't usually have to do this whole sitting down and writing things $_{SM9}$
- I feel that coaching you slip into your own way of doing things, and if you do come across something that hasn't worked, you generally scrap it and say, 'don't want to do that again' $_{AT13}$
- In terms of the reflective aspects, not something I'd document really, I'm doing coaching sessions at the moment, I write down something that needs to be changed or something that didn't go well, but that's as far as it goes $_{DF4}$

'I understand the intended benefit, but'.....
- I understand why it's used, and it'd be good in certain areas, it's just something I'm not particularly a fan of $_{AT9}$
- It's nice to note down your ideas of what worked with certain things, but in terms of coaching, I think you find your own style......you slip into your own way of doing things, and if you do come across something that hasn't worked, you generally know, 'scrap it', and, 'don't want to do that again' $_{AT13}$
- I thought it was nonsense, but reflection is a very useful tool, but as it's more common sense and writing it down I agree with, keeping a diary I agree with but I don't think necessarily that you need a functional model of reflection and that sort of stuff $_{S17}$
- I can understand the importance of it........but it's putting what you'd do anyway into a structured format $_{GD1.25}$
- I did see the benefits, you can reflect on it you can make improvements on your work, but when I was doing it, I just didn't really want to do it and I didn't engage in it enough $_{N7}$
- Judging off the research that's been done on reflection, it does make you a better practitioner......it's just that I'm happy to whinge about it $_{SM10}$

Lack understanding
- Lack understanding $_{GD2.9\ N8\ C4}$

Alternative assessment suggestions
- Reflect verbally $_{GD2.10}$
- Align the assessment to the different disciplines $_{S19}$
- Developmental assessment approach $_{GD2.9}$
- More focus on the placement $_{AT10}$
- Assign a higher grade distribution $_{DF12\ C5\ AT9-11}$

The above figure highlights the subjects' perceptions of the reflective method of assessment that was used to assess the placement. SI, GD2, SM, AT and N revealed negative perceptions regarding reflection. KT and DF had positives perceptions. However, DF described the reflection as being

useful 'towards the end' and revealed that it took him *'a while to get used to doing it'* DF4. The below quotation from KT shows what she thought was good about the reflection:

It makes you realise what you have done wrong or what you have done right......during the placement it would make me be like, 'well that went wrong last time, why don't we do it this way?' KT18

It should be noted that both KT and DF spent more time on their placements than the other subjects, which would have resulted in KT and DF having more placement content to reflect on. In support of this, the below quotations for GD1 and GD2 demonstrate that that they had a lack of content to reflect on:

Obviously the first time you do something it's never going to go 100% right and we had nothing to look back on, more for doing the reflective coursework, you had nothing to compare it to, like you just had, 'this is how it went for the session, but it could've gone like this, but we don't know, because we didn't get a chance to do it again', so it would've been good to have at least two times GD2.8/9

We did end up going once with another group, because there were two groups there and there was going to be two groups of players we were working with, so we ended up going along with their group and doing a bit with them just so we had something to write about in our reflective practice GD1.20

This supports that students need to spend an adequate amount of time on their placements to ensure that they have sufficient placement content to allow them to engage with reflection. The focus group students also demonstrated that a lack of engagement with the placements made the reflective assessment difficult due to a lack of content to reflect on (page 207). As previously stated, a lack of engagement can negatively impact on the quality of reflection (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009). GD2, S and DF did not agree with the model of reflection that students had to abide by when writing reflectively. The following slide was presented in L&T session 29, and represented the reflective cycle model that students had to abide by:
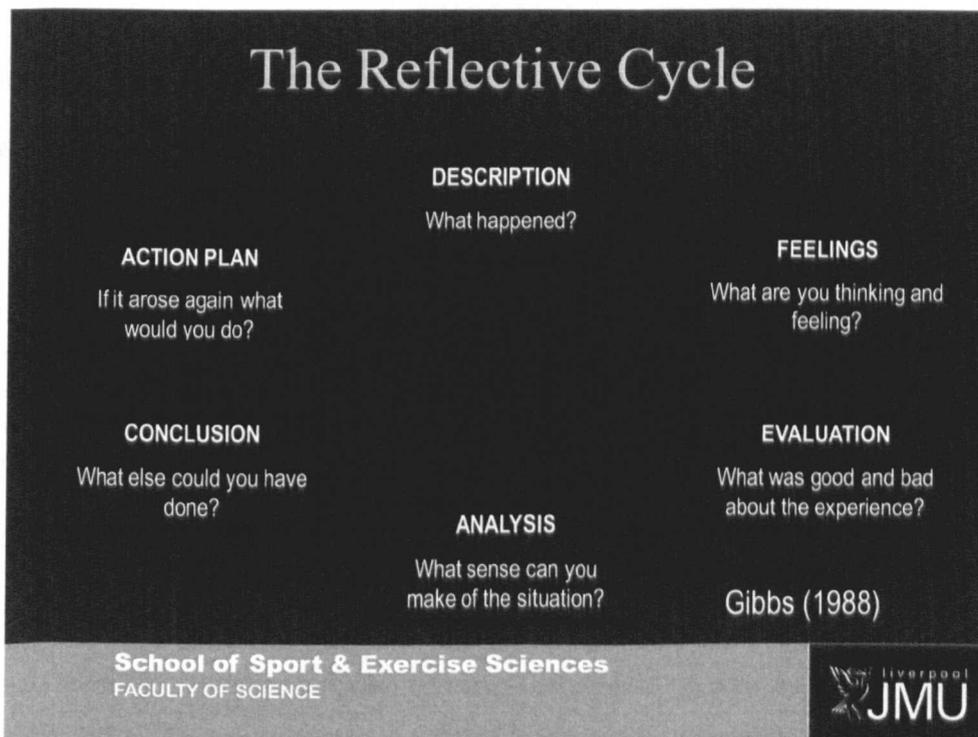
GD2 found it 'hard' writing her reflections and thoughts based around the model. In the below quotations, S describes why he does not perceive the need for 'a functional model of reflection':

I wouldn't put, 'I felt annoyed that the circuit didn't work', I'd more put, 'didn't work', 'this, that that that didn't work, change these, this is a better circuit' S18

You learn from your mistakes, and in the labs you should always keep a lab book and you'll note it down, 'this didn't work, do this next time', that for me is as effective if not more effective than noting it down according to the Gibbs model and how they were conveying reflection in that module S18

In a similar manner described by S above, DF stated that he would *'write down something that needs to be changed or something that didn't go well'*, but that he would not document *'reflective aspects'*. DF, SM, GD1 and AT all articulated that they reflected anyway, but not necessarily based around the model used for the placement's reflective assignment. D from focus group 2 made a similar statement:

I evaluate my own performance and make action points for next time, but I don't follow the Gibbs model structure D.182-184

AT, S, GD1, N and SM all made quotes that resembled, *'I understand the intended benefit, but.....'*. AT understood why reflection is used in certain areas, but alongside GD1 and S, felt that people reflect anyway, and find their own personal reflection style. N and SM both reported that they can see how reflection can enhance an individual's working practice, but they personally lacked engagement with it. GD2, N and C all expressed a lack of understanding with regard to reflection. GD2 demonstrated a lack of understanding by revealing that she was unaware that the purpose of the reflection was to promote learning from the placement experience (see from page 202 for the SSES intended purpose of reflection):

I learnt stuff from the placement, I found that really good, and so I did reflect on that I guess to learn it, but actually physically undertaking the reflection I don't think helped, it was more the placement made me think about stuff GD2.10/11

N stated, *'I don't really see the point in it'*, demonstrating his lack of understanding. C revealed her lack of understanding in the following two quotes:

I don't really know what your lecturers want to gain from it; I think a lot of students just think it's quite pointless how you write it up C4

I always think, 'why did we have to do the reflective report, really?' C8

The focus group students demonstrated an unawareness of the benefit of reflection (page 205). C was also unsure how to actually write a reflective piece of coursework:

I never really know how to write it, you can go to your lecturers and they can tell you about reflective writing, but I don't think you know whether you're doing it right or wrong when you're actually doing it yourself C4

The focus group students also demonstrated an uncertainty regarding how to write reflectively and described the reflective assessment as 'pointless' (page 206 and page 204 respectively). According to Marzano (1992), it is important that students are clear regarding the learning goal and how staff will evaluate such learning. Students must also perceive such goals to be meaningful and worth engaging with (Marzano 1992). Clearer guidance can help to ensure that reflection is genuine and beneficial

(Philip 2008). GD2, S, AT, DF and C gave suggestions for alternative forms of reflective assessment. GD2 suggested reflecting verbally:

I'd rather reflect verbally or something like that, rather than have to write down everything you think; just putting your thoughts on paper is something that I find quite hard GD2.10

As discussed earlier, it would be more appropriate to verbalise complexities as opposed to presenting and assessing them in a written form (page 132). At the staff away day, the staff highlighted the difficulty involved with assessing 'wicked competencies' (page 128). The focus group students suggested that oral assessments could be utilised to assess competencies that are complex and 'hard to convey' (page 132). S feels that the reflective assessment should be aligned to the different disciplines:

They should have a different scope for the diary and reflective practice for psychologists, physiologists and S&C, because although there's certainly cross over, the three aspects are fundamentally different, therefore the assessment method can't be the same for all three S19

GD2 suggested utilising a developmental assessment approach to overcome the lack of understanding:

If they want us to do coursework on that they should start that from the very beginning of the three years of the course, because that's something I found quite hard GD2.9

According to Moon (2004), reflection is more effective if it is supported throughout a curriculum. The quotes below from GD2 and N further highlight the need for a developmental approach:

Because you're so used to writing scientifically for every other module, doing reflecting is quite hard, especially on something that you're not sure what you're reflecting on GD2.10

We'd just have to write about our thoughts and things like that, and it's quite weird doing that, because you've never done it before N7

I've never written a reflective diary before, and because we only had one session to reflect on, I think my reflective diary was very, 'and today this happened', rather than, 'and I thought this and that', because I didn't know how to write it, because we've never done it before GD2.9

AT suggests that the assessment should focus more on the placement:

They could do it so there was more focus on the placement itself AT9

AT goes on to make suggestions for what could be assessed:

They should be looking at your group preparation, group dynamics, the way you go about things and your communication with your supervisor, your communication with your provider, and things such as that, and maybe ask the provider if they'll present feedback and say how well they think that you've worked, that'd be a better way to go about it, rather than just the reflective diary AT10

The phase 2 focus group students also felt that assessment should be more orientated around the effort that students put into their placements (page 211). Furthermore, KT referred to her placement provider as being *'clearly impressed with the group and our enthusiasm'*, supporting the suggestion from focus group 1 participant A that the placement groups' enthusiasm could be assessed (page 211). However, KT went on to state that her placement provider did not give *'actual group feedback of you did this, this and this'*. Providing feedback would be a good way to assess, develop and prepare students for the world of work by making students aware of what they are doing well and what they

need to improve on. Regarding the above suggestion from AT to *'ask the provider to present feedback'*, KT revealed that her group asked their provider for feedback, but *'we never ever got it, because he's just so busy'* KT17. The busy schedules' of the placement providers suggests that verbal feedback would be a better alternative, since providers are too busy to engage with written feedback, and as previously discussed, verbal feedback will be a better way to discuss wicked competencies. JF from focus group 2 also suggested that students should receive feedback about their performance from the placement provider (page 211). Alumnus 5 from phase 1 suggested that providing students with evaluation of their placement performance is required:

> *You don't actually get assessed on your contribution to the applied Sports Science, evaluating what you have done on the placement gives you a measure of how good you were practically, as opposed to writing a theoretical reflection, they would maybe benefit more from some practical evaluation from that placement, what they did well and what they didn't do so well.*

Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) recommended that placements should utilise employer feedback due to the positive effect employer feedback can have on enhancing students' confidence. DF, C and AT suggested that the placement should be assigned a higher grade distribution:

> *The Sports Science placement is only worth 12 credits, so it's not really that big a module, whereas in Science and Football it's weighted the same as the dissertation, so there's quite a lot of importance put on it* DF12

> *Because it's only worth such a small percent, I don't think people were as bothered as what they probably would've been over their other coursework* CS

> *The placement assessment was only 12 credits, which is worth less for your overall mark than a 24 credit module or the major project which was 36......so it gets put to the bottom of the pile, it's prioritising how to get the best mark out of everything* AT9/10

As the above quotations demonstrate, students determine the *'importance'* and *'priority'* of work based on the way that grades are distributed, which is in accordance with the assessment driven culture, which will be discussed in more detail from page 274. The phase three reflective practice assessment discussion bears consistency with and adds credence to the phase two part 2 reflective assessment recommendations (page 209).

Exams: Impact on Learning

Exams are more about memorising than learning DM11 GD1.14,15&17 KT13 GD2.13 N9 SM15 S8

Exams involve tactical revision and luck GD2.13 GD1.5 S8 DM4

Exams: Impact on post HE preparation

You have to question how applied it is, when you'd ever have to suddenly reel off all this information in any other situation but an exam? GD1.13

If you didn't have a broad range of knowledge, then you went into a job, you might not be necessarily qualified or be apt enough to do that job effectively, but you've got a piece of paper that says you can S9

Like with the driving test, you don't learn to drive you learn to pass the test, and then once you've passed then you learn to drive S8

Coursework: Impact on Learning

Coursework promotes you to learn the question or the specific area of the question, but I don't think it promotes wider learning, because it doesn't give you any freedom DM10

In coursework you can easily read something, pick out the information you need and just put it in your coursework but not actually learn it GD1.14

Coursework I probably feel as though I was learning more, because you have to think, 'is that important?' Put it in, take it out, and read through it GD1.15

In coursework you have to research it yourself, and you pick up things that although might not necessarily go into the coursework, but you'll remember and think, 'that's interesting' GD1.14

With coursework's you gain a better understanding of the area, because there is so much reading and research involved before you can actually put something down on paper N9

Coursework: Impact on post HE preparation

Coursework is a greater reflection on your knowledge than exams, because that nerve element's taken out of it because you're doing it in your own time SM15

All the experts in fields now don't sit exams, they just write a journal article about what they've done, so I think getting used to writing rather than sitting in an exam is better SM15

Presentations: Impact on Learning

Sometimes it's just easier to talk about it, I found that I preferred presentations in the end, because you can just say it how it is, in your own lingo, it makes more sense, it's easier to understand KT12

You've actually got to get up and talk about it, and there are questions at the end, so you need to know the stuff rather than just being able to copy it down on a written coursework DF7

I prefer presentations, I'm happier to articulate what I'm thinking verbally than I am by writing it, I feel like I can convey information better that way, if I have to learn to be able to present it, then that will stick with me longer than if I just write it down S7

If I actually have to convey that information to someone, you have to be able to articulate and explain to someone the information that you have so that they understand it, it requires more of a learning effect than being able to see it in a book and write it in your own words, in which you wouldn't necessarily have to fully understand it to get away with conveying information, whereas I think if you're sat face to face to someone, then that gives a better learning effect S8

Presentations: Impact on post HE preparation

You've got to do your homework; really know your topic area N9

Presentations were really beneficial, because it's obviously something you do in a real job situation, you never just write, you always have to convey the information to other people, so to be able to practice that, and especially for someone like me who is terrified going into it and then slowly gaining a bit more confidence, I think it was really good......you develop a habit of presenting better, communicating better N8/9

In Sports Development we had quite a few presentations, some of them weren't even marked, so it got you used to getting your work together, building up something to show other people, and talk it through with your theory C7

There were presentations with posters, half assessed through the poster and half assessed through your presentation, so that's a bit more conference type, like when you have to defend your thesis and stuff like that, if you look at it from an academic route, it's all gearing you towards further steps down the line AT6

Groupwork: Impact on Learning

Group work is always a pain......trying to get everybody together and trying to understand where everybody was coming from, especially people who you didn't know so well AT6

In first year the group work was quite difficult, because no one's really interested, everyone's a bit like, 'oh, I can't really be arsed', but then you work out who you need to work with, because you become a bit closer to people in your class, so in third year you chose people that you know are going to work hard, so you're not going to have to do all the work KT13

I've never really been a big fan of group work, because I ended up being the one that does the majority of the work SM11

It was the fact that in the third year, working with these people is actually contributing towards my final grade, and do they want the same things out of their degree as I want? AT6

A better way of assessing the contributions of the group might make it a bit more worthwhile, getting everybody to fill out a questionnaire anonymously at the end, their perceptions of how their group performed SM11/12

Groupwork: Impact on post HE preparation

I understand why it's there, it's very rare that you're going to do anything individually throughout the whole of your lifetime; you're always going to have to work with other people in some kind of group setting or team AT6

When you start working in jobs you'll have to work with people who you might not necessarily get on with, but you learn to work together to achieve a goal, being able to be tactful with how you approach things and how you convey what you trying convey, put your points across about the group, and see how that works, that's a really, really positive learning aspect S10

You need to know how to work in groups, because most jobs you will have to do some sort of group work......when you're in a working environment you have to do your own work, but when it came down to group work in uni, people could slack off and then I had to pick up the pieces SM11

255

The figure above highlights the subjects' perceptions of the assessment methods that were used throughout the duration of their courses (apart than reflection). The assessment methods the subjects discussed were exams, coursework, presentations and group work. For each of these assessment methods, subjects discussed the impact that the assessment had on learning and on preparing students for post HE. Due to the volume of data, two figures have been used to discuss the 'Exams: Impact on Learning' theme. DM, GD1, KT, GD2, N10 and SM felt that *exams are more about memorising than learning'*:

A lot of it you learn just literally for the exam, once you've been in that exam, you've got it all written down, you forget it, because you have an idea of what they're likely to ask you, so you focus on answering that question, as opposed to learning all the interlinked things, and almost pre-write a question in your head, and then after that it's forgotten and you haven't learnt it GD1.14/15

The exams are only a memory test DM11

Exams were more a memory test than actually retaining the information that you were learning GD1.15

Seen questions doesn't encourage you to revise round, it just encourages you to write the essay as quick as you can and then learn it word for word DM5

Exams is what you remember, if you haven't got a very good memory then you've got one chance at it......you might know, but you might not be able to write it done in an exams situation KT13

'Exams are more about memorising than learning'

I did a timed essay and it wasn't really learning the topic it was just writing a good answer and then learning me answer, it was like learning lines pretty much, just sitting there and writing them all out SM16

It was more memorising what you'd been taught, rather than learning it, like I wouldn't be able to tell you anything about it now GD2.13

It's more about your memory as opposed to how much you know......I always think that when I come out of an exam I forget it all, and a week later, I've no idea what the exam was about N9/10

It was, 'memorise as many references and bits of information as you could', then write it all down GD2.13

The staff at the staff away day questioned the use of exams, *'are you testing their understanding or are you testing their ability to remember?'* SAD.CC. Gibbs (1992) stated that regardless of good practice and the best efforts of staff, students recognise that what is required is to memorise. It therefore appears that exams as a form of assessment are failing one of the key purposes of assessment; to facilitate learning (Boud and Falchikov 2006). GD2, GD1, S and DM described how *'exams involve tactical revision and luck'*:

A lot of people for the exams just got lucky, if you picked the right topics to revise, because most people revise like four topics, and then two of them come up GD2.13

There were six subjects, then only five of them would come up, but you had to only answer two of them, so you could still not do a lot of the stuff, you only had to turn up to two lectures in theory and then you knew all you need for the exam DM10

'Exams involve tactical revision and luck'

In one of the exams something that I'd revised quite thoroughly didn't come up, and so I didn't quite get the marks I wanted there......sometimes it's down to what comes up on the exam GDI.5

The issue that I have with exams is that they examined one or two sections of what would've been a module that contained six major sections, so I knew people who revised all six sections to a decent standard and could get 60s, 65s, solid 2:1s, but then there are people who only revised two, but they happened to be the two that came up, and so they could potentially get 70s plus, the issue I have is that that doesn't necessarily convey a learning effect, it's the potential for people who say haven't got the same knowledge base but are lucky in the fact in that they just memorised a minor section of a large topic, as opposed to someone who has a much broader range but maybe not in the exact amount of depth, but as a knowledge base that's bigger S8

GD1 and S did not feel that exams prepared students for post HE. GD2 does not feel that exams prepare students for the applied nature of the world of work. S feels that exams do not assess a wide enough knowledge base, which results in students entering the world of work inadequately prepared. S feels that using exams as a form of assessment means that students are learning and being prepared for passing exams as opposed to learning and being prepared for the world of work, as demonstrated in his analogy on page 255 comparing HE exams to the driving test. As originally demonstrated on page 163, the member of staff in session 29 used the same analogy to describe any given degree:

A degree is like learning to drive, you get your degree, and then you go out into the world of practice, you only learn how to drive, when you've passed your driving test, before that you're learning to pass a test

However, according to Hawkins and Gilleard (2002), exams prepare students for skills required in the work place, such as sorting facts, the ability to explain facts quickly, and deliver high standards of work under intense pressure. In this sense, it needs to be ensured that students are made aware of the attributes they are learning and developing through exams, and the applicability of such attributes post HE (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Brewer 2009, Leitch 2006). DM and GD1 question the impact of coursework on learning. DM does not feel that coursework promotes 'wide learning'. GD1 feels that coursework involves selecting information to report, but does not involve learning. However, GD1, N and SM feel that coursework has a greater impact on learning than exams. GD1 stated that he learnt more via coursework than exams, due to the research process that is involved with coursework. N also felt that coursework promoted better learning than exams due to the research process. SM felt

that coursework promotes better learning than exams because the exam 'nerve element' is not involved with coursework. Regarding post HE preparation, SM feels that coursework better prepares students for post HE than exams, by better reflecting the reality of the world of work. KT, DF, S and N felt that presentations were a good way of promoting learning. KT described how she found it easier to verbalise complex notions as opposed to writing them, as demonstrated in the below extract:

Sometimes it's just easier to talk about it, I found that I preferred presentations in the end, because you can just say it how it is, your own lingo, it makes more sense, it's easier to understand, because I gave a presentation about my placement[9], and I'd done a report on it as well, and what I was trying to get across about the elderly and the children, I just couldn't get it across in the report, and it was really frustrating trying to write it and be like, 'oh, and then we used to get them to hit balloons', but saying it is like, 'we used to get them to move their arms around in the air to hit the balloons, because they were a bit immobile', and saying that in the presentation was so much easier than writing it in this report, saying it was totally fine KT12

As discussed earlier in the presentation of the phase 3 interview findings and in the phase 2 focus groups findings, it would be more appropriate to verbalise complexities as opposed to presenting and assessing them in a written form (pages 253 and page 132 respectively). DF described how presenting and being asked questions made him feel more accountable than coursework, enhancing learning. Like KT, S felt that he could convey information more effectively verbally than in writing. S also feels that he learns better via presentations than written methods, because a better understanding is required to present and articulate information verbally than to write it down. N feels that students are required to *'really know the topic area'* for presentations. Page 278 will further discuss the impact of accountability on engagement and learning. Focus group 2 also referred to presentations promoting accountability and in turn engagement and learning:

R: Sometimes when you're doing a presentation you end up learning more because when you're doing a coursework all you have to do is write it on the paper and you can forget about it
A: But with a presentation you repeat it and repeat it, you memorise it
R: And you make yourself know it, because when people ask you questions you get put on the spot 1.715-723

N, C and AT felt that presentations effectively prepare students for the requirements of post HE. N and C referred to presentations developing students' confidence and ability to communicate and convey information to people. AT referred to presentations preparing students for the realities of an academic career. AT, KT and SM describe the difficulties they encountered in relation to group work. AT articulates that the assessment driven culture of HE made group work difficult. In order to account for this culture, SM suggested utilising a method of assessment that recognises the individual contributions of group members. The NSF (2010) recommended utilising technology which enables staff to determine individual students' input into group work. Focus group 1 also referred to recognising individual contributions to group work:

A: There was one group work where we had to fill in a confidential form and you had to say what everyone did, so if you thought someone in the group hadn't done the work you could write it down
M: It was good
R: There was another one that we had for psychology last year were we had to do a group poster and presented it together but then you got marked individually on the presentation so it was a mix of individual and group
JL: Yeah that was good 1. 642-653

AT, S and SM acknowledge the importance of group work in the world of work and the subsequent impact of group work on preparing students for the world of work. However, SM did not feel that the group work that he experienced at university adequately reflected the reality of group work in the world of work, suggesting that the realities of the world of work need to be better aligned to HE in order to effectively prepare students:

You need to know how to work in groups, because most jobs you will have to do some sort of group work, and you've got to work with different levels among some sort of sporting hierarchy, if you're working as a S&C coach, you'll have to report to the head S&C, and you may have to report to the physio or the club's doctor, you have got to have these skills to work in a group, a lot of people on my course were fairly selfish, when you're in a working environment you have to do your own work, but when it came down to that, it was like people could slack off and then I had to like pick up the pieces, whereas in a sporting environment people are responsible for their own jobs, I can't tell a physio how to do his job, he has to do his job and tell me what to do, and I have to do my job and give him recommendations, so it's a good thing to get used to, so it's good that that sort of work's on the course, it's just my own personal experiences of it have been quiet bad SM11

Impacts on Assessment

Obviously the time constraints, financial constraints of assessing any sort of cohort presents problems $_{S8}$

In the first year they was a huge volume of people, 200 plus, and if you get 200 plus essays then it's going to take some time, whereas a poster you've got a group of maybe 5 or 6 people, they come in and present for 5 minutes or just leave you the poster and then you go from there $_{AT6}$

They can't assess everyone individually on loads of different pieces of coursework, that's just impractical, so I think they do just have to whack an exam on $_{DM12}$

I don't know how really you would go about assessing someone in a practical sense, especially with the volume of people there are within the university $_{AT12}$

Impacts on Feedback

Because there's like ninety essays of the same stuff, they probably don't have time to be like, 'oh, you should've put this, put that', and things $_{GD2.16}$

In second, third year, there was a lot of people handing in coursework's at the same time, and thus, the feedback that you can get is fairly restricted by time constraint for the lecturer $_{S22}$

It's hard to sit down with everyone, especially in first and second year, you've got like 200 people in the class $_{DM14}$

I never took most of my courseworks to see the staff, because there's so many people doing the course, I don't think they really wanted to read like ninety essays before you go off and do it all $_{GD2.14/15}$

Impacts on Community

If it was smaller groups, you'd know the staff slightly better, if you did have any queries either during the session or at the end of the session, you'd talk to them, rather than everyone looking at you, it's not really the tutor that's the scary bit, it's all the rest of the pupils, if it was smaller groups it would be better for both getting on with the tutor and the rest of the cohort $_{GD2.16}$

You get to know people a bit better in smaller groups, rather than just loads of people in one room $_{GD2.16}$

Because there are so many people on the course, especially in first year, it's a bit overwhelming, it's too many people, you don't know any of the teachers, it's not personal enough $_{KT5}$

Make the numbers a bit smaller, so it's a bit more personal $_{KT9}$

Impacts of Support

If you were in a smaller group of people, you would be able to get a bit more help, and they would notice that your were struggling, rather than it be like, 'oh well, you're not trying hard enough', or, 'you're not very good at this' $_{KT7}$

Some of the staff are a bit less willing to help, I suppose when you've got a huge number of students coming through each year, it's difficult to be like, 'I'll help them out', I suppose it's easy for them to think, 'just do my lectures, that'll do, and that'll be another lot going through to graduate over and done' $_{GD1.28}$

Because the school's so big, I think that's why, I didn't expect anyone to know me or know what had been going on when I came back after my year out $_{C18}$

Impacts on Engagement and Learning

Because there were only like thirty or so people on the module in third year, you're able to get a lot more answers and ask questions and you don't feel stupid asking questions or anything like that $_{GD2.2}$

You didn't really need to go to the lectures in first year, because there were so many people, so you didn't know anyone at all, and they just spoke at you $_{GD2.5}$

It didn't really matter if you were at the lectures because he just tends to talk at you, you could get everything from the lecture notes, but it's probably because there were loads of people, so you can't really be like, 'oh, what do you think?' and all that stuff if there's like ninety people in the room $_{GD2.3}$

Because it was a smaller group, you could ask individual questions $_{GD2.3}$

There's people sat behind you or sat in front of you talking about last night, or sometimes you're sat there whispering or talking away to somebody, but as you get down to the smaller groups you just feel a lot more involved and you feel like you can ask more questions, because you're getting to a point when you feel like you recognise the people off your course, so you're able to ask things and engage a lot more with the learning and what you're meant to get out of it really $_{AT24}$

I got to do a Wingate once, but it was in biomechanics, which is actually a very small class, so they tend to do quite a lot of very good stuff $_{S14}$

Because the classes were smaller, you could learn from your lectures $_{C12}$

Impacts on Placements

You've got the problem of sheer numbers of people, trying to find them all placements; it's not really possible $_{GD1.23}$

Cohort size (and related issues) decreases over the duration of the course

The first year's very sporadic and 200 people in a lecture theatre, but you're in groups of maybe twenty five by the end of it in certain modules, it does just get a lot better as you go on......more personal, you feel as though you're actually involved, rather than being a face in a lecture $_{AT23/24}$

There were so many more modules to choose from in third year, so it was broken up a lot more, it was more evenly spread out $_{GD2.16}$

In first year, you're just like nothing, and second year, you're shown a little bit more interest, and then third year it's like, 'ok, now I know your name' $_{KT5}$

It's just everyone in one big room in first year, but then as you start to pick your modules that's when it becomes personal $_{C16}$

It changes through the years, you get to know staff better and they're more willing to help you, it's based on your relationship with them, and them getting to know you $_{GD1.28}$

As the years have gone on the tutors have more respect for you, because you know more and you're older and things $_{GD2.14}$

The extracts above highlight the subjects' perceptions of how the size of a given cohort impacts on the students' university experience. A member of staff at the staff away day stated that *'the big problem for the SSES programme is that it has got too big'* (page 171). S, AT and DM made reference to the large cohort sizes within the SSES limiting assessment. At the staff away day, the staff articulated that the assessment options available to them are limited due to the large cohort size (page 133). GD2, S and DM referred to the large cohort size restricting feedback. GD2 articulated that the large cohort sizes prevented her from engaging with support from the staff whilst completing her work, because she did not think *'they wanted to read ninety essays'*. GD2 and KT described how large cohort numbers impact on the community within the SSES. According the GD2 and KT, smaller groups can enhance community and engagement between the staff and the students and between the students themselves, and can make things *'more personal'*. In the same sense, KT, GD1 and C described how the large cohort size impacts on support. KT feels that students would be able to get more help if the groups were smaller. GD1 described how some staff do not appear to be willing to help, which he attributed to the large cohort sizes. According to GD1, the large cohorts within the SSES fosters the resource mentality that was highlighted on page 150 and will be further discussed on page 304:

> *When you've got a huge number of students coming through each year, it's difficult to be like, 'I'll help them out', I suppose it's easy for them to think, 'just do my lectures, that'll do, and that'll be another lot going through to graduate over and done'* GD1.28

C had a year out after her second year, and felt a lack of support upon returning to the SSES, which she attributed to the large cohort size. GD2, AT, S and C described how large class sizes can negatively impact on students learning and engagement, and small class sizes can have a positive impact. The literature review referred to the impact cohort size can have on student engagement (see page 14). AT stated that smaller cohorts help to foster a sense of student involvement with their L&T community. El Ansari (2002) found that the students valued seminars small enough for them all to contribute. Larson (2000) proposes that small group work is crucial in the post HE preparation of students, including the development of students' ability to talk to others outside of the classroom, develop the ability to cope with new challenges, and the ability to make links with the world of work. GD1 stated that placements were restricted by the large number of people on the course. AT, GD2, KT and C felt that the cohort sizes and the related issues decreased over the duration of the course. KT stated that it was only by third year that she felt staff began to know her name. As Bowles (2011) stated, *"it is hard to feel authentically engaged with your learning if your lecturers do not know your name"*. The students in phase 2 also felt that smaller class sizes would be desirable and help to overcome some of the present issues that exist within the SSES, by enhancing a sense of community and dialogue with the SSES, enhancing learning, creating accountability, and developing students' ability to ask and answer questions in L&T sessions and a group setting (page 172).

5.2.3.7 Feedback

```
                          5.2.3.7 Feedback
                               |
          ┌────────────────────┴────────────────────┐
   Feedback Evaluation                      What Should Feedback be like?
```

The analysis for the 'feedback' course component has been presented using two analysis summary figures under the heading stated above.

FB Evaluation

FB Evaluation → **-ve**

- Some was helpful, but other bits were a bit basic GD1.27
- The socioeconomics module feedback was always a bit vague C14
- The feedback was average S21
- It seemed to be generic more than genuine feedback S22
- It varies a lot from lecturer to lecturer, some can be very good, detailed and enlighten you, and others can just give you a mark N12
- They're limited to what they can feedback, you can't send them a first draft and get feedback, which seems a bit odd, if you've been motivated enough to ask for feedback and do the best, do you deserve to have it checked? GD1.28/29
- Sometimes you're not quite sure exactly what it is that you've done wrong, you think you've written it well, but they're saying otherwise, and you're just not too sure how it's not quite right GD1.28
- I didn't learn a lot about where I was going wrong, but it's quite hard to get on paper what you're trying to put across, I did take up the option of going over feedback in a conversation quite a lot, but that doesn't always work with some people SM17/18
- Unless you went to see them, you wouldn't really know where you went wrong KT14
- Some modules there was only one coursework, so you get loads of feedback from it, but that was the module done, so it was a bit pointless DM13/14

+ve

- You always got the coursework back before the other one was due in, and they are quite good about putting quite a lot of feedback on DM13
- They just wrote loads of comments on the essays about the structure of them, the good bits and bad bits what you need to expand on and things like that, and then they give you group feedback as well DM14
- I think that's really good when they fill out that form when they give you your work back C14
- Most of it was pretty good, and all the lecturers were fine to explain anything if you went to see them about it DP7

Attitude towards FB

- Sometimes you'd think, 'I'll probably need to do something similar to this in the future', so you'd try and learn from it, but other times it'd be, 'that's my grade, there's not a lot I can change on that specific thing now,' so you wouldn't be too interested in the feedback GD1.27
- Sometimes it was just like, 'right ok, it doesn't really tell me much, just throw it to the back of my cupboard' N12
- It would just be what got written on the form really, which I'd normally forget about, put it away with the rest of my second and third year work and I forgot it was there KT15
- I wanted to know what way I was going wrong, you've got to take the feedback, grab the bull by the horns and find out for yourself SM18

The extracts above present the subjects' perceptions and evaluation of the feedback that they received throughout the duration of their degrees. GD1, C, S N, DM, SM and KT all provided insight into their perceptions of the feedback that they received during their time at university. They used terms such as *'basic'*, *'vague'*, *'average'* and *'generic'*. GD1 and N described that the feedback lacked consistency, with some staff providing good feedback and others providing poor feedback. S felt that feedback had been generic as opposed to genuine, and GD1 felt that the restrictions that are in place to limit the amount of feedback that staff can provide whilst students are completing their work are questionable. GD1 also stated:

Sometimes you felt like it was helping out those who were either struggling or not willing to put the effort in, as opposed to focus on the ones who were putting the work in GD1.29

GD1 and SM revealed how they were not always sure where they had gone wrong, with GD1 highlighting a dissonance between the staff and students. SM and KT felt that going to see staff for clarification of where they had gone wrong was required. DM felt that feedback from work that did not develop on to subsequent pieces of work was *'pointless'*, highlighting that students require perceiving a 'need' to engage (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008, Marzano 1992). In a similar lack of accountability, lack of engagement manner to DM, GD1 revealed that his attitude towards feedback was based around whether the feedback could be utilised in the future. GD1 would not engage with feedback if he did not perceive that it could develop his performance in the future. N and KT also demonstrated a lack of engagement with their feedback. SM demonstrated a proactive approach to feedback. SM felt that in order for students to be prepared for post HE, students should take a motivated and driven approach to feedback:

> *You should be motivated and driven enough to actually go and find out more things for yourself, rather than having it spoon fed to you and asking somebody all the time......because you're not always going to have that when you go away and work, you need to have these answers for yourself, there's always going to be someone you can talk to and get a bit of confidence from, but you're not going to have someone to spoon feed you answers all the time, you need to find out for yourself* SM18

This links to Rae (2009), who suggests that students may desire the 'safe and certain' options but this does not prepare them for the reality of the post HE world.

What should feedback be like?

FB should be developmental
- A better understanding of where you've made mistakes, to identify your strengths, mainly to improve on the next piece of coursework, so it should always be progressing N12/13
- Finding out where you went wrong and finding out how you can correct that in the future SM18
- There was one for nutrition where you have three individual pieces of coursework......so they gave you your feedback and then that gave you an indication of what to improve for your next one, that was good N12

In order to be developmental FB needs to be specific and detailed
- Some just write on the feedback sheet, whereas some write on your actual paper, gone into the paper itself and flagged things up, areas where you're going wrong, which I found a lot more helpful AT5
- I quite like breaking down the sections, so you understood where you were going wrong AT5
- Being more specific, how it could be improved, how you could get a better mark, maybe some examples of what would be classed as good GD1.27
- Better feedback would be a definitive reason as to why it was 65% instead of 75%, or an example as an instead of what you put, 'have you considered this? That would take you to this percentage', it would either be, 'good tables and figures, bad tables and figures', 'ok well, bad tables and figures, why?' Just five, six extra words that the next time I'm doing a piece of coursework I might go, 'ok well the last time I put graphs on, I used too big a scale' S22
- In Sports Development we always had a feedback session after it, general points where people went wrong, areas for improvement and where people did well, which is good C14
- More feedback on your essay, there's not a lot saying, 'you should've developed here', and, 'you should've gone this way'......because I didn't go and speak to them, so it would be better than nothing getting it on the essay GD2.15/16
- If you wrote something wrong, some of them would put a book chapter for you to read, or say, 'is this comment right? Is it not a different factor?' So you could go away and read about it SM18
- It's got to be constructive, if you have done something bad, just say, 'this is no good, must improve in this area and this area', to tell you where you can improve on for further pieces of coursework N14

Pre-FB
- You write it and then hand it in to be checked, and they'd suggest changes, that way you actually have to look at the feedback, so you're learning from what you've done wrong GD1.27
- With Sports Nutrition they did drop in sessions which were good, you could go and ask questions about your coursework C14

FB should be motivational — Instead of just focusing on the negatives and where you've gone wrong, put the positive, which bits you've done well......because then you can understand, 'I've got a good base to work from' AT5

263

The extracts above depict the subjects' suggestions for how feedback can be enhanced and improved. N and SM support the notion of developmental feedback that has been discussed by DM and GD1 (see attitude towards feedback theme). N and SM feel that feedback should allow students to *'improve'* and *'progress'*. The NSF (2010) proposed that feedback should be used to improve future achievement, not simple judge performance to date. The NUS noted that feedback should a continual process (Porter 2008). A member of staff at the staff away day stated, *'students need to see feedback as relevant for the future* SAD.CC. AT, GD1, S, C, GD2, SM and N felt that in order to be developmental, feedback should be specific, detailed and constructive. As highlighted by GD2, not all students engage in dialogue with staff in order to clarify their written feedback. It is therefore important to provide thorough feedback in order to account for students that do not actively seek feedback clarification. If the SSES wants to encourage students to engage with staff for feedback, it needs to be ensured that students feel comfortable engaging in dialogue with staff (students' engagement with staff is further discussed in the next section). GD1 and C articulate that pre-feedback whilst students are doing pieces of work is desirable. AT felt that making students aware of their strengths as well of their weaknesses will help to enhance students' motivation and confidence in their ability. As stated by the NSF (2010), feedback should help students, not judge them.

It might be better to meet as a tutor group, but I guess the staff have got so much to do that I'm sure they don't want to spend time doing that GD2.13

In third year, I was always knocking on their doors like, 'hi!' I felt like a bit of a pain to be honest KT8

I did go to make an appointment with my personal tutor in the first couple of weeks, because they always say go make an appointment then, but because you see the dissertation pupils always take up the time, it's just easier to go to someone that you see more often C9

Students perceive that they are not the priority of the staff

It's crazy, because I used to see to my major project supervisor like every week, and I was like, 'how many PhD people have you got?' And he was like, 'seven', or something, and I was like, 'no wonder you haven't got any time for first years!' I was like, 'how do you manage that?' KT5

Some people were more willing to help you and take some of their time to dedicate to assisting you if you went and asked for it, some of them, they're a bit less willing to, which I suppose is difficult when you've got a huge number of students coming through each year it's very difficult to be like, 'I'll help them out', I suppose it's easy for them to think, 'just do my lectures, that'll do, and that'll be another lot going through to graduate over and done with' GD1.28

I don't like getting stuff wrong, if I find stuff hard, I'd rather just try and figure it out on my own rather than looking for help......I like being good at stuff, so if I go and say, 'is this the way that you do it?' And they're like, 'no', I always feel a bit stupid GD2.15

Lack of confidence

Unless you're really confident, you're just going to get embarrassed if you get stuff wrong, and you think that people will laugh at you if you put your hand up and said something wrong GD2.20

(Anon.) offered to do a dissertation with me, and I said no because I didn't feel confident enough to go with him, because I wouldn't want to let him down, but I wish I'd just put myself through it, and then I wouldn't feel as disappointed as I do now with my overall mark, I was like 3% away from a 2.1 C10

Assessment driven culture

A lot of coursework I left to the last minute in second year, because I didn't think it was as important, and so I didn't actually have time to go and talk to the tutors, because it had been left so late GD2.15

I've realised this year's a lot more important, and I didn't know how I was doing it wrong in second year to not get the best grade, so I wanted to try harder this year, and the staff are marking it so they know what they're looking for, so you might as well go and talk to them, you can't lose out GD2 15

Peer pressure — I feel like in first year I would have felt like a bit of a geek, like everyone's like, 'what you going to speak to them for ?' KT8

I did more so in second year, I think that helps you to get to know them and stuff as well, and I definitely did in third year KT8

I felt like as the years have gone on, the tutors have more respect for you, because you know more and you're older and things GD2.14

Engagement increased over the three years

Everyone seems to get on better, more of like a colleague rather than just a student, tutor relationship, like when you're in the labs doing your project or whatever with them, its more sort of a conversation, rather than a lecturer telling you what to do, it seems more of an even setting GD2 16

It changes through the years, you get to know staff better and they're more willing to help you, I suppose it's more based on your relationship with them, and them getting to know you GD1.28

I think it's more maturity and not being so nervous about talking to people GD2.15

DF and SM appeared to have had good staff engagement

In Science and Football, you get the same lecturers most of the time, so you end up getting to know them quite well DF7

With being a Sports Scholar, a lot of lecturers knew who I was, and I did have a good relationship with all my lecturers, so I was able to just talk to them about anything SM19

I used to see a couple of lecturers who train in the gym; I used to speak to them in the gym SM19

Bad experiences of staff engagement

I went to see him about this coursework I had been struggling with, and I ended up crying because he was that horrible to me in his office, he had a white board up and he was making me draw things that I didn't know anything about, it was horrible, it was really intimidating, it was the worst, so I didn't want to go and see anyone after that, it proper shook me, I would always fathom out how they were before going to see anyone after that, I would never go and see anyone intimidating like him, it wasn't very nice KT7

The first project supervisor meeting we had, all the other students had this form and were speaking about it, and I didn't have one, and I was like, 'well no one told me', and he had a go at me, and it just wasn't nice C11/12

It was always up to us, the students, to get the dates together, but then it would take about two or three emails just to get our project supervisor to look at your work, or to try and catch him, it was hard really, and in the end a lot of us just give up, everyone felt a bit stressed with him C11

It's important that you get on well with your tutors, like (anon.), he was really nice, really good, he'd help, you could go into his office and speak to him about the exams or whatever, and he'd still have a laugh with you C12

It should be more approachable, so students are able to have more of like a chat with them......so that you've always got someone that you can turn to KT9

The importance of engaging with staff

My dissertation tutor didn't really have a good relationship with anyone in our group, it's important if you want to do well to have a good relationship with your dissertation tutor, because you're doing something on your own and you need someone there to point out where you're going wrong or how you can do better, because I never got that off mine, and my disseration mark is what I'm most disappointed about when I look at my results C10

In first year I was going to quit, because I wasn't enjoying the course, the only module I enjoyed was Sports Marketing......I went to see the head of year panicking, crying, in a complete state, and I was like, 'I'm really not enjoying it, I hate all these modules', I was really struggling, and he said, 'well, you can focus on the marketing next year, that's one of your routeway choices, you can drop the ones you don't like', but no one told us that KT3/4 I didn't know that, I was just unaware, it just hadn't been made clear to me KT4/5

265

The quotes above demonstrate factors discussed but the students that impact on engagement and dialogue between staff and students. GD2, KT, C and GD1 revealed that they perceived that students were not the priority of staff. GD2 felt that it would be beneficial for students to meet in their tutorial groups, but dismissed this notion, because she perceived that the staff have *'got so much to do, that I'm sure they don't want to spend their times doing that'*. KT reported that she only really felt comfortable going to see staff for guidance and support in her third year, but even then she felt like *'a bit of a pain'*. C reported how she was disheartened from booking appointments to see her personal tutor, because the tutor's appointments slots always busy with appointments for other students. KT felt that staff prioritised PhD students over undergraduate students, highlighting a potential imbalance between research and teaching within the SSES. As previously discussed, GD1 felt that the large student cohort within the SSES makes it difficult for staff to prioritise students and their needs due to a large work load. The subjects' perceptions of the priorities of staff could be influenced by a lack of confidence. GD2 and C demonstrated that a lack of confidence prevented them from engaging in dialogue with staff. C regretted not engaging more with staff, and felt that her lack of engagement had a negative impact of her final degree classification. GD2 quoted that engaging with staff comes with *'maturity and not being so nervous talking to people'*. It should not be taken for granted that students possess the maturity and confidence required to engage in dialogue with staff. Students that do not possess such attributes will not voluntarily engage in dialogue with staff. Many students will require support and guidance to help them develop and feel confident and comfortable engaging in dialogue with staff. Since *'the ability to communicate and work with others'* and *'interpersonal working ability'* are requirements of the world of work (as derived from phase 1 (page 61) and phase 2 (page 123) of this research programme respectively), developing these abilities in students will in part prepare them for being effective post HE. GD2 revealed that the assessment driven culture impacted on her engagement with staff. GD2 reported not engaging with staff in the second year of her degree, but engaged in her third year. This was because she deemed the third year to be *'a lot more important'* than the prior years and therefore perceived a 'need' to engage. KT reported that peer pressure and the student culture within the SSES prevented her from engaging with staff in the first year. GD2, GD1 and KT felt that engagement between students and staff increased over the three years of the degree, as demonstrated in the quote from KT. GD2 felt that this was due to staff developing more respect for students, and *'a more even setting'* being created by the student-staff relationship developing into more of a 'colleague' relationship. Creating relationships between students and staff that reflect relationships that students will face post HE will help to prepare students for the realities of the working world. GD1 also correlates the enhanced engagement with staff over the course of the degree to an enhanced student-staff relationship. GD2 felt that the maturation of students over the degree years enhances engagement. DF and SM demonstrated having better engagement with the staff than other students. DF described that the Science and Football course involved a small number of lecturers, allowing students to get to know their staff body, which creates engagement and

community. SM felt that being a Sports Scholar meant that more of the staff knew him, creating community and enhancing engagement. SM also mentioned that some of the staff trained in the gym used by the Sports Scholars, further increasing the opportunities for SM to engage with the staff. KT and C reported bad experiences of attempting to engage with staff. KT and C both experienced interactions with staff that they described as *'not very nice'*; with KT even stating that her experience *'shook'* her. KT's bad experience left her feeling intimidated and discouraged from engaging with staff in the future. C reported that her project supervisor made it difficult for her to engage with him, despite the apparent best efforts of C. C, KT and N discussed the importance of engagement with staff. C and KT felt that it is important that staff are approachable and engaged, so that students are able to develop a rapport with them and feel comfortable going to see them when necessary. In her quotation, C discussed how she felt her dissertation tutor lacked engagement, and went on to state, *'I think that it's just picking the right tutor for your dissertation'*_{C11}. It should be ensured that all staff assigned to a specific role can effectively meet the requirements of such a role. In the final quote above, KT demonstrates the negative impact a lack of staff engagement can have. KT did not enjoy her course in the first year, and as a result was worried that she would not enjoy the rest of the degree. KT ended up contemplating this issue on her own without any support or guidance for so long that she ended up *'panicking'* and *'getting in a complete state'* before finally gaining the courage to discuss the matter with a member of staff. If the opportunity to engage with staff was more readily available, then KT could have been prevented from *'getting in a complete state'*.

5.2.3.9 Personal Tutor System

Lacked utilisation

I didn't really see him that much mainly because I didn't have any need to go and see him so it was a bit pointless in signing up for meetings and just going, 'how's it going?' 'Yeah all right, you?' AT21

It was a system that I never really used that much, because I didn't need it AT21

I used to go and see my tutor at the start of every year and that was pretty much about it AT21

At the start of each year we're meant to go and discuss how you felt about the course, I never really had any particular problems that needed addressing, it was more just general 'how are you finding this year?' 'Yeah all right', as opposed to, 'I've got this problem can you help me out with it?' GD1.30

I went and saw him first year when we had to, but I didn't really have any problems or anything to say to him at the time GD2.13

I didn't really see much of him, I didn't have any personal issues or anything, I think that was the main issue really, so there wasn't really a great deal to feed back to him with really N13

Students utilised an alternative member of staff

I didn't see him so much in third year, I had more time with my project supervisor, but through second year I saw my personal tutor quite a lot DF7

I saw my project supervisor a lot more, and he became a bit more of a personal tutor as well AT21

I didn't really contact him that much; I usually went to my lecturer in Sports Development because I was always in and out of his office for appointments anyway, so it was just much easier to ask him for guidance rather than going to your personal tutor C9

I did go to make an appointment with him in the first couple of weeks, because they always say go make an appointment, but because you see the dissertation pupils always take up the time, I think it's just easier to go to someone that you see more often C9

I saw him like twice, in third year the dissertation tutor was the person I went to rather than my personal tutor, even now if I wanted to ask them about CV and stuff, I'd go to my dissertation tutor rather than my personal tutor because he knows me better GD2.13

In first and second year there's no reason to really go talk to them about anything, if there's a problem with each subject then you go and talk to the subject tutor GD2.14

I personally didn't really use that system, because on the Sports Scholarship scheme I was also given a mentor who I had to meet once a month anyway, so I used him as both SM20

As my reference on my CV I've got my dissertation tutor, and if I had any problems, I would go and see my him KT6

When I had the problems in first year, I went to see my head of year rather than my tutor, which I probably jumped the gun a bit, but I thought he's probably best to go and see, because I knew that my head of year was really nice, and I had no personal relationship with my tutor KT6

Dual responsibility: both tutors and tutees need to be engaged

It's very much down to you to go and see them, they're not going to chase up for you to go and see them DF7

It is a really good system, I just think it's up to you to pursue and go and see them when you have problems and things, you can't expect them to chase you down all the time, it's you either want to, or you don't, in the initial stages you've got to go and see you personal tutor, but after that it was up to yourself to make sure that you went to see them SM19/20

I met him in the first week of uni, and then I went to see him in the January after December exams in first year, and he was like, 'who are you?' And I was like, 'you told me to come and see you so,' and I went to see him at the beginning of second year, and he was like, 'sorry who are you? Can I help?' I had to explain again who I was, and so I didn't bother again, I didn't go and see him after that, he clearly didn't care who I was, so then in third year I didn't even bother and he never emailed me and I never saw or heard of him again, so I was like, what's the point in having a personal tutor? KT5/6

They send an email, like, 'don't forget to make an appointment with your personal tutor to review your transcript and bla bla bla', you're not forced to though, unless your tutors on the ball and emails you, but mine wasn't KT5

Other people have really benefited from their personal tutors, because they have kept on top of them, so it just depends who you get really, it's luck of the draw, if you get a good one then they'll know your name and they'll make sure you're on the right track KT6

What more can be done?

There should be someone that you can go to if you've got a problem, but they need to be more approachable and show an interest in what you're talking about, I think somehow make friends with your tutors GD2.13/14

The first day we came to uni, your whole group met with your tutor and had a little conversation, and that was the only time our whole tutor group were together, it might be better to have a few other times when you meet them, so that then you've got not only a tutor, but you've got a few friends who potentially have the same problems as you GD2.13

We were told that we had a personal tutor but we weren't really told what for, we were just kind of, 'this is your personal tutor, enjoy Sports Science', we weren't really told why we were given a personal tutor......if you say, 'your personal tutor is here for x, y and z, if you have any of these queries then go to them', as opposed to just, 'that's your personal tutor, stay in contact with them' S19/20

The above quotes depict a summary of the discussion that the subjects had in relation to the personal tutor system. The intended purpose of the personal tutor system is outlined on page 106. AT, GD1,

GD2 and N reported that they did not utilise their personal tutors, because they did not perceive a need to. DF, AT, C, GD2, SM and KT went to see other members of staff as opposed to their personal tutors. As noted in phase 2 (page 106), one of the intended purposes of the personal tutor system was to coordinate PDP throughout the three years of the degree, which was not evident throughout the phase 3 interviews. SM referred to his Sports Scholarship scheme mentor, whom he was required to report to once a month, and developed a good rapport with:

I always went to see him about a lot of various different things really, and we became quite good friends, so any advice about lifestyle issues, I had him to talk to, so that was a big help SM19

All students should have access to a mentor and support in the manner the Sports Scholars do. DF, SM and KT felt that in order for the personal tutor system to be effective, both tutees and tutors need to be engaged in the process. DF and SM discussed the dual responsibility from the perspective of the students, stating that the students need to adopt a proactive role. However, as demonstrated by KT, the personal tutors themselves also have to be engaged and take responsibility in order for the system to be effective. KT went on to state that the effectiveness of the personal tutor system is dependent on the personal tutor that students are assigned to, *'it's luck of the draw'*. It should be ensured that all acting as personal tutors are engaged and effective in the role, either by retraining staff, or by only assigning members of staff to personal tutor roles that are engaged, motivated and effective in that position of responsibility. Personal tutors must account for the requirements of the role. GD2 suggested that personal tutors should be more *'approachable'* and ultimately effective at the role. GD2 also suggests that utilising tutor groups more often will provide more support to students. According to S, students need to be better informed about the purpose of the personal tutor system. The lack of support and engagement reported by the subjects can impact on students being unprepared for post HE opportunities (page 144). Furthermore, as suggested on page 150, students need more support from as early as the HE application stage. All students should be provided with the opportunity to engage with members of staff in the manner the Sports Scholars do, in order to provide students with adequate PDP, guidance and support. All students should have the opportunity for close personal interactions with academic staff, because teacher empathy, demonstrated interest in students as individuals, and respect for students are important factors in students' academic and social engagement (Cunnane 2012).

Perceptions of careers provisions

It's all so boring, it's like, 'this is a CV', it's like, 'we know what a CV is' $_{GD2.11}$

It was really generalised, it didn't really feel like it was Sports Science specific $_{GD2.11}$

I'm probably prime candidate number one for saying, 'I'm definitely going to go to the CV writing session', and then something else comes up, and I'm like, 'oh well, it's alright I'll go to the next one', there's certainly plenty of opportunities in the university, academia wise, that takes a little bit of extra effort and stuff, and that's maybe why a lot of people don't do them $_{S20}$

They were good; I got good information from that in terms of writing a CV and what people are looking for $_{DF9}$

I felt what you could do with your degree when you'd finished was really well documented $_{AT19}$

I went to the PGCE lectures, they were good, I got useful contacts out of them, that was the only one I went to $_{C13}$

Careers: What more can be done?

It would be more useful if it was like smaller groups $_{GD2.11}$

It needs to be more sports specific, like if you want to go to go work in professional sport as a coach, go to this and they'll help you with your application, that sort of thing $_{GD2.11}$

It's difficult to know what careers the degree can take you into......and it could be something that could be improved, give you a bit more of what you could do at the end of it, I didn't really feel as though I knew what there was available $_{GD1.18}$

It might need to be forced upon the students a bit more, because if you say like, 'our doors always open,' you only get about 2% of people who will actually pursue that, because some people are just too lazy or they just forget to do it, I think it might be a good idea to get more lectures involved in that......something in terms of how to apply for different jobs and where to look for different jobs might actually help $_{SM10}$

Perceptions of guest lectures

They've introduced people from different areas of Sports Science quite a bit, that's quite good to hear insight in what they've done and how they've got there $_{N14}$

We had various guest speakers coming in, I thought they were really interesting, they were good in that they gave you an idea of the route ways they had taken, it gave you a bit of a look at potential careers you could go into, and showed that there was potential for a career at the end of it, they also gave you an idea of their roles and if it'd be something you'd be interested in going into, so I thought they were really helpful to have, and would have quite liked a bit more of that in the degree $_{GD1.17/18}$

Guest speakers came in but no one really came in who I was interested in listening to, because they were more physiology based......there was nothing there for Sports Development, so as the weeks went on I thought, 'I'm not going', because it doesn't focus on the whole Sports Science, it's just physiology $_{C13}$

Guest Lectures: What more can be done?

It would've been interesting to have a few more of those, because it is a major part, I often find people asking me, 'you're in Sports Science, what are you going to do at the end?' And its like, 'I'm not too sure yet', it is difficult to know what to do with it $_{GD1.17/18}$

The quotations above display the subjects' perceptions of the careers and guest lecture provisions that were provided as part of the SSES curriculums. GD2, S, DF, C and GD1 revealed their perceptions of the careers provisions provided by the SSES. GD2 described it as *'boring'* and *'generalised'.* The focus group students also felt that the careers information was too *'general'* and not specific enough (page 111). Rae (2007) suggests that students' inability to perceive the relevance and subsequent need to engage with employability related L&T content is due to disjointed way in which it is delivered. S did not attend as many of the careers sessions as he intended to, due to prioritising his academic work. DF, AT and C gave positive feedback about the careers sessions. AT felt that a range of potential post HE career options was well documented during the degree, but he did also state, *'I knew I wanted to be an academic for at least another year, so it's something I never really looked at'* $_{AT19}$. GD2, GD1

and SM gave suggestions for what more could be done to improve the careers service. GD2 felt that it would be better to have careers sessions in smaller groups and have more specific careers advice. GD1 suggested that more insight into post HE options would be beneficial. SM suggested that careers related information should be mandatory and embedded in the SSES curriculum. The alumni also articulated that employability should be embedded within the SSES curriculum as opposed to being a university wide or extra curricula initiative (page 77), and the focus group students felt that the careers service should be specific to the needs of the students within the SSES (page 111). N and GD1 both had positive perceptions and feedback regarding the guest lectures. They appreciated gaining insight into the different potential career options and the career journeys of guest lectures. However, according the C, the guest lecturers only accounted for a small range of potential post HE options, suggesting that a wider range of guest lectures are required in order to account for the individual needs of the students. GD1 felt that more guest lecturers were desirable in order to gain more insight into different potential post HE opportunities, because as stated by GD1, *it's difficult to know what to do'*, particularly for Sports Science students, due to the broad, non-vocational nature of the degree. The focus groups discussed guest lecturers in a similar manner (see page 113).

5.2.4 Part 2: Summary & Recommendations

Part 2 addressed overarching research programme aim 'b' and 'c':

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

Part 2 aimed to identify graduates perceptions of the Sport Sciences course that they underwent. This involved discussing the graduates' courses with them in an evaluative manner, identifying potential improvements. There was a particular focus on the assessment, feedback and L&T methods that subjects experienced. According to the subjects there is a 40% mentality that exists within the first year which negatively impacts on students' learning and engagement. Making students feel accountable and enhancing their awareness of the 'consequences' of the first year L&T content, will enhance engagement and diminish the 40% mentality. Increasing students' awareness of the impact of the L&T content in their subsequent degree years and increasing students' awareness of the impact of the L&T content post HE can make students feel more accountable. Making students aware that their first year grades will be printed on their degree transcript, which they will have to present to potential employers is an example of how to enhancing students' accountability. There should be more practically orientated L&T sessions, since practicals have a positive impact on learning and preparing students for post HE. Phase 3 subjects demonstrated that placements can positively impact on learning and world of work preparation. The subjects gained insight into the world of work, potential career

options and developed contacts. However, subjects reported that placements did not meet their expectations and aspirations. The subjects' positive placements experiences should be utilised to develop and enhance the placement course components. Good practice should be shared between modules within the SSES. Students need to have more opportunity to gain experience and insight into the world of work throughout their degree courses. Students need more support in gaining placement experience to account for their individual post HE aspirations and needs, and there needs to be an increase in the placement options available in order to account for the individual needs of students. Students should have more responsibility within their placements. Placement experiences should be more 'meaningful' and have a purpose in which both the students and the placement provider gain. Placements must reflect the true 'employer-employee' reality of the world of work. In terms of placement assessment, students need to spend an adequate amount of time on their placements to ensure that they have sufficient placement content to allow them to engage with reflective practice. Since students lack understanding regarding reflection, a developmental assessment approach throughout the duration of the degree would help to overcome this lack of understanding. Alongside the use of reflective practice as assessment for the placement, the practical placement experience should be assessed. In terms of assessment for post HE preparation, the subjects did not feel that exams are effective for learning or preparing students for post HE. Exams result in students learning and being prepared for passing exams, as opposed to learning and being prepared for the world of work. It would be more appropriate to verbalise complexities, or 'wicked competencies', as opposed to presenting and assessing them in a written form. Presentations enhance students' sense of accountability, which in turn enhances learning, and presentations prepare students for communication in the world of work. The realities and requirements of the world of work need to be better aligned to assessment, in order to effectively prepare students, for example, group work needs to better reflect the reality of group work in the world of work. According to phase 3 of this research programme, large cohorts can negatively impact on assessment, feedback, community, support, engagement, learning, and placements. Smaller groups can enhance community and engagement between staff and students, diminish the 'resource' mentality that exists within HE, and help to overcome the documented issues. Feedback needs to be developmental, specific, detailed and constructive. Students need to be able to perceive a 'need' for engaging with the feedback provision. Enhancing students' sense of accountability will enhance engagement with feedback. It is important that students feel comfortable enough to engage with staff to clarify feedback and what more can be done. It is important that students are able to engage with staff when necessary. The opportunity to engage with staff needs to be more readily available. Many students will require support and guidance to help them develop the confidence to feel comfortable engaging with staff. It is important that this confidence is developed, since the ability to communicate and work with others is a requirement of the world of work. Creating relationships between students and staff that reflect relationships that students will face post HE, will help to prepare students for the realities of the working world. It

should be ensured that all staff assigned to a specific role can effectively meet the requirements of said role. Enhancing engagement between staff and students will enhance community, and vice versa. The phase 3 subjects reported that they did not access the personal tutor system for any of the intended purposes of the personal tutor system, including PDP. Both tutors and tutees need to be engaged in the system in order for it to be effective. It should be ensured that all acting personal tutors are engaged and effective in the role, either by retraining SSES staff, utilising external staff with the appropriate expertise, or by only assigning members of SSES staff that are engaged, motivated and effective in that position of responsibility. Students need to be made aware of the intended purposes and importance of the personal tutor system. All students should be provided with the opportunity to engage with members of staff in the manner the Sports Scholars do (as demonstrated by SM on page 270), in order to provide students with adequate PDP, guidance and support. Careers related provisions should be embedded within the SSES as opposed to being an institutional initiative. The careers provision should be specific to the needs of the students within the SSES. Guest lecturers from a wider range of post HE are required to account for the individual needs of the students and the broad non-vocational nature of the Sports Science degree.

5.2.5 Part 3: Factors that impact on learning and engagement

Part 3: Factors that impact on learning and engagement

| Assessment Driven Culture (ADC) | Accountability | Interest and enjoyment | Staff |

Lack of engagement with the universities employability award exemplifies ADC
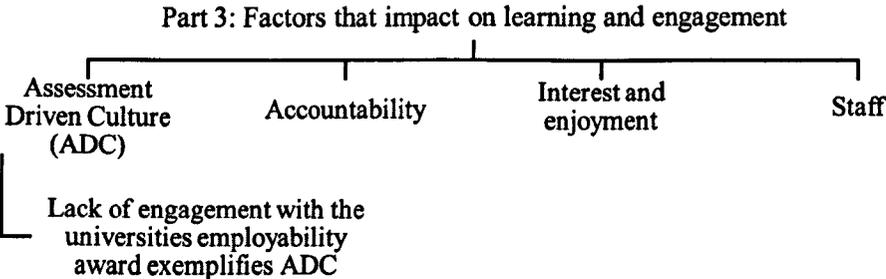
Part 3 has been broken down into the themes presented above. The themes represent the factors that impact on learning and engagement that the subjects discussed during their interviews. Each of these factors will be discussed in turn. For each of the factors, a summary figure of the outcome of the analysis process will be presented. The analysis of the ADC factor will be discussed using two summary analysis tables. The below figure presents the data which demonstrates how the ADC impacts on the learning and engagement of students.

More engagement in third year, due to grade distributions

Third year I started working the way I maybe should've done throughout the whole of university, I think it was because it actually really counted towards something, it was 75% of the actual overall degree $_{AT3}$

You want to do better in the last two years because it counts for more $_{KT8}$

I've realised this year's a lot more important, and I didn't know how I was doing it wrong in second year, to not get the best grade, so I wanted to try harder this year, and the staff are marking it so they know what they're looking for, so you might as well go and talk to them, you can't lose out $_{GD2.15}$

Prioritise based on grade distributions

When you're a third year, your main focus is your dissertation for that year, because that's what most of your grade's going to be made out of $_{AT9}$

See page 254 which demonstrates subjects placing a lack of priority on the placment assessment.

'Everything you do is geared towards passing'

Everything you do is geared towards passing, you don't read up much of your own interest, you wouldn't read a paper just because it's dead interesting, you'd read it because you'd think, 'I'll write that in my essay or exam or for the piece of coursework that's due in two days' $_{DM4}$

It's a means to an end; it's knowing how to write an exam paper and how to get the best writing style and things like that $_{AT11}$

You just go to do as well as you can, even if you're reading something interesting, you're thinking, 'this is taking away from that essay that I could get an extra 5% in if I spent three hours on it now', so why would you do anything else? $_{DM5}$

You just want to do as well as you can in the piece of coursework or in the test you've got coming up, so when you've got three weeks to an exam, if you see a paper and you thought, 'that's dead interesting', you're not going to read it, unless it's not directly linked to the question you've got to do in three weeks time $_{DM5/6}$

ADC influences module choices

I was thinking, 'it doesn't really matter what else I pick in this second year, as long as I get a good grade in it', so I chose psychology because there's no exam, I'm really bad at exams......it was just basically to boost my grade, so I knew I was going to come out with like the best degree I possibly could $_{SM13/14}$

I'm not very good at presentations, and that's reason why I went down the physiology route, because there wasn't many presentations $_{GD2.12}$

I picked the development route way, because you got to go on a placement, and it was all coursework there was no exam in Sports Development $_{C6}$

I definitely wouldn't have chosen muscle metabolism, because it was the hardest thing I've ever done, but you had to do it, and so I'd much rather have not done that, and done something that I could get a better grade in than that one $_{GD2.17}$

If you're really interested in doing the stuff, go down those modules......and if you don't really know what you want to do, maybe just do the easier options, to get a better grade $_{GD2.17}$

The perceived 'need' can impact on learning and engagment

Second year you picked two, I picked physiology and biomechanics, I knew that physiology was the route way that I was going to do third year, in biomechanics it was like, 'do I really need to learn this, if it's not something that I'm going to use and in my third year or after?' $_{GD1.11}$

I learnt it, did the exam, won't be doing that next year, forget it all type thing, so for some of the modules that I didn't feel I'd need, I still put the work in, but was less interested in them, and probably less willing to retain what I was being taught, because I didn't feel as though I'd need it $_{GD1.12/13}$

You just use the learning material to your own means, you use it to get a first in your essay, and then you screw it up and kill all your brain cells off the next night $_{DM12}$

Reflection was the assessment, if it hadn't have been for that, I wouldn't have done it, and I don't think anybody else would have either $_{SM10}$

I thought reflection was a pile of crap......the actual piece of coursework I didn't enjoy, I did it because I had to, I thought it was nonsense $_{S17}$

I just did what I had to do, but I don't know if I really believed in what I was writing......I wasn't too engaged in the process of reflection $_{N8}$

ADC linked to perceptions of what employers want

Because so many people go to uni, it's really competitive, I'd rather have come out cheating my way to a first and taking every shortcut possible, than getting a 2:1 and having loads of really in depth knowledge, if you write on your CV 'got a first', or you write, 'I got a 2:2, but I think I learnt loads,' they'll take the first every time $_{DM12}$

If you came out with a 2:2 rather than somebody with a first, more than likely in a job situation the person who's got a first is more likely to be put forward to interview level, rather than the person who's got a 2:2, because they're most likely going to glance over and go, '2:2, not likely to know much about the area as the person who got the first' $_{AT12}$

It's not the subject that I've done that's going to help me, it's probably whatever level I get that will determine what job I get $_{GD26}$

I don't think doing Sports Science has initially helped that, it will be like, 'oh you've got a 2:1, well done, you can do this', sort of thing, rather than, 'oh, you've got Sports Science, you must know all this stuff' $_{GD2.6}$

Huge importance placed on degree classification

I definitely think that a first class degree from the SSES is going to see me through in the initial part of my career, I think say twenty years down the line, it won't be where I've came from, it'll be on my past experiences, but in order to get the better experiences, I think coming from this institute rather than another one is going to be better for me $_{SM3}$

When I actually got the grade 'first', I was really relieved, it was like the three years actually had meaning then, I didn't really want to go through that whole process and not got what I'd aimed for, I would have been really disappointed $_{SM5}$

I got a 2:1, got 68% which was a bit frustrating, bit gutted about that, but I've got to where I wanted to go, I'm doing my MPhil, which I suppose is the main thing, but it would just be quite nice to have got a first, to say I had one $_{GD1.4}$

I wish I'd just put myself through it, and then I wouldn't feel as disappointed as I do now with my overall mark, I was like 3% away from a 2.1 $_{C10}$

As previously discussed (page 5), an ADC exists within education, due to:

"The persistence of a system that concentrates on a single summative judgement results in a fixation on achieving a number that is considered 'good'. This drives the behaviours of academic staff and students and works to the detriment of the currency of other information" (Burgess 2007: 5).

The ADC means that:

"Students learn what they have to, when they have to and in many cases by whatever means they have to" (Ainley cited in Fearne 2008).

In a manner which reflects the ADC, AT, KT and GD2 stated that they engaged more with their degree in their third year, because the third year counted toward 75% of their final degree classification, which meant that they therefore perceived more of a 'need' to engage in the third year than they had in their preceding years. Newstead (2002) claimed that students become more interested in their grades than their subject over the duration of their degree. On page 254, AT also demonstrated that he prioritised pieces of work based on their grade distribution: *'it's prioritising how to get the best mark out of everything'*. As stated by Ramsden (1992: 187), students perceive assessment to *"define the actual curriculum"*. DM and AT revealed that from their perspective, *'everything you do is geared towards passing'*, which detracts away from 'learning for learning's sake', adding credence to the above quotations from Ainley (cited in Fearne 2008) and Burgess (2007). However, as stated by Strathern (1997: 308), *"when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure"*. SM, GD2 and C demonstrated that the ADC impacted on their module choices. SM and C chose modules which avoided exams, and GD2 chose modules which avoided presentations. C chose modules that involved placements. SM and GD2 both referred to tactically choosing modules in order to get the best possible grade. GD2 even advised that current and future SSES should base their module choices around getting the best grade possible. GD1 and DM articulated that their perceived 'need' related to the L&T material determined their engagement and learning. GD1 and DM demonstrated that if they did not perceive that the information was required, they did not engage or subsequently learn. It appears that the narrowing of the degree route way in which students engage in a module in their second year which will not be carried through into their third year, results in students not perceiving a 'need' to engage with that second year module. GD1 suggests making the second year module in question redundant:

After first year most people have an idea of where they want to go, which route way, so it's whether you need both of those modules in the second year GD1.11/12

Focus group 1 reiterated this suggestion:

H: Last year we had to pick two modules, so I picked physiology and psychology, but I had no interest in psychology at all, but you had to pick something, so I think if they had done it if you were focusing more on one and less of the other type thing like a major minor type thing, I think that would be better
A: Like a first choice second choice 1.819–825

~

M: I think they could maybe do smaller ones still do Sports Science but then for people that know like they do the Sports Psychology degree if I could have done a Sports Physiology degree I would have done that instead of wasting my time with all these other things in first year ₁.₁₇₂₆-₁₇₂₉

SM, S and N referred to only engaging with the ASS3 reflection coursework (see page 202 for more details on the ASS3 reflection coursework) because it was the assessment for the placement module, as further represented in the below quotation:

I reflect anyway, I'll do something with one of my athletes or something, and then I reflect upon it immediately, 'should I have done that or not?' I don't usually have to do this whole sitting down and writing things, I only ever do it when I have to do it for coursework or something ₛₘ₉

This highlights that just because something is mandatory, does not mean that students will engage in the way that was intended. SM, S and N completed the reflective coursework, but they were not engaged with reflection in the manner intended by the SSES (see page 203 for the intended learning outcomes of the reflective assessment), as N and S demonstrate:

I just didn't really want to do it and I didn't engage in it enough and I went in with a mindset that it was rubbish anyway and it didn't really mean anything and then I just didn't take it seriously as I should've done ₙ₇

~

I thought reflection was a pile of crap......the actual piece of coursework I didn't enjoy, I did it because I had to; I thought it was nonsense ₛ₁₇

Furthermore, KT, who was the one of only two subjects who claimed to engage with and enjoy reflection (see pages 250-251), stated that she would not carry on reflecting if she was *'not being assessed on it'* ₖₜ₁₉. One of the intended outcomes of the reflective assessment was to enable students to assume responsibility for their own learning and self assessment, and to enable students to effectively develop as professionals post HE. Based on the quote displayed by KT, such intended outcomes were not accomplished. DM, AT, GD2 and SM revealed that the ADC is linked to their perceptions that employers require them to have a certain degree classification. However, as stated by Harvey *et al.* (1997), employers tend to value generic skills more highly than subject knowledge. This matter was discussed in the literature review, under the heading 'a Degree is not enough' (page 6). SM, GD1 and C demonstrated the huge importance students place of their final degree classifications, with SM stating that gaining a first class degree felt *'like the three years actually had meaning to them'*. Students need to be made more aware that the world of work requires a lot more from them than a certain degree classification, as demonstrated in the world of work requirements derived from phase 1 and phase 2 of this research programme (pages 61 and 120 respectively).

Lack of engagement with the universities employability award exemplifies ADC

Lack of time

I found out that you had to do some written work, and it was like, 'do I really want to do another assignment, on top of everything else I have to do?' So that's the main reason why I didn't bother with it in the end, the fact that there was actual written work involved with it $_{AT19}$

They mentioned once about having to write like a ten page assignment, and it was like, 'got enough work on without having to do this extra bit' $_{GD1.26}$

I did read about it and it seemed like a lot of effort, a waste of time $_{C12}$

It's a lot of work......it's just a waste of time really $_{GD2.12}$

I signed up for it being eager and stuff, but I just never had time to do it......you have to write essays......so it is quite extensive on top of all the other work you've got to be doing, so I just thought, 'no, i'll just get on with my degree' $_{N14/15}$

I never got around to it, I was quite busy with dissertation and placement and things, kind of pushed it to the back $_{DF9}$

I was just trying to concentrate on passing one essay and writing your dissertation as quick as you can, it's just not the top of your list $_{DM15}$

I would probably do it now, now that I have more time on my hands $_{KT2}$

Unsure of the benefit, and therefore do not perceive a need

Will employers even recognise this as anything? Does it actually have any value in doing it? I just didn't know how useful it was to do $_{GD1.26}$

Whether it's as highly regarded in the business community as they say it is, I'm a little bit sceptical $_{S20}$

I didn't really look into it, because I didn't think that it would be particularly useful $_{GD2.12}$

They say employers are looking for this kind of stuff, but I'm not too sure, I don't know if a certificate would help $_{N15}$

I don't think it applies to our course that much......of it seems to be sport related $_{SM11}$

I started but never finished it, I wasn't sure how relevant it'd be to the world of football, it seems to be more business orientated $_{DF9}$

I saw it as kind of gimmicky $_{AT20}$

I spoke to a group tutor and she said, if you're carrying on study, then it's less important than if you're not $_{DM15}$

Integrate award to increase engagement

They need to work on explaining what it is, or maybe they could integrate it a bit better $_{GD1.26}$

If they made it compulsory they would actually do it $_{C13}$

You should probably be forced to do it, it should probably be incorporated into one of the modules or something, not be optional, because if you don't have to do it, you're not going to, unless you're really driven $_{KT2}$

Ten of the subjects interviewed reported that they did not engage with the universities employability award because they were unsure of the benefit and the 'need' of undertaking the award, as demonstrated above. It should be noted that engaging with the employability award was optional. AT, GD1, C, GD2, N, DF, DM and KT stated that they did not engage with the award because it involved written work which they did not have the time to do. The subjects demonstrated that they prioritised their mandatory academic work over the employability award, because they perceived a 'need' to complete their assessed academic work, but there was not a 'need' to complete the optional employability award. GD1, S, GD2, N, SM, DF, AT and DM stated that being unsure about the benefit of the employability award prevented them perceiving a 'need' to engage. GD1, C and KT felt

that making the employability award mandatory and embedding it into the curriculum will enhance engagement, because as stated by KT, *'if you don't have to do it, you're not going to'*. Phase 2 part 1 also presented data on the ADC (page 159).

5.2.5.2 The Importance of Accountability

Accountability can help to overcome the ADC by creating a perceived 'need' to engage

With the major project, if you don't put the hours in, then you soon get found out, that you haven't done enough reading, there isn't enough substance to your thing $_{AT11}$

With presentations, you've actually got to get up and talk about it, and there are questions at the end, so you need to know the stuff, rather than just being able to copy it down on a written coursework $_{DF7}$

I got conditionally offered my PhD position, then that was a bit more of a spur on to do well in final exams, because to get on to the PhD I needed a 2:1, so that really kind of like, 'right, I need to get this' $_{AT18}$

You knew you had to go to Sports Nutrition lectures, because you just knew it was your exams and your coursework $_{C15}$

If you miss a lecture, you're just like, 'oh well, I'll just read it off blackboard, because I know he's just reading off the slides not mixing it up' $_{KT11}$

I didn't learn anything by going to the practical, so you didn't lack any knowledge by not going, you learnt all the answers from a book rather than actually doing it $_{GD22}$

Make first year count for something, because as long as you pass it, it's not going to give you any consequence if you get 60% or if you get 40%, so what's the point in putting all the effort in? $_{KT13}$

The staff attempt to overcome the ADC and increase accountability in order to engage students

A lot of them say, 'there's a good chance this will be on the exam', so you see everyone taking loads of notes, I suppose that's a good way of getting people to write it down $_{DM12}$

We did lots of presentations on motor skills throughout the year, but they weren't marked, they were just a way of getting us to revise stuff, like when he told us to read papers he knew no one was going to read, he got everyone to present on them......it was different and made everyone stay sharp $_{DM9/10}$

However, despite attempts from staff, it appears that students find another way to do 'what they need, when they need it', as demonstrated below: It probably did help me get to grips with it, because if you don't understand a paper then you tend to just brush it off, but when you've got to do a presentation on it and you're speaking to people about it, but because it was a group presentation, I'd do the introduction, someone else would do the method and so on, he did tell us not to do it, so I'd know the introduction to a paper but I wouldn't know the method and results $_{DM10}$

DM demonstrated that he felt more accountable doing his masters

My masters teaching staff keep on drumming in that you'll get eaten alive if you don't know you're stuff, and just get tossed out the door straight away, so you might actually need this stuff again $_{DM11}$

And they said you'll never have a chance like this again with so much free time to read and build your knowledge up, so now's the time to do it $_{DM11}$

I've changed my tactic now, because to go into an applied setting, you have got to build up knowledge, that's what it's about now, because its dead easy, you only need 40% in a masters, and it's not much hours a week, but you just need to build up a lot of knowledge, because it's what you could be doing for the rest of your life, so if maybe you can convince people that you need to know this, not just for your exam, but for your life $_{DM11/12}$

Presented above is the data which demonstrates how accountability can impact on the learning and engagement of students. Accountability can be defined as:

"A relationship in which an individual or agency is held to answer for performance that involves some delegation of authority to act" (Romzek and Dubnick, 1998: 6).

AT, DF, KT, GD2 and C demonstrate how accountability can help to overcome the ADC by creating a perceived 'need' to engage. AT described how with the major project, *'if you don't put in the hours, you soon get found out'*, potentially due to the individual nature of the major project and the project supervisor making the student answerable and unable to *'hide behind a piece of coursework'* as stated by the focus group students (see page 132). DF described how presentations made him feel more accountable than *'just being able to copy it down on a written coursework'*. Being required to present

made DF perceive a need to engage and learn with the required L&T material. Page 132 further discusses how presentations can enhance student engagement and learning by making students feel more accountable. AT revealed that knowing he had to achieve a 2.1 degree classification in order to gain his PhD position made him feel accountable and gave him a reason to engage and learn. As discussed on page 150, encouraging students to have something to aim for post HE will enhance students' sense of accountability and motivate students to engage with the opportunities provided. As stated by M from focus group 1, *'if we had jobs in mind, you could be like, 'right, I really want to do this, I'm going to work towards it''* (page 144). C reported that she felt a need to attend her Sports Nutrition L&T sessions; because she knew that they would involve content that would be required in subsequent assessments. KT and GD2 demonstrated how making students feel accountable by giving them a 'need' to attend L&T sessions can impact on attendance, which in turn will impact on learning and engagement. As highlighted on pages 158-159, attendance is an issue within the SSES. Students have to feel accountable and perceive that they will gain from L&T sessions in order to attend, engage and learn. KT suggests that making the first year count towards students' final degree classification will make students accountable and overcome the '40% mentality'. According to KT, students do not perceive there to be a 'consequence' or a 'need' to engaging with the L&L material in first year.

No consequence ➡ No accountability ➡ No engagement and learning
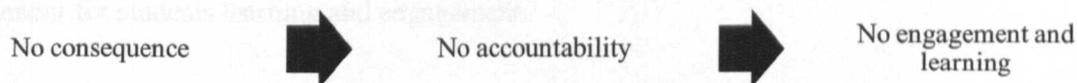
In phase 2 (page 162), a member of staff stated:

If there isn't a demand to engage, then people won't do it: lack of accountability, lack of engagement [30]

The researcher reflection below demonstrates how the researcher's perceived sense of accountability impacted on her ability to undertake this research programme:

> *When I started my PhD, my attitude towards my work changed. Friends from my undergraduate university days ask me 'how are you getting on with motivating yourself to get your work done?' My response to this question was always the same.*
> *'I don't class myself as being at uni anymore. I am employed to do a job, my research is my job. Knowing that I have to report to my supervisory and project team with regular updates and outputs from my work, continually keeps me motivated and focused'.*

Above DM discussed the fact that he felt accountable during his master's year, despite the pass rate also being 40%. DM demonstrates how students can be made to feel accountable and overcome the 40% mentality. DM reveals how staff attempted to overcome the ADC by making students feel accountable. The staff in phase 2 demonstrated attempts to overcome the ADC and engage students (page 160). However, DM demonstrates that the staffs' attempts to enhance accountability are not always fool proof, and students still manage to 'do what they need, when they need it' (Ainley, cited in Fearne 2008). DM goes on to demonstrate that he felt truly accountable whilst studying for his master's degree, resulting in him engaging and learning. DM described how he perceived a need to engage and learn the relevant knowledge because he perceived that he would require such knowledge

after his masters in the world of work. The staff also *'drummed'* into DM the importance of engaging and learning the L&T material based on the requirements of the world of work. The students in the study by Hill *et al.* (2003) stated that if courses are valued by the world of work then students will become motivated to achieve. DM suggested that students can be made to feel truly accountable by making them aware that they will need to learn the L&T material, *'not just for your exam, but for your life'*. According to this discussion from DM, the 40% mentality exists within the first year but not within masters, because students do not perceive that they will 'need' the information being provided in the first year (see page 237-238 for more discussion on the 40% mentality). Students need to be made aware of the 'consequences' and 'need' related to engaging with the first year L&T content. Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) identified that students engagement enhances when they perceive there to be a value to the endeavour in question. It should be noted that DM stated the importance of *'interest'*, suggesting that a combination of perceived 'need' and interest are required to engage students:

You've got to be interested in it, it's no good like a physician telling you in a lecture that, 'you will need to know this for your life', when you don't want to do that DM12

The extracts below present the interview data that demonstrates the importance of interest and enjoyment for students learning and engagement.

Module choices impacted on by interests

The main reason I chose to do the physiology route way was because that was what I was interested in......I quite liked the modules that were related to physiology in first year $_{CT7/8}$

I knew that was the route I wanted to do, because that was what I was more interested in $_{C6}$

Physiology was the area that I was most interested in $_{GD2.3}$

Do what you're interested in, that helps if you pick modules because it's a lot easier to revise the stuff if you've got a mild interest in it $_{DM16}$

If you're really interested in doing the stuff, go down those modules $_{GD2.17}$

It's interesting, so that helps learning $_{DM13}$

If you don't enjoy it you aren't going to get anything out of it $_{AT14}$

I didn't mind the major project write up or anything like that, because it was something that I actually enjoyed, so I didn't mind doing all the research and reading all the papers and stuff $_{SM22}$

It's like anything, if you're interested in it, you concentrate a bit more and are more willing to look into it, but if it's something that you don't find interesting, it's more difficult to be motivated to do that $_{GD1.12/13}$

I wasn't that engaged, because I didn't enjoy the subject area as much $_{CT8}$

I found Sports Nutrition really interesting, because I learnt in that module, it was different all the time and you had guest speakers in, and the stuff what you had to read up on for your coursework's became interesting, so you could learn from it $_{C15}$

As the years went on, I actually developed more of a thirst for knowledge as opposed to having it stunted, studying has become more interesting as the years went on for me, I think that every year got progressively more interesting, the opportunities that you're given get better, and the stimulation from the teaching, the practical aspect of it within the labs becomes a lot more interesting as the years progress, and the more exposure to more cutting edge science the closer you get to graduation $_{S1}$

For some of the modules that I didn't feel I'd need, I still put the work in, but was less interested in them, and probably less willing to retain what I was being taught, because I didn't feel as though I'd need it $_{GD1.13}$

I really enjoyed that module (cardiovascular and respiratory assessment techniques), it's really interesting, it was a lot of practical work so pretty much every other week we were down in the labs doing like ECGs (electrocardiography) on each other, it was a lot more interesting, and you felt like you were learning something that you might actually be able to use in the future in a job or something $_{GD1.8}$

It would've been better if placements were more specific to what you personally want to do.......because at the end of the day then it would look better on the uni as well, because surely if you've got someone that's really interested in doing something they'll make a lot better impact on that place than if I don't care and gone off somewhere else $_{GD2.18/19}$

Reflection is definitely one of those things, unless you really enjoy doing that sort of stuff, it's quite hard to get yourself motivated to do it $_{SM10}$

In first year I was going to quit, because I wasn't enjoying the course, the only module I enjoyed was Sports Marketing $_{KT3}$

CT, C and GD2 stated that their module choices were influenced by what they enjoyed and what they were interested in. DM and GD2 advised that current and future SSES students should choose modules that they are interested in. DM stated that it is easier to learn if you are interested, and AT illustrated how if you do not enjoy what you are learning, then you are not going to gain from it. SM demonstrated that enjoyment can aid engagement with the L&T methods. GD1 describes how interest can impact on concentration, willingness, motivation, and ultimately engagement. CT shows how a lack of enjoyment can negatively impact on engagement. C demonstrates the relationship between learning and interest. S felt that the course became progressively more interesting over the three years of the degree, causing him to develop more of a *'thirst for knowledge'*. GD1 demonstrates a relationship between perceived 'need', interest and learning. GD1 described how he found the learning of applied content that he felt *'might actually be able to use in the future'* interesting. GD1 even stated that the module in question encouraged the stemming of his career interests (see page 291):

That's actually probably why I changed my mind to look into the more health things, because I really enjoyed that module, it was really interesting GD1.8

GD2 feels that the impact of interest and enjoyment on engagement and learning should be considered during the process of assigning students to placements. KT supports that interest is important for engaging with placements:

If we hadn't of been really interested in it we probably wouldn't have done very much because they weren't setting us tasks, but they probably got a good group of enthusiastic people who were driven to actually do work even though you don't have to, because we wanted to make the most out of it KT18

SM demonstrated that the importance of interest impacted on the reflective placement assessment. SM stated that unless students enjoy reflection, it will be hard to get motivated to engage with it (pages 250-254 discussed students' lack of engagement with reflection). S from focus group 2 also felt that interest was important for engagement with L&T interventions:

S: I've got friends who're still doing essays, and are like, 'ah it's so boring, I really don't want to do it', but I couldn't actually do it if I didn't find it interesting, you've got to find it interesting, otherwise it's just a chore, there's so much to do, you couldn't do it if you didn't like it 4.1625-1632

KT's quote demonstrates how drastically enjoyment can impact on engagement with a course. As highlighted on page 239, the broad range of subjects in the first year creates a lack of engagement. GD1 demonstrates why it would be beneficial for students to explore their interests earlier in the degree:

It would've been good to have that module (cardiovascular and respiratory assessment techniques) before third year, because it probably would've changed what I'd done in my major project, I probably would've liked to look more at the cardiac side of it GD1.9

However, the figure above entitled 'ADC' demonstrates that the ADC prevents students from pursuing their interests, since *'everything you do is geared towards passing'* (see page 275). The alumni specified that 'a good work ethic' is a requirement of the world of work, in which it is important that graduates must have desire, passion and drive to work in their given post HE industry, and must be motivated, enthusiastic and committed regarding their job (see Table 11, page 61). A good work ethic is so important for the world of work that a member of staff from phase 2 advised students to try different post HE areas, stating, *'if you don't have passion, get out of that area'.* Hawkins and Gilleard (2002) encourage students to consider and pursue what they enjoy with regard to post HE options.

The lecturers make a big difference, and it's not something they can help it's just how charismatic, convincing and enthusiastic they are DM11

There were some lecturers that I don't feel were good enough to lecture, it wasn't that they didn't have the knowledge, they're all highly expert in their field, and know their discipline really well, but there's knowing your discipline really well, and there's being able to deliver it to a large group of students in the way that we understand, and a way that everyone can engage, and I don't think every lecturer was the best at getting the students to engage, I don't think every lecturer had that charisma to lecture CT13/14

I don't think lecturing is for everyone, I think that in terms of delivering lectures, some of the staff just aren't good enough, and that's not just my opinion, that's the opinion across the whole cohort, and that is genuinely the case.....some people just don't have that presence and don't capture your imagination, you don't want to learn, and I think that is something that needs to be addressed at this university, some of the staff just aren't capable of lecturing CT14/15

You don't necessarily need to be an expert in your field to give a good lecture and to engage the audience, it's about having that personality and that enthusiasm to make it look like you're excited, and then you can start getting the students excited, but if, as a lecturer, you come in and you're unenthusiastic and you're not willing to get animated and that then how can you expect, if you're not passionate about your area you can't have the audacity to try and make other people passionate about your area CT15

Some lectures just didn't engage you at all, within twenty minutes I'd switched off CT15

The way they deliver the lectures makes a good member of staff, if they make it a little bit more interesting and involve you a bit more, (anon.) like bounces around the lecture room, and it makes you concentrate, and (anon.) always does some form of activity in the lectures, it's a good way to get you thinking, to keep you on the ball KT9

In terms of learning, I didn't find it valuable when they just literally read off the slides, and they wouldn't involve you or ask any questions, and you'd just be sitting there, they just used to read word for word off the slides in the most monotone voice ever, it was just horrendous KT10

If you cover stuff that they're interested in, you know a lot more about that stuff, because they're really good at it, but if they don't like it, then you don't know anything about it GD2.7

I don't know whether it was the members of staff or what they were teaching, because everyone who taught our cardiac module I thought did it really well, but I think that's probably because I was interested in the subject GD2.3

The above extracts demonstrate how members of staff can impact on students learning and engagement. DM, CT, KT and GD2 all felt that staff impacted on their learning and engagement. DM feels that the *'charisma'* and *'enthusiasm'* of staff *'makes a big difference'*. CT felt that not all lecturers had the *'charisma'* required to *'engage'* students. CT felt that if staff *'don't capture your imagination, you don't want to learn'*. Yorke (2000) stated that the quality of students' educational experience is influenced by teacher expertise in the classroom. According to CT, if staff appear *'enthusiastic'*, *'excited'* and *'passionate'*, then students will also become *'enthusiastic'*, *'excited'* and *'passionate'*. For CT, if staff did not engage him, then he was unable to engage with the intended L&T material. Andresen (2000) emphasised the important relationship between students' engagement with the subject and the passion and enthusiasm of the lecturer. Such passion and enthusiasm helps to demonstrate to the students that the lecturer cares about them and their intellectual development (Hill *et al.* 2003). Lamners and Murphy (2002) also referred to staff enthusiasm, expertise and teaching style in relation to effective HE. KT gives an example of how staff can positively impact on learning and engagement in her first quote, and how staff can negatively impact on learning and engagement in her second quote. KT's example of how staff can positively impact on students' learning refers to interest, which adds further credence to the impact of interest and enjoyment on students' learning and engagement, discussed above (page 281). GD2 felt that whether the staff themselves were *'interested'* in the subject they were teaching directly impacted on students' learning and engagement. Probably in the same manner discussed on page 281 in relation to students, if the staff lack interest in relation to a given topic, they will lack the ability to adequately engage with that topic. In the final quote, GD2 revealed that the impact of staff and interest on learning and engagement can interlink and positively

impact on one another. Kay *et al.* (2007) advise that staff need to ensure that the enthusiasm they have for their research is balanced by a real commitment to excellent L&T, since this can enhance the students experience and graduate employability.

5.2.6 Part 3: Summary & Recommendations

Part 3 addressed overarching research programme aim 'b':

d. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

Part 3 aimed to identify factors that impact on students' engagement and subsequent learning, identifying which L&T and assessment methods promoted learning for the graduates. Due to the ADC, everything students do is geared around passing. Students reported only engaging when they perceived a 'need', as exemplified by subjects' lack of engagement with the universities employability award, and subjects perceiving more of a need to engage in the third year than in the preceding years, since 75% of the degree classification is based on the third year grade. Subjects prioritised and determined the importance of assessments based on their grade distribution, and chose modules that they perceived they would get a good grade in. Modules that students were not pursuing in their third year, they did not perceive a need to engage with in the second year. As demonstrated in phase 2, assessment can be a big driver for students' attendance, engagement and learning (pages 159-163). According to the subjects, accountability, interest and the staff can all positively impact on and enhance students learning and engagement.
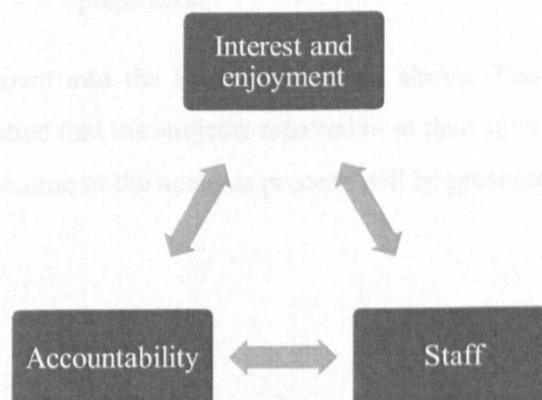
Accountability can help overcome the ADC by creating a perceived 'need' to engage. Accountability drives students' engagement. Examples that the subjects gave of being made to feel accountable included the major project supervision, having a job lined up for post HE conditions to achieve (e.g. an upper second degree classification), presentations create a perceived need to engage and learn the L&T material, the perception that L&T content will be needed post HE, and a perceived 'need' to attend L&T sessions increased accountability, attendance, learning and engagement. The ADC is linked to students' perceptions of what employers want and what is required of them post HE. The subjects demonstrated that they perceived employers to require a certain degree classification, and

they subsequently placed huge importance on grades and degree classifications. Students need to be made more aware that the world of work requires a lot more from them than a given degree classification. Students can be made to feel accountable by making them aware that they will need to learn the L&T material, *'not just for your exam, but for your life'*. The world of work requirements need to be made more central to the HE L&T culture and content. The subjects reported that interest plays an important role in engagement and subsequent learning. However, the ADC hinders students' engagement with interests. It is important that students are encouraged to explore and pursue their interests. Not only does it impact on engagement with the L&T content, but a good work ethic with desire, passion and drive is a requirement of the world of work (Table 11, page 61). Students must account for their interests when determining their post HE pursuits. The importance of interest should be considered when assigning placements, since students will engage more, make a more positive impact and provide a better service. The L&T style of staff impacts on students learning and engagement. Staff are required to be enthusiastic, excited, charismatic, passionate and interested in order to effectively engage students. Students have to feel accountable and perceive that they will gain from the L&L sessions in order to attend, engage and learn.

5.2.7 Part 4: Post HE Preparation

Part 4: Post HE Preparation

Post HE Preparation	Attitudes regarding post HE preparation	Qualifications	Stemming of Career Interests
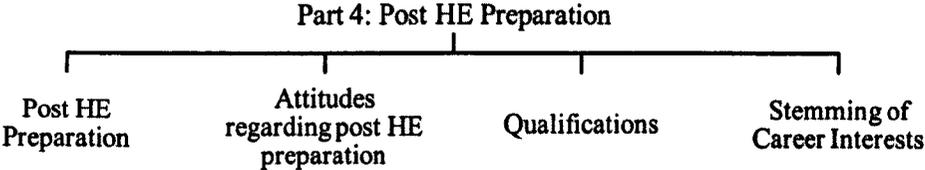
Part 4 has been broken down into the themes presented above. The themes represent the factors related the post HE preparation that the subjects referred to in their interviews. For each of the factors, a summary figure of the outcome of the analysis process will be presented and discussed.

Notions of being prepared for the world of work

I feel reasonably equipped, the quality of information we get from lecturers, I was looking back at some of the slides, particularly from second year, and there's a lot of really pretty good information on there $_{DF4}$

It prepares people pretty well, if you take all the opportunities that are given to you, you come out with a very large skill base, you come out with a lot to offer companies $_{S12}$

If you have a good CV, and take all the opportunities that are given to you at undergraduate, then there's no reason why you can't stand out from the crowd $_{S12}$

I'm more ready to start working than I was at the start of university $_{GD1.33}$

The odd placement, people coming in to talk to us, the fact that you have that relationship with your tutors that is similar to a employee-boss relationship, and stuff like how to write an email properly, have prepared you more $_{GD2.18}$

A Sports Science degree at LJMU is pretty valuable, it stands you in good stead to get a job in any field $_{DF11}$

I definitely think that a first class degree from the SSES is going to see me through in the initial part of my career, say twenty years down the line, it won't be where I've came from, it'll be on my past experiences, but in order to get the better experiences, I think coming from this institute rather than another one is going to be better for me $_{SM3}$

A degree isn't enough anymore – everyone's got one! $_{C, off record, post interview}$

Notions of being unprepared for the world of work

I you're never really prepared until you get in there, I guess the most learning you do is when you're actually there $_{DF12}$

I feel prepared for post HE from a personal point of view, I'm not sure if it was so much the actual university course, because we only really had one applied placement module, if it hadn't of been for me pursuing applied experience in my own time, then I don't think I'd have come out of this place really prepared to go into work......I would've been a bit daunting come out of university $_{SM8}$

Being able to write up a paper, being able to present, I think that'll help, but how many people would actually get into that situation following a Sports Science degree I'm not sure $_{S13}$

It prepares you with a piece of paper that says you got a 2:1, but whether it actually prepares you for say, managing a group of people or not, I don't know, probably not $_{DM19}$

It's still kind of daunting, I don't know what to expect when I actually go work somewhere $_{GD2.18}$

I didn't feel prepared for the world of work after my degree, I don't know if that's because I knew what I wanted to do, and I knew I wasn't going to be able to pursue that career unless I did further education $_{N15}$

I just still feel a bit too young , I just couldn't imagine myself working $_{N16}$

It's the more practical skills that I'll be gaining this year doing the masters which will make me feel more confident actually working in a real workplace $_{N16}$

I was hoping to do down the dietetics route, but I looked at the options for it and it just wasn't going to be viable, I'd have had to do like an extra year of work experience and then another year of modules extra that I hadn't covered in the undergrad $_{N1}$

I took the nutrition module with the purpose of going down the nutrition, dietetics route, and it just didn't happen $_{N16}$

I'm having this year out, and I'd like to look into Sports Development or PE teaching, and I think this year I'm just trying to get some courses under my belt and get more experience on the CV, and then apply for the PGCE, just get more of an insight into teaching really, just to see if I want to do it $_{C2}$

I'm a bit nervous about going into the real world, because I don't actually know what I want to do, I started applying for jobs for cardiac physiologist, I'm just a bit unsure at the moment exactly what I want to go into $_{GD2.1}$

I have just had an email to confirm that I have got an interview, I just forwarded my lecturer the email and was like, 'can you give me some advice on the interview?' because I have never done anything like that $_{KT1}$

I've never had such an interview, but I imagine there are people from Sports Science out there looking for jobs and one or two might fall down in that aspect of things $_{AT13}$

The above figure presents data demonstrating how prepared the subjects felt for post HE. DF, S, GD1, GD2 and SM discussed notions of feeling prepared for the world of work. DF felt that he will be able

to apply the knowledge he gained from his Science and Football degree in the world of work. S feels that students will be well prepared for the world of work if they engage with all the opportunities that are offered to them during their degree. This links to the belief from SM that preparing students for post HE is a dual responsibility to be shared between the SSES and the students (to be discussed on page 289). GD1 reported feeling more ready to enter the working world than he was when he first started his degree. GD2 gave examples of how her experience at university has made her feel more prepared for the world of work. She referred to placements, guest lectures, having an 'employee-boss relationship' with staff, and gaining knowledge about how to email and communicate with others professionally, demonstrating the important impact a student-staff dialogue and embedding the world of work requirements in the SSES can have on preparing students for post HE (page 168-171 discusses factors that hamper engagement between staff and students). For DF and SM, the status of their HE institution made them feel more prepared for the world of work. SM also stated that he felt prepared to go into work as a result of gaining experience, and not due to the 'actual university course'. This resonates with the quote from D (focus group 1), *as a result of me going out and finding work, I feel quite prepared for life after university* D.1120-1121. S, GD1, DM, DF, GD2, SM, N, C, KT and AT discussed notions of feeling unprepared for the world of work. C simple stated that a degree is no longer enough, a view that is reflected in phase 1 and phase 2 of this research programme (page 47 and 101 respectively). DF felt that he would not be prepared for the world of work, until he was actually in the working world. He believes that, *the most learning you do is when you're actually there*, which relates to the analogy from S that HE is like *learning to drive* (page 255): *you don't learn to drive you learn to pass the test, and then once you've passed, then you learn to drive* S8. According to DF, the only way to prepare students for the world of work is for them to actually experience the world of work. SM confirms this perception, by stating that it was the experience he gained whilst at university made him feel prepared for post HE. The alumni in phase 1 concurred with the notion that experience is the best way to prepare for post HE (page 84-85). S was unsure how relevant some of the skills he had gained during his degree would be post HE, and GD1 was unsure about how prepared he was for the world of work. DM did not feel that his degree had prepared him to cope with the realities of the working world. He felt that his degree was more of a paper as opposed to an operational degree. GD2 was *'daunted'* by the prospect of work, because she did not know what to expect. This suggests that the subjects were unaware of the requirements of the world of work and whether they could meet such requirements. Students need to be made aware of the world of work requirements, and develop the ability to account for those requirements whilst they are university. N stated that he did not feel world of work ready at the end of his degree, but felt that this perception may have been due to the fact that he knew he was staying on to do a masters. N stated that he felt *'too young'* to be entering the world of work. He went on to reveal that he perceived that the gaining of more practical experience during his masters degree would help him feel more *'confident'* about entering the world of work. This suggests that students need to be gaining an understanding of how

287

the knowledge that they are gaining during their degree can be practically applied post HE. Such an understanding will in turn enhance students' confidence regarding their preparedness for post HE. The quote from N stating that he does not feel world of work ready due to a lack of practical skills adds credence to the suggestion that SSES students need to be given the opportunity to gain more practical skills during their degree (page 241-242). N, C, GD2, KT and AT go on to highlight gaps and potential ways in which the university could have better prepared students for the world of work. N was hoping to pursue a career in dietetics. By the time N decided that this career would not be 'viable', but had already chosen to pursue modules to compliment his dietetics aspirations. If N had of been supplied with help and support to gain insight into the requirements of the world of work, and realised that dietetics was not the right career path for him earlier in his degree, he could have chosen more appropriate modules to suit his needs. C revealed that her post HE plans involved taking a 'gap year' in order to attend additional courses and gain experience and insight into potential jobs. C's gap year intentions could have been accounted for whilst she was at university. On page 150, R and S also discussed post HE aspirations which could and should have been accounted for at university. GD2 revealed that she was applying for cardiac rehabilitation posts at the time of interviewing. She revealed that she was 'nervous' and unsure about what she wanted to do career wise. As previously highlighted, GD2 attempted to gain experience relevant to her cardiac related post HE aspirations. Such attempts were not supported by the SSES (see page 248). GD2 should have been supported and encouraged to gain insight into cardiac rehabilitation and other potential post HE options, in order to help her determine which route she wanted to pursue post HE. Encouraging and supporting GD2 through this decision making process whilst she was at university would have meant that GD2 was confident as opposed to 'nervous' regarding the prospect of post HE. KT and AT revealed that more could have been done to help prepare them for interview and job applications processes. When AT was discussing students' lack of preparation for job interviews, he was very focused around technical knowledge:

If they ask maybe, 'how would you go about testing 22 peoples' aerobic capacity? How would you set up a test? Things like that so you don't fall down at interviews AT12

As previously discussed, students cannot focus solely on technical knowledge. The requirements of the world of work in phase 1 and 2 demonstrate that a degree alone is not enough (see pages 61 and 120 respectively). Students have to be made aware of and equipped with the necessary requirements. This means that students will enter the world of work with the requirements that employers need, and the ability to market themselves accordingly during the job application process (Burgess 2007). According to the phase 2 findings, 'self awareness and marketability' is a requirement of the world of work (Table 11, page 61). Four of the alumni from phase 1 of this research programme also felt that students need to be better prepared for the process of marketing themselves to potential employers and attaining a job (page 76).

5.2.7.2 Attitudes regarding post HE preparation

I think everything that you can use to engage in is provided for you, I'd say 90% of the resources are out there for you, it's that extra 10% you actually going out and pursuing it yourself, that's what a lot of people miss out on, so I don't think it's anything on the university, it's just giving people that inch and then expecting them to take that extra mile SM19	When you first start at uni it's like, 'three years until I finish, I've got time to think about what I want to do, I'm sure something will crop up in that time' AT17 *(Such an attitude bears consistency with the attitude of M from focus group 1 (see page 143)).*	I was always just panicky, I was thinking, 'well, I might not actually get what you need to get to do the PGCE'......I never thought I'd get a 2:2, so that always put me off, but now I can think, 'right, I can go from here' C3/5	Maybe the skills you develop are just because of the way you're growing up anyway, and you would've developed them if you worked in a factory for three years DM19

The table above presents the post HE preparing attitudes of SM, AT, C and DM. In a similar manner to Redmond (2010), the phase 2 staff and the phase 1 alumni (see page 102), SM believes that preparing students for post HE is the dual responsibility of the university and the students. Alumnus 7 from phase 1 believes that in general, students are well supported; they just need to be made aware of it in order to make the most of the opportunities that are offered to them (see page 76). SM feels that the SSES is effective in providing *'resources'* to prepare students for post HE, and students need to proactively take responsibility and engage with such resources. When asked why he thought students do not engage with the resources the university provides SM replies:

It's just our generation, they've been used to having everything given to them and then when it comes to a situation where they can't have it given to them, they don't know what to do, you're still going to get that 5% who will do everything for themselves, but the majority of people just won't do it, because they're not used to doing it SM19

According to SM, students are not used to taking responsibility, which impacts on their engagement. D from focus group 2 felt that the age that HE students are generally at when they enter HE means that they are *'too young to be taking on much responsibility'* D.1157–1162. Students need support, guidance and encouragement to help them develop the ability to take responsibility. Without this ability, students will not be prepared for the world of work, since they will be required to do things for themselves post HE. C revealed that she did not prepare for her post HE ambitions because she did not think that she would achieve the degree classification she required. This lack of confidence prevented C from preparing for post HE. Support and guidance could have helped C develop her confidence and encouraged her to prepare for post HE. DM stated that the university experience provides the opportunity to, *'get to grips with the world, and learn loads of new things'* DM17. However, in his quote presented above, DM questioned whether the *'skills'* that students develop whilst they are at university are as a result of maturation or the university process. However, universities should be ensuring that students gain more personal and professional development from the experience than they would have if they had of entered the world of work and *'worked in a factory for three years'*. The HE experience can be life changing, as it is a time when knowledge, skills,

values and personality are developed (HECSU/AGCAS 2011). Students should gain added value that will help to prepare them for the world of work and their post HE lives.

5.2.7.3 Qualifications

Notions of being unprepared for the world of work

I was looking to get involved in football, and talking to people it seems like the masters is the first filter in terms of selecting Sports Science staff $_{DF1}$

The jobs I'm interested in are predominantly looking for masters or PhD graduates, so those are the levels that you need to get to be going onto some of the better jobs $_{S13}$

After looking at the options of what I wanted to do, which is cardiac physiology, you have to have extra qualifications and that was just the way forward and there aren't many jobs available at the moment so I thought I might as well stay in education $_{N2}$

I thought probably the undergrad degree wasn't quite enough to lead into a career straight away, or something I wanted to do anyway $_{GD1.6}$

We got the occasional emails that would be forwarded to the uni, job opportunities here and there, but I'd say seven out of ten of those are for masters or PhD students $_{S13}$

With regards to what actual jobs you do, I'm not entirely certain, because it seems that to get into a decent position, for example, to work for Lucozade as their national area reps, they require a Masters degree $_{S12}$

Quite a large driving factor that having masters is I think quite a considerable boost to being able to get a job $_{S13}$

It gives you an advantage over other people $_{DM3}$

There's a lot of people who do Sports Science, so there's a lot of competition, so staying on, giving me a little bit over those who only have the BSc, and at the moment there's no jobs out there at all for anything so it's going to be a nightmare to find anything, or anything that I wanted to do career wise, I just didn't feel as though it was enough to distinguish you from the other however many people do that degree $_{GD1.6/7}$

When I actually started university I was like about 50% sure that I was going to try and stay on and do MPhil or PhD, a lot of the comments the first few weeks, from a lot of the lecturers, things like, 'there's going to be three hundred people graduating from our school alone, there's going to be thousands across the country', so how am I going to make myself look better than all them, my aim was to get a first in university and then go on and do postgraduate as well, just to be in that like upper 5%, as my time at university went on and the country got in a worse and worse state, I started to gear more towards doing a PhD, because it's going to be hard to find a job anyway $_{SM2}$

What more could be done: Qualifications

Maybe more of an opportunity to gain extra qualifications, so in the first year you're pointed in the direction of doing like the level one coaching, level two coaching badges, they could provide more of an opportunity to maybe do a strength conditioning one or extra things that would help, the staff are pretty good at passing information on to you in terms of courses and things like that, but whether they could provide something linked in with the course $_{DF10}$

Above highlights the subjects' perceptions of qualifications in relation to preparation for post HE. DF, S, N, DM, GD1 and SM all felt that they were required to have additional qualifications in order to be prepared for the world of work. DF, S, N and GD1 all reported requiring additional qualifications in order to achieve their post HE aspirations. The quotes from S go on to state that he was unaware of jobs available for Sports Science graduates who do not posses additional qualifications. S, DM, GD and SM all felt that additional qualifications were required due to the competitive nature of the graduate job market. The phase 2 staff also referred to the importance of additional qualifications for the world of work (page 122). DF suggested that due to the importance of qualifications for post HE preparation, the *'opportunity to gain extra qualifications'* should be embedded into the SSES, in concurrence with recommendations from both phase 1 and 2 of this research programme (see pages 80 and 122 respectively). It should be noted that all of the subjects that contributed to the data presented above were staying on to gain a postgraduate qualification, which may account for their perceptions of additional qualifications.

5.2.7.4 Stemming of Career Interests

In third year there's a cardiovascular and respiratory assessment techniques module, and that's actually probably why I changed my mind to look into the more health things, because I really enjoyed that module, it's really interesting, it was a lot of practical work so pretty much I think every other week we were down in the labs doing like ECGs on each other, it was just a lot more interesting, and you felt like you were learning something that you might actually be able to use in the future in a job or something $_{GD1.8}$	The cardiac module for third year for that I thought was really good, so that's why I want to now do something in that area, because there were only like thirty or so people in the module, you're able to ask a lot more questions and get more answers and you don't feel stupid asking questions or anything like that, but I enjoyed the fact that it was loads of practical stuff in that module, it was one week theory one week practical, so we got to see what they were talking about the week before as such, we got to put it into practical, whereas none of the others have really done much practical in before $_{GD2.2}$	I used to play American football, one of my coaches there was a S&C coach with the EIS, so I used to go and talk to him when I was on breaks and things, and I used to watch some of the athletes training, and I just immediately fell in love with the whole thing, so I just thought like, 'yeah, this is what I want to do,' so the whole thing just sort of snowballed from there $_{SM6}$

The extracts above give insight into the stemming of career interest of GD1, GD2 and SM. For GD1 and GD2, their career interests stemmed from gaining practical experiences and theoretical knowledge within those given areas. For SM, his career interests stemmed from gaining experience in that given environment and getting insight into the experiences of somebody within that given job role. GD1 also made reference to his final year major project, which was based around sports performance, and impacted on the stemming of his career interests, *'it helped me decide that I'm more interested in looking at more the health side of things as opposed to performance'* $_{GD1.3}$. GD1, GD2 and SM demonstrated that applying their knowledge practically and gaining insight into job roles helped them clarify their post HE aspirations. As demonstrated by AT, having something to aim towards, increases accountability which in turn increases engagement:

I got conditionally offered my PhD position, then that was obviously a bit more of a spur on to do well in final exams, because to get on to the PhD I needed a 2:1, so that really kind of like, 'right, I need to get this' $_{AT18}$

If students can perceive a value in their endeavours, engagement will be enhanced (Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009). As demonstrated in his above quote, this notion is supported by SM. SM discovered something that he loved which he ultimately decided to work towards achieving. Based on these findings, it is important that students are encouraged to have something to aspire towards achieving post HE. Increasing aspirations increases accountability, which in turn increases engagement. Phase 2 highlighted that post HE options need to be perceived as achievable, in order for students to be inspired by post HE options (page 113 and 118).

5.2.8 Part 4: Summary & Recommendations

Part 4 addressed the overarching research programme aim 'b':

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

Part 4 aimed to assess how prepared the subjects felt for the world of work, and identify the impact the SSES university experience has had on preparing students for post HE. The subjects highlighted ways in which students could be better prepared for the world of work and their post HE lives. The subsequent recommendations have been organised into the following themes: curriculum design, increase awareness and support.

Curriculum Design

Embedding the world of work requirements within the SSES culture and ensuring effective student-staff engagement and dialogue can have an important impact on preparing students for post HE. In order to be prepared for the world of work, students have to gain experience of the world of work. Students need to be given the opportunity to gain more practical skills that relate to the world of work requirements during their degree. Due to the competitive nature of the graduate job market, students are required to have additional qualifications. Therefore the opportunity to gain additional qualifications alongside the degree course should be embedded into the SSES.

Increase Awareness

In order to engage with any given curriculum intervention, students have to perceive a 'need'. Students need to be made aware of the importance and need of preparing for post HE. Students need to be able to perceive that the knowledge that they are gaining during their degree can be applied post HE. It must be demonstrated to students that their degree is operational as opposed to paper based, and that it is therefore preparing them for the world of work. Students have to be made aware of and equipped with the world of work requirements. This will result in students being able to enter the world of work with the requirements that employers need, the ability to market themselves accordingly during the job application process, and the ability to apply such requirements in the work place. Understanding that their degree is operational and that they can meet the requirements of the world of work will in turn enhance students' confidence regarding their preparedness for post HE. Students need to be prepared and confident about the prospect of post HE, as opposed to unprepared and nervous.

Support

Students will be well prepared for the world of work if they engage with all the opportunities that are offered to them during their degree. However, students are not used to taking responsibility, which impacts on their engagement with such opportunities. Students need support, guidance and encouragement to help them develop the ability to take responsibility. Without this ability, students will not be prepared for the world of work, since they will have to do things for themselves post HE. Support and guidance is required to encourage students to make steps towards post HE. Students need to gain experience and insight into the requirements of the world of work and potential post HE options in order to help them determine the best post HE options to suit their needs. Gaining insight

into and trailing potential job roles helps students to develop post HE aspirations. With an increase in aspirations comes an increase in accountability, which in turn leads to an increase in engagement with L&T opportunities. Students' degree courses and time at university needs to be aligned to compliment students' individual post HE needs.

A Final Thought

The students' time at university provides them with the opportunity to get to grips with the world and learn new things. The period of time that students spend in HE would see any individual grow and develop. HEIs should optimise this malleability and prepare students for their post HE lives and the requirements of the world of work, providing students with the unique added value that can only be gained from the university experience.

5.2.9 Part 5: Advice

Part 5 discusses advice aimed at current and future SSES students from the subjects. The outcome of the analysis process related to 'advice' will be presented and discussed.

ADVICE

Gain experience

Make the most of your placements and get work experience, because if I don't get a proper job soon, I'm going to just have to work for free, just to get work experience to put on my CV $_{KT19}$

Do as much work experience as you can, whether it be paid or unpaid, just boost your CV and give yourself the best opportunity that when you come out of uni, you've got things behind you, because you might not decide to go onto a PhD and having experience behind you whether it's in your field or not looks better and prepares you for working in applied setting and working outside of uni $_{CT22}$

You should try and get experience in something that you do want to do while you're still at university, if there was an opportunity to do that then that would be good $_{C17}$

Explore interests & potential job areas

Find something you like, try and focus and get some experience working in that $_{GD1.34}$

Try and find what you're interested in, explore different areas that you might be interested in going down, so maybe come up with a list of what you're interested in, try and contact a few people, and decide if it's something you like or not, and then if you find something you like, try and focus and get some experience working in that, try and get yourself involved in that, to make sure that it is something you want to stick with and then work towards it, try and have a goal $_{GD1.33}$

Align module choices to interests & post HE aspirations

Pick the right modules if you know what way you want to go, but it's always hard isn't it to say what you want to go at this age $_{C17}$

If you're really interested in doing certain areas, go down those modules, and if you don't really know what you want to do, maybe just do the easier options, to get a better grade $_{GD2.17}$

Do what you're interested in, that helps if you pick modules because it's a lot easier to revise the stuff if you've got a mild interest in it $_{DM16}$

Engage with tutors

It's really important that you have a good relationship with one of your tutors, I think that's key to success, because if you've got someone that you can go to, then you can get the help and the guidance that you need $_{C17}$

Utilise your tutors as much as you can because they can help you more than you can imagine, get to know as many members of staff as you can within the area that you have an idea that you want to work in, because having a good understanding with them is the start to making things easier, there's placements available, they can get you into maybe helping out, just things you can put on your CV $_{AT23}$

Get to know your lecturers, they're pretty well placed to pass information down to you, and some of the contacts that they have are invaluable , in terms of getting a job possibly, and in terms of information as well $_{DF11}$

Just find the relevant members of staff you can start building up a rapport with and go from there $_{AT23}$

Try and interact with the staff more, with regards to work, try and get as much of a learning effect from the staff as you can, go and proactively ask questions about lectures that you've had or topics that you find interesting, even if it's been mentioned in a lecture but not necessarily relevant to maybe the module or something, if you're interested in it, go and ask about it $_{S22}$

Take advantage of your mentor who you can go and see all the time, they're not going to turn you down, so just see them about anything you can $_{SM21}$

Get Involved

Interact more in the lectures and things like that, instead of taking a back seat $_{DM16}$

Put more into the university, if you put a little bit in to the university, they'll make sure you'll getting a hell of a lot more back out of it, so whenever they've got open days or practical days where they're showing people around, help out with them, because people will remember you from that, and when it comes to requesting funding or even trying to get onto a PhD or a Masters, they'll recognise that you have helped out and it'll make you look better in the long run, whereas if you're fairly selfish and you just don't want to help out at all and expect the university to give you stuff all the time, it's not going to happen $_{SM21}$

This PhD came down to more luck than anything, the more feelers you put out there, the more opportunities you're going to get to do stuff, so just find the relevant members of staff you can start building up a rapport with and go from there $_{AT23}$

I did well in my undergraduate project with my MPhil supervisor, he probably knew I was willing to work hard and because it was something similar to what I've done before, and I volunteered as a subject for one of his previous PhD student's and it was roughly similar, so I've seen the techniques happen $_{CTS/6}$

When I first started uni, I was in the gym quite a lot, and the head S&C coach asked me to help out with the rugby league club that he was the conditioner for, and then after that he asked me if I would take over the academy and the reserve teams, so I got a lot of practical experience during my first and second year $_{SM5/6}$

If you treated this course as a nine to five, it's easier said than done, I didn't do it all the time, but I tried to, you'll absolutely breeze this course $_{CT22}$

Subjects were asked what advice they would give to current students. KT, CT, C and GD1 all advised students to gain work experience whilst they are at university. KT and CT stated the importance of

gaining experience for enhancing graduates' marketability and preparation for post HE. C and GD1 advise that students gain experience in the area that they are interested in pursuing post HE. D from focus group 2 advised future students to *'just get out there and get experience'* ~D.1348,~ as did the phase 1 alumni (pages 85-87) and the phase 2 staff (pages 125-130 and 137-140). GD1 feels that it is important that students try and find out what they are interested in by exploring different post HE option that interest them, and if possible, determine a post HE goal to focus on preparing for. C, GD2 and DM advise that students align their module choices to their interests and their post HE aspirations. C and GD2 advised that students should align their module choices to compliment their post HE aspirations and interests. However, C notes that it can be hard for students to know what they want to do *'at this age'*, which adds further credence to the notion that students' need nurture (see page 59). GD2 advised that those students who do not know what they want to do post HE should chose *'the easier'* module options in order to *'get a better grade'*, further demonstrating the ADC that exists within the SSES (see page 274). DM adds to this by suggesting that students should choose modules that they are interested in, in order to *'make revision easier'*. C, AT, S, DF and SM recommend that students engage with and get to know staff. C states that building a relationship with staff is the *'key to success'*, as it can provide the required help and guidance. The alumni also felt that establishing good relationships with staff can help prepare students for post HE (page 81 and 91). AT and DF believe that getting to know the staff can help with post HE preparation. S advised that students should also be interacting with staff regarding academic work. SM advises that students go and see staff *'all the time'* about *'anything'*. SM, DM, AT, SM and CT informed students to get involved. DM advises that students get involved by interacting within the L&T sessions. SM suggests that students should get involved by putting more into the university, for example, helping out at open days. SM feels that students that help out will reap the rewards. AT, SM and CT demonstrate the benefit of getting involved and interacting with the SSES staff. AT and CT attributed the gaining of their postgraduate positions to getting involved. AT states, *'the more feelers you put out there, the more opportunities you are going to get to do stuff'*. SM gained work experience as a result of getting involved and interacting with SSES staff. CT advised treating the degree as *'a nine to five job'*, which is how SM described he treated the final two years of his degree, *'certainly second year and third year it was definitely like more or less a nine to five job'* ~SM4.~

5.2.10 Part 5: Summary & Recommendations

Part 5 contributed to the addressing of overarching research programme aim 'c':

    c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

The subjects were asked what their advice to current and future SSES students would be. The subjects advised that students should gain experience and explore post HE options in order to determine a post

HE goal to work towards. A students time at university needs to be aligned to their post HE goals. Students should get involved with their HE community, and engage and build rapport with staff, since this is the *'key to success'*. This adds credence to the phase 2 recommendation highlighting a need to develop community within the SSES. Students should treat their degree as a 9-5 job. Embedding the world of work requirements and cultures within the SSES will enhance students post HE preparation.

5.3 Phase 3 Summary & Recommendations

Phase 3 aimed to address overarching research programme aims 'a', 'b' and 'c':

a. Gain a better understanding of students' needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience.

b. Develop an understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability curriculum and the opportunities provided.

c. Create a set of employability focused recommendations for curriculum design that identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap.

The subjects reported going to university with aspirations to develop personally and professionally. The SSES needs to prepare students for their post HE lives and the requirements of the world of work. The SSES needs to make the most of the opportunity to provide students with a unique added value that can only be gained from the university experience. The synthesis establishes how the SSES can better account for students' aspirations, alongside recommendations developed in phase 1 and 2 of this research programme.

5.3.1 A Final Note

General Evaluation

Overall I've enjoyed the experience, I've enjoyed the time here, there's certain lectures you don't enjoy going to and certain things you don't enjoy doing, but same as anything isn't it? AT24

Living with friends that are on other courses, their courses just don't seem to be as well run, and the academics don't seem to be near the level, some of the teaching that they seem to get doesn't seem to be as good as what we seem to get in our department AT23

There were some things at uni that weren't great, but the majority of it was fantastic, I'd recommend this course and this uni to anyone, purely because of the facilities, the expertise that is in this field, specifically in physiology and in Sports Science as a whole CT21

The facilities are amazing here, when we had the cardiac summer school, we had people from all over the place, and we did a bit of a tour around, and they couldn't believe how good the facilities actually were in this building compared to where they've come from GD1.4

I thought it was good and I did enjoy it, I thoroughly enjoyed it I'd say CT13

It was a really good experience, I loved it, it was good SM11

I thought the Science and Football programme was pretty good, I think they put a lot of work into designing it DF10

The SSES are heavily focused upon research and that always leads to your lectures being up to date, so in that respect it is good, I think all staff are involved in in carrying out research at the same time of lecturing, so it's good NI5

All the best lecturers here have gone out and got a lot of practical experience, they're not just people who stay in the labs all the time, the best ones are the ones that can do both, are good in the labs and also have that applied experience SM8

The staff are all experts in their field, and that's a given with the clubs that they've worked at, the journals they've published CT14

The subjects' quotes above provide positive general evaluations of their experiences at the SSES. The subjects referred to the world class expertise of the staff, research informed teaching and the SSES facilities. The subjects highlighted that they enjoyed the overall experience and that they would recommend the SSES to others. In support of this positive note, a member of staff at the away day reported:

It's not right for us to be sitting down and saying what we are doing at the moment doesn't work, let's change it, it's not broken, the positive note is that we are doing OK SAD.EZ

As highlighted by Denholm (2011) and UKCES (2009), incorporating post HE preparation can be about retuning and building on existing good practice. The fact that this research programme has been undertaken highlights that the SSES endeavours to continual evolve and improve the service provided. This research has highlighted ways that the SSES can tweak its provisions in order to enhance the SSES student experience, and better prepare students for their post HE lives.

Chapter 6: Synthesis

6.1 Restating the Overarching Rationale of the Research Programme

This research programme was orientated around the philosophy that:

Students are at the heart of the HE process. Therefore, if we truly want to develop and enhance the employability of HE students', we need to involve those who are really affected; the students.

There is a need to consider and account for the needs of all students (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2010). Barnett (2007) makes a call for putting students into the centre of the educational thinking in HE. It is recommended throughout the literature that student learning, the student experience and student engagement are put at the heart of all planning, teaching and review (Browne 2010, BIS 2011, Hadfield *et al.* 2012, HEFCE 2010, NSF 2010). Barnett (2007) proposes that debates about HE are not logical without considering and gaining input from students. Students know how they want to be taught, and have ideas about how techniques can be improved to enhance learning (Kay *et al.* 2007). Furthermore, no HE stakeholder group has been more affected by the significant changes HE and the economy has undergone than students and graduates (Brown 2007, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Therefore, debates on the HE employability agenda should utilise students' needs and perceptions regarding their HE experience, in order to better design programmes that adequately prepare students for the requirements of the labour market and meet the needs of students (Burgess 2007, Denholm 2011, Kay *et al.* 2007, Nguyen *et al.* 2005, UKCES 2009). As the NUS (2010:2) stated, if we want to positively impact on students' lives, we need to better understand the needs of students; we need to be the experts on students. This research programme was focused around investigating the perceptions of present and past students, in order to determine how students can be better prepared for their post HE lives. Since students are at the heart of the HE experience, the student experience and their needs require more consideration. Utilising qualitative research methods was appropriate in order to do justice to the very individual and personal nature of students' perceptions regarding their HE experience and post HE preparation.

6.2 Restating of the Overarching Aims and Objectives of the Research Programme

Using a qualitative research approach, this research programme aimed to explore and identify factors that impact on the existing skills gap between HE graduates and the requirements of the world of work. The increasingly diverse student population has resulted in a need to accommodate and account for the broader student population, their differing post HE expectations and needs, and determining what motivates and engages them. This research programme therefore aimed to gain a better understanding of students needs, aspirations and expectations in relation to their HE experience and post HE preparation, and determine students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the employability related curriculum and opportunities provided to them by the SSES. Using this information, the research programme aimed to identify what more can be done to prepare HE students for the

requirements of the world of work and diminish the skills gap. As a result of such investigations, employability focused recommendations for curriculum design have been created.

6.3 Major Findings

6.3.1 Reasons for going to university

For the alumni in phase 1 of this research programme and the subjects in phase 3, 'personal development reasons' and 'career reasons' were the most dominant reasons for going to university (pages 44 and 229 respectively). Table 26 demonstrates the frequency of mentions given to personal development and career reasons.

Table 26: The frequency of mentions the phase 1 and phase 3 subjects gave to personal development and career related reasons for going to university

Reasons	Frequency of Mentions from Phase 1	Frequency of Mentions from Phase 3
Personal Development	20	19
Career	19	11

The phase 1 and 3 subjects envisaged that university would develop them personally and result in them feeling more prepared for their post HE lives and the requirements of the world of work. As demonstrated in the literature review, current research suggests that students attitudes regarding the purpose of university are dominantly career related (Committee on Higher Education 1963, Fearne 2008, NUS 2008, Swain 2011, The Pennsylvania State University 2009, UNITE 2007). The subjects involved in phase 1 and 3 of this research programme demonstrate that whilst career reasons are important in relation to reasons for going to university, personal development is of equal importance. This reflects the NUS (2008) finding that graduates view university as preparation for life more than preparation for work (65% and 35% respectively). In essence, graduates view the purpose of HE as broader than employability alone (NUS 2008). This research programme supports the notions suggested by Brennan *et al.* (2005), the NUS (2008), the CBI/NUS (cited in Anderson and Marsh 2011) and UNITE (2007) that different students have different reasons for going to university and choosing their degree course, and a variety of hopes and dreams for their life post HE. Such factors need to be accounted for in order to make sense of the employability needs and aspirations of students, to ensure that these needs are met and students are efficiently prepared for post HE. Employability related agendas should not homogenise students (Barrie 2007). In relation to employability, one size does not fit all (Yorke and Knight 2006). Students are orientated to pursue their degrees and post HE preparations in different ways, and therefore HEIs need to ensure that they meet the needs of the broader student population (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009).

6.3.2 Post HE aspirations and expectations

It should be noted that despite 'career reasons' being the joint most dominant reason the alumni gave for going to university, ten out of the seventeen alumni interviewed said that they did not have a particular career in mind whilst at university. It appeared that for the phase 1 and 3 subjects, going to university for career reasons was related to career in general as opposed to career in specific. For example, only four of the phase 1 and four of the phase 3 subjects specified that their decision to do a Sports Science related degree was based on a desire to work in the Sports Science industry, highlighting that Sports Science students do not necessarily pursue a Sports Science degree due to aspirations to work in that given discipline. This notion was further supported by the fact that only four out of the seventeen alumni ended up working in the Sports Science industry (Table 3, page 33). This adds credence to the statements from Browne (2010) and the NUS (2008) that students choose their degrees based on academic interest in the subject as opposed to perceiving it as a direct route into a career. Similarly, Lexmond and Bradley (2010) found that 61% of students and graduates reported choosing their degree subject based on academic interest in the subject, whilst only 21% reported choosing their degree subject because they wanted a related job. According to the alumni (n=14), the general purpose of HE is *'preparation for the world of work and post HE life'*. The phase 2 and 3 student subjects described how the SSES did not meet their post HE preparing expectations. Subjects reported feeling unprepared for post HE despite opportunities provided by the SSES and advice from the staff to prepare for post HE during their degrees. Six of the alumni were concerned that *'a degree is not enough'*, and that more needs to be done to prepare students for their post HE lives and account for their perceived purpose of HE.

6.3.2.1 What impact do such findings have on the government HE policies?

As stated in the literature review, there is a need for HE to contribute to the delivery of a labour force that will ensure our national economy is capable of flourishing in an economic climate that is becoming increasingly competitive (Browne 2010, HEFCE 2007, Leitch 2006, Thompson *et al.* 2008). The skills agenda that resulted from the Leitch (2006) report promoted that the skills developed at HE were the answer to national competitiveness (O'Regan 2010). However, as demonstrated in the section entitled 'skills gap' in the literature review, this vision did not become a reality. In his 2006 government report, Lord Leitch claimed that the nation's people are the 'natural resource' of the 21st century, and that developing peoples' skills is the key to unlocking the vast potential of this resource, which will in turn enhance the economy and society (Leitch 2006: 1). However, concern was expressed regarding the impact of the skills agenda on HE (The University and College Union (UCU), Brown and Porter, cited in Fearn 2008). The UCU stated that *"they had never considered universities to be the coal mines of the 21st century"* and that *"HE is a learning environment, not a training camp for business"* (Fearne 2008). There is a sense that for the

government, the focus is on the farming of the nations 'natural resource' in order to create a skilled work force that will drive the economy forward. However, it could be claimed that comparing people to natural resources is dehumanising, and does not do justice to the complex nature of human beings. The quotation below from alumnus 11 demonstrates the intricacy of the 'natural resource' that HE is dealing with:

HE, for me, is to bridge the gap between school and childhood and adulthood

As described by Henderson *et al.* (2007), HE students are on a trajectory through HE, transitioning into adulthood. In order to do justice to the complexity of HE students, there needs to be more 'nurturing' as opposed to 'farming'. Focusing on the development of skills alone is simplifying the complex phenomenon of preparing students appropriately to transition into adulthood. For many students, the HE process is often life changing (HECSU/AGCAS 2011). HE is a big step in students' maturation and personal development, and as a result, support and guidance through the HE process is required. As stated by Kay *et al.* (2007), university should shape and mature students, developing skills and attitudes in preparation for contributing to society post HE. Understanding the individual needs of students and providing them accordingly with the post HE preparing nurture and support that they require, will result in them being better prepared to meet the requirements of the working world, which will in turn lead to a more skilled workforce that can enhance the economy and society. It is therefore important to gain an understanding of students' aspirations regarding university, in order to enhance the effectiveness of HE in preparing graduates for a competitive job market (Barrie 2007, Brennan *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2000, Minten 2010, O'Regan 2009). Based on the perceptions of the alumni and students involved in this research programme, more needs to be done to help support students' personal and professional development in preparation for their post HE lives. Government policies and HEIs need to prepare students for their post HE lives and the requirements of the world of work. The student experience and their needs require more consideration. This synthesis will now consider why a degree is not enough to account for the general purpose of HE (as stated by the phase 1 alumni), and summarise recommendations for what more can be done to better support and prepare students for the world of work and their post HE lives.

6.3.3 A Lack of Engagement

The SSES evidently responded to the demand of the competitive graduate job market by developing a three stage employability model for curriculum design (Figure 5, page 93), which involved opportunities to prepare students for post HE including PDP, careers sessions, guest speakers, a placement, and reflective practice. Phase 2 of this research programme demonstrated that the SSES were proactive in providing opportunities; advice and encouragement to help students develop personally and professionally, yet students did not engage and reported feeling unprepared for post HE. Yorke (2006) notes that the provision of opportunities to develop employment prerequisites does

not guarantee that such development occurs; since employability derives from the ways in which students learn from their experiences. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that students are employable on the basis of curricular provision alone (Yorke 2006). Since part of achieving a high level of performance in employability provision involves ensuring learner engagement, it is important that the students' lack of engagement was explored (Astin 1999, Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009). Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009) highlighted the need to develop employability curricula that is valued by students and in turn promotes engagement. The apparent dissonance between the SSES provided opportunities and student engagement was subsequently explored by gaining a better understanding of students and the students' L&T university culture in order to determine why there was a lack of engagement. This understanding and subsequent recommendations can be utilised to diminish the dissonance between what the SSES provide and what students engage with, and determine how the SSES can promote effective learning and post HE preparation within the SSES curriculum. Examples of students' lack of engagement with the opportunities provided by the SSES are presented below.

6.3.3.1 Example 1: A lack of engagement with the careers provision

Despite students being informed by the SSES staff in phase 2 that the competitive graduate job market meant that it was important and beneficial to engage with the careers sessions provided, there was a lack of engagement (see page 153). Based on the perceptions and experiences of the past and present students involved in this research programme, it is recommended that careers related provisions should be embedded within the SSES as opposed to being an institutional initiative. O'Regan (2010) also recommends embedding work related interventions into degree programmes. The careers provision and support should be specific to the individual needs of the students within the SSES, and represent the wide range of post HE options available to Sports Science students, both within and outside of the Sports Science industry. More quantity and variety is required in order to account for the wide range of post HE options and the wide range of students' needs. Students need to be prepared for their post HE lives whilst they are at university. Students need to begin post HE preparation from the beginning of their degrees (AGR 1995, Brewer 2009, GEES 2008). The philosophy of 'university career' needs to be instilled within the SSES culture. Students need more information relevant to the stage of career they are at. For example, insight could be provided into how what they are doing whilst they are at university can prepare them for post HE. There needs to be an increased accountability among students regarding the need to prepare for post HE.

6.3.3.2 Example 2: A lack of engagement and dialogue between the staff and students

Despite the apparent best efforts of the phase 2 staff to encourage dialogue, there was a lack of engagement between students and staff both within and outside of the L&T sessions. It appeared that this lack of engagement was in part due to students' lack of confidence. According to the findings

303

from phase 3, many students will require support and guidance to help them develop the confidence to feel comfortable engaging with staff. Bloxham and Campbell (2010) demonstrated that students' who are not comfortable taking part and engaging with their academic community will be unable to engage with staff and gain support when it is required. As stated by the USEM model discussed in the literature review, personal qualities such as efficacy beliefs and self theories are one of the four main factors that influences employability (see page 11). The phase 3 subjects advised that it is important that students' ability to engage with staff is developed, so that students can access support when necessary. According to Astin (1997) and Hill *et al.* (2003), the most significant factor in student academic success is student involvement fostered by student-staff interactions and student-student interactions. Community within the SSES needs to be developed and the opportunity to engage with staff needs to be more readily available. It is essential that students' confidence to engage in dialogue is developed, not just to enable students to flourish at university, but since the ability to communicate and work with others is a world of work requirement.

6.3.3.3 Example 3: A lack of engagement with L&T sessions

Phase 2 highlighted that within the L&T sessions, there was a lack of focus and engagement amongst the students in relation to the opportunities being provided, as demonstrated through a lack of engagement with the personal tutor system, the careers provision, the guest lectures, the laboratory practical sessions, advice to engage in work experience and encouragement to prepare for post HE. According to the phase 2 students, it appeared that this lack of engagement was due to large class sizes creating a lack of community and sense of belonging. Bowles (2011) reported that basic HE resourcing issues, such as staff-student ratios has the biggest impact on student engagement.

6.3.3.4 A subsequent need to enhance community and engagement

According to the findings in this research programme, there is a need for an enhanced sense of community, involvement and ownership within the SSES student culture, alongside an enhanced staff-student engagement. As stated, it is important that students feel comfortable enough to engage with staff when necessary. There needs to be a greater dialogue between staff and students from the beginning of the students' degree courses. Students should be involved and engaged with their HE L&T community and environment (Astin 1999). This will result in an increase in students' focus and engagement with opportunities and sessions provided. Enhancing engagement between staff and students will enhance community, and vice versa. Smaller sized L&T sessions (labs, practicals, seminars, tutorials) can help to overcome some of the present issues within the SSES. Smaller L&T sessions can: enhance a sense of community and engagement between staff and students and amongst the students themselves; develop students' ability to engage in dialogue within L&T sessions, which in turn develops students confidence and ability to communicate in a group environment; enhance accountability, especially if students have to prepare for the sessions and if the sessions are marked on

attendance and contribution; diminish the 'resource' mentality that exists within HE and positively impact on assessment, feedback, support, engagement, learning and placements. Smaller cohorts foster a more inclusive environment (Wilson and Tong 2009). Cunnane (2012) cited Harvey's research findings that demonstrate students' learning is best nurtured through small, supportive groups, taught by trained teachers using interactive L&T, formative feedback and one-to-one engagement. According to Astin's (1999) student development theory, the greater the student's involvement in their learning community, the greater the student learning and personal development. Zhao and Kuh (2004) and Kember *et al.* (2001) found that participation in some form of learning community promotes a sense of belonging and contributes to better quality learning outcomes and student success. Delaney (2004) suggested that there needs to be a balance between academic demands and social opportunities, with extra-curricular opportunities expanded, and investment in resources and staff to enrich students' social lives. A better established support network can help to enhance engagement between the staff and students and the community within the SSES (support network will be discussed below). Examples of how to enhance community and encourage staff-student dialogue and engagement within the SSES are presented in Figures 8 and 9.

6.3.3.5 The 'Assessment Driven' Culture

A major factor that impacted on students' lack of engagement with the opportunities provided by the SSES was the ADC, which was apparent within the SSES culture and has resonated throughout this research programme. Students placed huge importance on assessment, grades and degree classifications, as demonstrated in phase 2.1, 2.2 and 3. Due to the ADC, everything students do is geared around passing. As stated by Brown *et al.* (1997: 7), *"assessment defines what students regard as important"*. Students in this research programme reported only engaging when they perceived a 'need'. For example, phase 2 demonstrated that the SSES L&T culture is assessment driven, whereby students do what they need, when they need it. Assessment was a driver for students' attendance, engagement, effort and learning. Phase 3 demonstrated a lack of engagement with the university's employability award, which students did not perceive a need to engage with because it did not contribute to their degree classification. Subjects perceived more of a need to engage in their third year than in the preceding years, due to the fact that 75% of the degree classification is based on the third year grade. The phase 3 subjects reported a 40% mentality that existed within the first year, which negatively impacted on students' learning and engagement. Subjects prioritised and determined the importance of different assessments based on their grade distributions. The subjects chose modules that they perceived they would get a good grade in, and modules that students were not pursuing in their third year, they did not perceive a need to engage with in the second year. As discussed in the literature review, it has been suggested that within HE more emphasis is placed on academic achievement and gaining qualifications than preparation for the world of work (Roberts 2009). According to Brown and Knight (1994), at the centre of the student experience is assessment.

However, this ADC may be futile, since the academic knowledge base of graduates is overemphasised (Brown *et al.* 2003). Employers take for granted that graduates offer academic qualities, as this comes as a given in conjunction with any named degree (Brown *et al.* 2003). A degree is not the only requirement of the world of work, as demonstrated in Figure 7 on page 310. The ADC therefore prevents students from being prepared for post HE, as demonstrated in the below quote from the member of staff facilitating session 29:

A degree is like learning to drive, you get your degree, and then you go out into the world of practice, you only learn to drive when you've passed your driving test, before that you're learning to pass a test.

Ainley and Allen (2010) argue that for HE students, the goal is to pass the degree rather than to learn, resulting in what Ainley (cited in Fearne 2008) describe as a 'culture of instrumentalism', causing students to learn what they need, when they need it, disregarding information that they do not perceive a 'need' to engage with. As demonstrated in the below quotation from Burgess, this preoccupation with 'passing' can be detrimental:

"The persistence of a system that concentrates on a single summative judgement results in a fixation on achieving a number that is considered 'good'. This drives the behaviours of academic staff and students and works to the detriment of the currency of other information" Burgess (2007: 5).

There needs to be a culture shift. The SSES curriculum structure needs to be orientated more around preparing students for post HE and less around passing assessments, supporting the discussions in 'the need for a real world curriculum' and 'an economy of experience' sections in the literature review (pages 8 and 6 respectively). Students need to start 'learning to drive' whilst they are at university. According to the alumni, employers require graduates to enter the workplace and 'hit the ground running', as supported by Gilleard (cited in Mail Online 2007). Therefore, students need to be prepared to meet the requirements of the world of work. The world of work requirements are discussed below.

6.3.3.6 Factors that positively impact on engagement and learning within L&T sessions: the student perspective

According to the phase 3 subjects, accountability, interest and the staff can all positively impact on and enhance students' engagement and subsequent learning within the L&T sessions and help to overcome the ADC.

Interest and enjoyment

Accountability
Making students feel accountable can help to overcome the ADC by creating a perceived 'need' to engage.

Staff
In order to attend, engage and learn, students have to feel accountable and perceive that they will gain from L&T sessions.
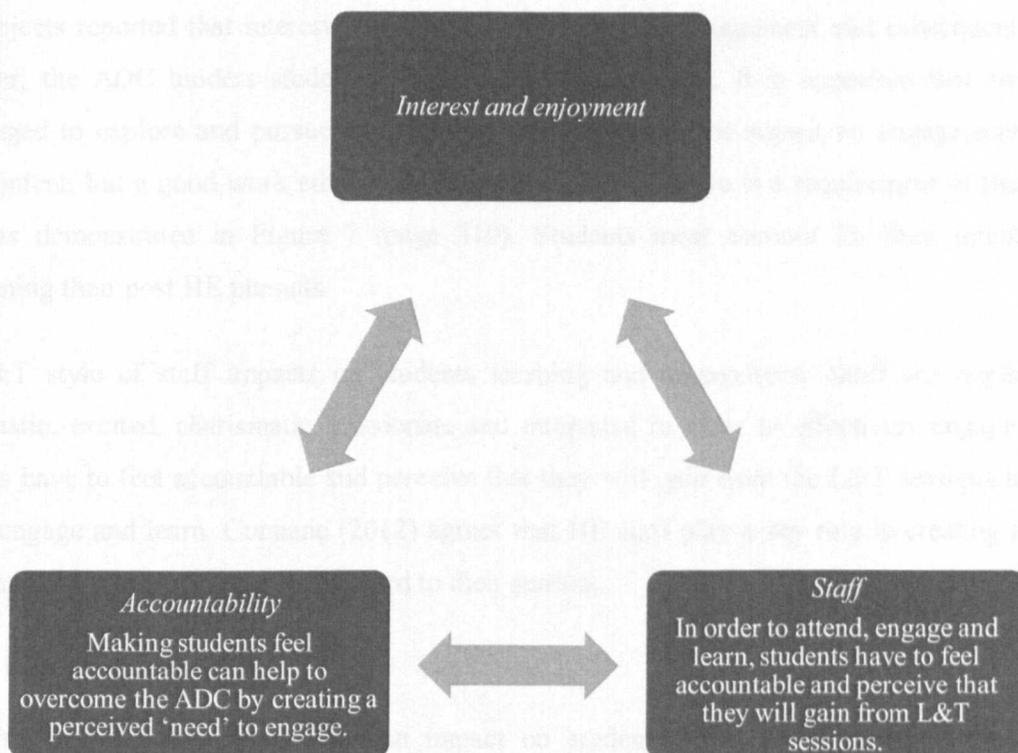
Accountability can help overcome the ADC by creating a perceived 'need' to engage. Making students feel accountable and enhancing their awareness of the 'consequences' of curriculum interventions drives engagement. The subjects gave some examples of scenarios that made them feel accountable, including the major project supervision involving direct one-to-one contact with a member of staff; having a job lined up for post HE with conditions that need achieving (e.g. an upper second degree classification); students perceiving that L&T content will be needed post HE in the world of work; presentations created a perceived need to engage and learn the intended material; and a perceived 'need' to attend L&T sessions increases accountability, attendance and learning and engagement. Students have to feel that they will benefit from attending sessions. The ADC is linked to students' perceptions of what employers want and what is required of them post HE. The subjects demonstrated that they perceived employers to require a certain degree classification, and they subsequently placed huge importance on assessment and grades. However, since the academic knowledge base of graduates is overemphasised, students need to be made more aware that the world of work requires a lot more from them than a given degree classification (Brown *et al.* 2003). Students can be made to feel accountable by making them aware that they will need to learn the L&T material, *'not just for your exam, but for your life'*. Enhancing students' awareness of the important impact L&T opportunities has on the world of work requirements will enhance students' sense of accountability to engage (the need for enhancing students' awareness will be further discussed below). The world of work requirements need to be made more central to the HE L&T culture and content.

The subjects reported that interest plays an important role in engagement and subsequent learning. However, the ADC hinders students' engagement with interests. It is important that students are encouraged to explore and pursue their interests. Not only does it impact on engagement with the L&T content, but a good work ethic with desire, passion and drive is a requirement of the world of work, as demonstrated in Figure 7 (page 310). Students must account for their interests when determining their post HE pursuits.

The L&T style of staff impacts on students learning and engagement. Staff are required to be enthusiastic, excited, charismatic, passionate and interested in order to effectively engage students. Students have to feel accountable and perceive that they will gain from the L&T sessions in order to attend, engage and learn. Cunnane (2012) agrees that HE staff play a key role in creating a sense of engagement amongst students with regard to their studies.

6.3.4 A lack of awareness

As highlighted, students awareness can impact on students sense of accountability and in turn engagement. The content below will highlight that students' awareness is lacking, which will negatively impact on students' sense of accountability and subsequent engagement.

The factors that the alumni felt they developed that helped prepare them for the working world could be grouped into following five themes:

Self management (n=13)	Confidence (n=10)	Ability to communicate and work with others (n = 12)	Developed, matured, grew as a person (n = 13)	Foundations for the Sports Science world of work (n = 7)
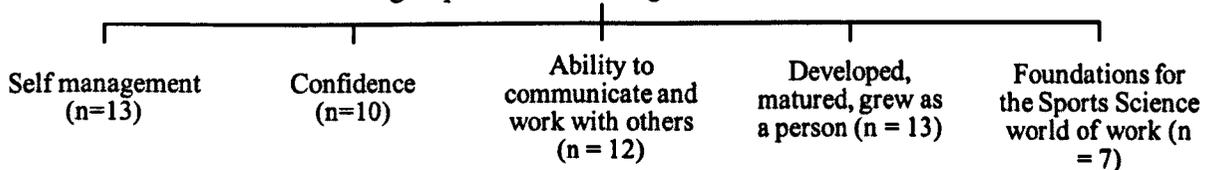
The alumni reported that their HE experience had a positive impact on preparing them for the world of work. It was notable that the factors that impacted on preparing the alumni for the world of work were more dominantly related to the process of the university experience as opposed to the actual discipline content of the SSES curriculum. Ashwin *et al.* (2011) also found that personal development was central to students gain from HE. Since employers tend to value generic skills more highly than technical understanding, the alumni university experience will have positively helped to prepare them in part for the requirements of employers (Harvey *et al.*1997). However, the alumni reported that they only began to recognise the benefit of aspects of their HE experience and the attributes they possessed when they started to put them into practice in the workplace. This supports the findings from Leggott and Stapleford (2004), who demonstrated that students only become aware of the skills they developed at university and the applicability of such skills after entering the workplace. Glover *et al.* (2002) reported that students do not recognise how their experiences at university are applicable post HE. This highlights that there needs to be an increased awareness amongst students regarding the attributes they are developing alongside their degree courses and how they can relate and be applied

post HE to the world of work requirements, a notion that was supported by the phase 1, 2 and 3 subjects. Understanding that their degree is operational and that they can meet the requirements of the world of work will enhance engagement and students' confidence regarding their preparedness for post HE. Students need to be prepared and confident about the prospect of post HE, as opposed to unprepared and nervous (recommendations for how to enhance students' self awareness will be summarised).

6.3.5 World of work requirements

As discussed, students need to be prepared to meet the requirements of the world of work, and it is therefore important to make the world of work requirements central to L&T content and HE culture. Through the alumni, staff and students involved with phases 1 and 2 of this research programme, requirements of the world of work could be identified. Such requirements are presented in Figure 7 below. This research is unique because it offers an interpretation of the requirements of employers and the world of work from the perceptions of alumni, university staff and guest lecturers, all with experience of the reality of the world of work and an awareness of what is required to be effective and successful from the perspectives of both employers and employees. Whilst an employer can specify what they require, an employee can specify what is required in order to enter and succeed in the working world.

The world of work requirements

Interpersonal working ability (Based on the work place experiences of interviewed alumni, and advice from the staff in the L&T sessions).

Graduates must be personable.
- Must fit comfortably into the workplace.
- Must be able to effectively interact with a range of different populations.
- Must be effective with different types of communication (e.g. face to face, telephone, group, presentations, written, email).
- Must be able to work in an interdisciplinary team.
- Must be adaptable.

Added value (Based on the work place experiences of interviewed alumni, and advice from the staff in the L&T sessions).

The alumni felt that degree level knowledge is taken as a prerequisite by employers, and that employers are more interested in the type of person that a graduate is. The degree alone is not enough.

Graduates are required to be innovative. They need to offer something that makes them exceptional.
- Students need to build around their degrees and invest time engaging with a variety of different opportunities.
- Exceptional people to work with exceptional people.

Self management (Based on the work place experiences of the alumni).

Graduates must have the independence and self discipline to take ownership of their motivation, organisation and time management.
Graduates must take initiative, and make steps to drive the company in question forward.

NB: The alumni reported that their experiences at university helped them to develop the ability to 'self manage'. The attributes that were developed included:
- The discipline to work independently.
- Effective time management.
- The ability to research and critically analyse knowledge and information.

The ability to 'toe the line' (Based on the work place experiences of the interviewed alumni)

- Graduates must work hard and always try to do their best.
- Graduates must do what is required based on the schedule of the employer and the job.
- Must be willing (and able) to learn, adapt and be flexible, based on the demands of the employer and the job.

Self awareness and marketability (Based on advice from the staff in the L&T sessions).

It is important that students are aware of the skills that they are gaining and developing as part of their university experience.

Students require self awareness in order to effectively market themselves to potential employers.

NB: The alumni only became aware of the attributes that they had developed as a result of their university experience when they started to put such attributes into practice in the work place. Furthermore, the focus group students demonstrated that they were unaware of the world of work requirements that they had developed alongside their degree. There needs to be an increased awareness of the attributes students are developing alongside their degree and the applicability of such attributes to the world of work. If students are aware of their attributes, they will be better able to effectively market themselves to potential employers, and better able to apply their attributes in the workplace, helping to diminish the apparent existing skills gap.

A good work ethic (Based on the work place experiences of the interviewed alumni).

The alumni interviewed in this study feel that graduates must have a good work ethic and attitude. They feel that graduates:
- Must be motivated, enthusiastic and committed regarding their job.
- Must have passion, desire and drive to work in their given industry.

NB: For the alumni, enjoying their job was important. Not only is it important for a person to work hard to achieve the requirements of the job, it is also important for the job to meet the requirements of the person. Students must be made aware of the importance of pursuing post HE options that are relevant to their individual needs, skills and interests.

Knowledge & Experience Triad (Based on advice from the staff in the L&T sessions).

Students require a combination of technical knowledge, craft knowledge and experience in order to be adequately prepared for the world of work.

Technical knowledge is a prerequisite:
- This is knowledge about the key components that underpin practical skills, techniques or concepts.
  - This knowledge is gained from the L&T degree components.
  - Technical knowledge alone is not sufficient for the world of work.

It is essential that all students gain meaningful work experience. In order to be meaningful, work experience must:
- Develop the requirements of the world of work.
- Reflect the reality of the world of work.
  - Where possible, be relative to students' post HE aspirations.

Craft knowledge is the ability to effectively apply technical knowledge into a world of work which is constantly changing and variable in its nature.
- Craft knowledge is not taught. It can only be learnt from experience.
- Craft knowledge develops over prolonged engagement with experience.
  - *It's ok understanding the respiratory system, but can you then go and do a VO2max with a 10 year old? Can you do a bleep test with a 40 year old?*
  - *You may have prepared an amazing presentation for a football team, but how do you ensure that they engage and don't sit there on their mobile phones? I can't teach you that, you have to get out there and experience it, learn from being in those situations, learn from mistakes.*

Figure 7: The world of work requirements

This research programme revealed that the SSES provides excellent, world class technical knowledge, accounting in part for the 'Knowledge & Experience Triad' in the figure above, but the other world of work requirements are not accounted for to the same world class standard. As highlighted in the literature review, there is an apparent 'skills gap' between the skills possessed by graduates and the requirements of the world of work. Graduates' academic knowledge base is overemphasised, and although a degree is a prerequisite for many careers, it is no longer a distinguishing factor in many cases with a growing emphasis on the need for wider employability skills (Brown *et al.* 2003, Kay *et al.* 2007). The SSES therefore needs to account for the other requirements of the world of work in order to prepare students for their post HE lives and diminish the skills gap. In the context of the USEM model of employability (see page 11), it appears that the SSES is accounting for the 'U' component of the model, and that the 'S, E and M' factors require addressing. The past and present students involved in this research programme felt that students need to be given the opportunity to gain more practical skills that relate to and develop the world of work requirements during their degree. The evident skills gap between HE and the workplace suggests that there needs to be a closer fit between what is taught in HE and the skills required in the economy (Browne 2010, Leitch 2006, Universities UK 2006). Denholm (2011) advised that HEIs should develop their curriculums and L&T in order to account for students' future employment needs.

In order to prepare students for the world of work and diminish the apparent skills gap, teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) needs to be aligned to the requirements of the world of work. TLA should resemble world of work application. Crebert *et al.* (2004) underlined the importance of embedding the development and assessment of generic skills and abilities in HE. ➡ The world of work requirements, ethics and cultures should be instilled and embedded within the SSES and its students, creating an environment that replicates the world of work and its components. The UKCES (2009) suggested that HE learning environment should resemble the workplace. ➡ The students' university experience will therefore effectively train and prepare them for the world of work. The development and preparation for post HE should be equally as valued as technical and academic skill development. A student's career should begin when they enter HE, supporting the suggestion from Barnett (2010) and O'Regan (2010) that HE should be orientated around preparation for post HE life as opposed to preparation for employability.

At the staff away day, the SSES director revealed that the educational aims of the SSES are:

To prepare students for employability, in a wide variety of Sport and Exercise related fields, and more general graduate employment (and equip for post graduate study).

Such aims should be restructured to account for developing students personally and professionally in preparation for their post HE lives. Preparing students to live prosperous post HE lives will in turn positively impact on the economy.

6.3.6 Post HE Preparation and Support

Embedding the world of work requirements in the SSES is not enough alone to account for adequately preparing graduates for post HE. As demonstrated, phase 2 and 3 students reported that the SSES did not meet their post HE preparing expectation. Furthermore, there was a lack of student engagement with the opportunities provided, and students lacked awareness of the extent of their post HE preparation. According to the staff in phase 2 of this research programme, preparation for post HE and PDP was embedded within the SSES and supported by the personal tutor system. However, the phase 2 and 3 subjects reported that the personal tutor system designed to support PDP and post HE preparation was ineffective. More needs to be done to help support students' professional development and preparation for post HE. The HE experience can be life changing, as it is a time when knowledge, skills, values and personality are developed (HECSU/AGCAS 2011). The maturation and personal development that the phase 1 alumni reported experiencing at university demonstrates that for many students, entering HE is a big step in their maturation and personal development, and therefore support and guidance through this process would be beneficial, if not essential. This was a notion that was supported throughout this research programme. Furthermore, students are not used to taking responsibility within an educational setting, which impacts on their engagement with the post HE preparing opportunities provided by the SSES. Students need support, guidance and encouragement to help them develop the ability to take responsibility and engage with post HE preparing opportunities. Without this ability, students will not be prepared for having to take responsibility in the world of work. This research programme proposes that in addition to making the world of work requirements central to the SSES L&T culture and content, it is important that students are provided with support and guidance regarding their personal and professional development. The personal tutor system experienced by the subjects in this research programme did not reflect the reality of the world of work, and therefore did not prepare them for post HE. Increasing the 'toe the line' discipline work ethic and making students feel accountable to the personal tutor system will better prepare students for what will be required of them in the working world. Creating relationships between staff and students that reflect relationships students face post HE will help to prepare students for the realities of the working world. Furthermore, those involved with the implementation of the support network must be able to meet the demands of the role by being available, approachable, and able to provide students with the support, guidance and nurture that they require.

6.3.7 Enhancing students' awareness

Such support needs to be orientated around transparency, resulting in an enhanced student awareness. As previously discussed, a lack of awareness can negatively impact on students' post HE preparation. Students need to be made aware of the importance and need of preparing for post HE. As previously discussed, the ADC means that students need to perceive a 'need' in order to engage. Students need to

be made more aware of the reality of the working world and the fact that a degree is not the key to the world of work. In order to enhance students' understanding of the importance of the opportunities and advice that the SSES offer, students need to have a better understanding of the relationship between HE and the world of work, and to be aware that the world of work requires a lot more from them than a given degree classification. As previously discussed, the alumni demonstrated that they lacked awareness of the attributes that they were developing and gaining whilst they were at university and how they were applicable to the world of work. Glover *et al.* (2002) found that students are unaware of the requirements of the world of work. In many cases, students will have gained the skills they require for the workplace, but they need to be made aware of the skills they possess and can offer to potential employers (Bowers-Brown and Harvey 2004, Leitch 2006). Since graduates can be at a disadvantage if they do not understand the world of work requirements, it is important to make steps towards enhancing students' awareness of such requirements (Brewer 2009). There needs to be an increased awareness of the general as opposed to discipline specific impact the HE experience has on preparing students for their post HE lives. HE should be aware of the importance of developing non-discipline specific world of work requirements. Students need to be informed and made aware of how curriculum interventions and the learning and development they are undergoing at HE relates to the world of work requirements. The need to increase students' awareness of the value of curriculum interventions and the world of work preparing attributes that are being gained and developed whilst at university supports recommendations from Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004), Brewer (2009), Leitch (2006), Yorke and Knight (2006). As suggested by GEES (2008), the links between the classroom and the workplace need to be made evident. GEES (2008) highlighted that much of the teaching in HE is relevant to the workplace, but students are not always made aware of it. This notion was exemplified by the alumni involved in phase 1 of this research programme, who only became aware of the attributes they had developed at university when they started to apply them in the work place. Research reported in the Burgess (2007) review found that employers were concerned by graduates' inability to articulate their experience and achievements and relate them to the job role in question. The HEA (2006) advised that there should be a focus on students' ability to communicate with employers the professional and personal employability aspects that have developed as a result of their HE experience. Making students aware of the world of work requirements they are being equipped with will result in students being able to enter the world of work with the requirements employers' need, the ability to market themselves during job application processes, and the ability to apply such requirements in the workplace (Burgess 2007). As stated by Yorke (2006), HE can facilitate the development of students' awareness of the understanding, skills and attributes that will help them have successful careers. Students need to be engaged with an effective support network to help them understand and become aware of the learning and development process they are undergoing, and how that relates to the world of work requirements. When the alumni were discussing the impact HE had on preparing them for the world of work, they gave very little mention to the Sports Science discipline

content, and referred more to the general world of work requirements (for example, communication, confidence, self management). Students therefore need to understand that their degree prepares them for the world of work in general and not just the Sports Science discipline specific world. Informing students how their learning relates to the world of work requirements will help to counteract the ADC and enhance students' sense of accountability to engage. The SSES needs to be more transparent and open about the benefits of all employability related opportunities being provided. Students need to be focused and made aware of the importance of the opportunities, advice and recommendations provided to them, in order to identify a 'need' to engage. This research programme suggests that HEI's should focus on the development of the 'M' component of the USEM employability model (see page 11). That being, students' self awareness regarding their learning and ability to reflect on their learning.

6.3.8 Accounting for students post HE aspirations

Alongside enhancing awareness, students need to be supported and guided through the process of determining and appropriately preparing for their post HE aspirations. This process should involve gaining an awareness of the wide range of post HE opportunities that are available, and consider how such options suit students' individual needs. In phase 2 part 1 of this research programme, the SSES staff advised students to consider post HE options in relation to themselves. The students however did not know where to start looking at options, and had difficulty deciding which options were best for them. As demonstrated by the phase 1 alumni, Sports Science graduates end up in a variety of different jobs. Only four out of the seventeen alumni were working in the Sports Science industry at the time of interviewing (Table 3, page 33). There needs to be an increased awareness amongst students regarding the wide range of post HE options that are available to SSES graduates, and the fact that not all SSES graduates end up working in the Sports Science industry. Due to the wide range of post HE options available to Sports Science graduates, the SSES needs to make students aware of all the potential post HE avenues. Since students are orientated to pursue their degrees and post HE preparations in different ways, HEIs need to ensure that they meet the needs of the broader student population (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009). Students should be supported to determine post HE goals to work towards. Such preparation and support is required from pre-application to ensure that students make the right choices to suit their needs, and are aware of the reality and outcome of their course. As part of the support network, the SSES needs to guide and prepare students towards post HE options that are relevant to their individual needs, skills and interests. Students should be encouraged to pursue options that they feel passionate and motivated about, in order to account for the 'good work ethic' world of work requirement (see Figure 7, page 310). Such support can guide students through the experience of deciding what direction they want their post HE lives to go in and how they can achieve that. Due to the competitive nature of the graduate job market, graduates require something 'extra', over and above their academic qualifications (Green 2009). The opportunity to undertake a broad range of additional opportunities alongside the degree course should therefore be embedded

into the SSES. Students should take steps towards gaining the requirements for their desired post HE options, for example, experience, additional qualifications and courses. A student's time at university should be aligned to their post HE aspirations. This will result in students leaving university prepared and in a position to pursue their post HE aspirations. In phase 2 of this research programme, the staff highlighted to students the importance of gaining experience for world of work preparation. According to phase 1, 2 and 3 of this research programme, experience helps to prepare students for the world of work by enhancing their ability to compete in the graduate job market; provide students with opportunities to network; develop contacts and trial potential job ideas; increase students' awareness of the range of post HE options and the world of work requirements; develop world of work requirements and determine the best post HE goals to suit their needs. Gaining insight into and trailing potential job roles helps students to develop post HE aspirations. With an increase in aspirations comes an increase in accountability, which in turn leads to an increase in engagement with L&T opportunities. These advantages of experience expand on the benefits of experience highlighted in the literature review (page 7). The phase 1 and 3 subjects even stated that it is essential that students gain world of work experience in order to be prepared for the world of work. As highlighted in the literature review, a lack of work experience is a key barrier in the gaining of employment (Wilson 2012). High Fliers (2012) revealed that 52% of employers reported not considering graduates unless they had gained relevant work experience. Furthermore, 36% of graduate vacancies in 2012 will be filled by graduates who have previously worked with the organisations in question (High Fliers 2012). Despite encouragement from staff, students in phase 2 reported that they did not engage with experience. Students reported that they *'did not know where to start'*, and that a lack of confidence and accountability prevented them engaging with work experience. Students' lack of confidence adds further credence to the need for focusing on the 'E' component of the USEM model. Students needed more support and encouragement to help them gain experience and insight into the world of work requirements and potential post HE options. They need more insight into experience options and how to engage with work experience. Students can be made to feel more accountable by gaining insight into the reality of the world of work, what employers want, and the importance of experience. According to Graduate Prospects (2011) and GEES (2008) the importance and benefits of engaging with work experience needs to be highlighted to HE students.
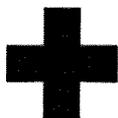
↑ Emphasis on gaining work experience **+** ↑ Awareness of importance of experience **=** ↑Accountability

The phase 2 and phase 3 subjects reported that the gaining of experience through SSES conducted placements can positively impact on learning and world of work preparation. The subjects gained from the placement application process, their technical knowledge was enhanced, they developed confidence, and appreciated being able to sample career ideas amongst other things. However, a

number of phase 1, 2 and 3 past and present students reported that their placements did not meet their expectations and could be improved. According to the subjects, students need to spend more time on placements. Students should have more opportunities to gain experience and insight into the world of work, sample different post HE options and learn from their experiences. Ways of incorporating more placement and experience could involve shadowing, informational interviewing, making time for block placements, and incorporating placements throughout the three years of the degree programme. The subjects reported a lack of engagement with their placement providers and a lack of challenging tasks. Students should have more responsibility within their placements. Placement experiences should be meaningful and have a purpose in which the relationship between the students and the placement provider reflects the true 'employer-employee' reality of the world of work. Since the subjects reported a conflict for time, placements should be conducted at an appropriate time during the degree course, so that it does not interfere with other L&T. Regarding placement preparation, more information, time and guidance is required to allow students to make an informed placement choice based on their needs. Subjects stated that there needs to be an increased range of placements options to reflect the reality of the world of work and the range of individual post HE needs and aspirations of students. This will increase students' awareness of the wide range of post HE options available to them. There also needs to be an increased awareness among students regarding the reality of the world of work, including the Sports Science sector. Students need to know what post HE options are achievable. The importance of interest should be considered when assigning students to placements, since students will engage more and provide a better service if interested. Students' contacts could be utilised to set up placement opportunities. Not only will this increase the placement opportunities and develop students' contacts, but it will engage students more in the placement process, enhancing ownership, accountability and engagement.

6.4 Recommendations in action

This research programme proposes that a support network and the world of work requirements and realities need to be embedded within the SSES. Figures 8 and 9 demonstrate some examples of how the world of work requirements can be embedded into the SSES culture and curriculum. Figure 7 presents the role of curriculum design and assessment in developing the world of work requirements. Figure 8 demonstrates how the support network can support and develop the world of work requirements throughout the duration of the degree programme. The suggestions for methods of assessing and supporting the development of the world of work requirements are a synthesis of the findings from phases 1, 2 and 3 of this research programme, alongside suggestions from the researcher that are the product of her engagement with this research programme. Suggestions that have collated from the research programme are tagged with the page number that relates to the origin of the recommendation. Figure 8 built on the figure which was presented at the end of phase 2 on page 220, which summarises the post HE preparing assessment orientated recommendation that were

made by the students and staff involved with phase 2 of this research programme. It should be noted that the recommendations included in Figures 8 and 9 are just some examples of ways that students can be better supported and prepared for their post HE lives. The recommendations are suggestions and are by no means conclusive or exhaustive.

NB: Figures 7, 8 and 9 can also be found in appendix 36.

Central node: World of work requirements: Transparent Assessment & Curriculum Design

Branch nodes: The Knowledge & Experience triad · Interpersonal working ability · Added value: What can students offer over and above their academic qualifications? · Self management · A good work ethic · Self awareness and marketability · The ability to 'toe the line'

Interpersonal working ability

Interdisciplinary group work should be assessed. However, group work must reflect the reality of the world of work in order to effectively prepare students for post HE. Assigning individual roles and assessing individuals' contribution can help to promote 'real world' group work) (page 135, 253 &256-257).

Smaller sized L&T sessions can enhance community, engagement and dialogue between staff and students. Assessing students' contribution and attendance during smaller sized L&T sessions, will enhance engagement in the L&T content and sessions, which in turn will enhance students' interpersonal working ability (page 172).

Presentations with questions and answer sessions will develop students' ability to convey information to others. NB: oral assessments and feedback are good for 'wicked competencies' that are complex and difficult to convey (page 132). Presentations developing students' confidence and ability to communicate and convey information to people (page 257).

SSES student led conference: Alongside presenting, students can be involved with the organisation of the conference in a team set up.

Involve different populations in assessments, to enhance students' experience of working with different populations (see page 186). For example, employers, alumni, peers.

The phase 2 focus group students reported applying and developing their interpersonal working ability via their placement experience (page 192).

Added value: What can students offer over and above their academic qualifications?

Due to the importance of personal skills in the world of work, students' effectiveness in mock interview scenarios should be assessed. Evaluative feedback about the interview should be provided, developing students' self awareness, and students' ability to self assess (page 135).

The opportunity to undertake additional opportunities alongside the degree course needs to be embedded into the SSES (page 84&121).

Assess enthusiasm and attitude in relation to a given entity. For example, SSES ambassador scheme related activities (see Figure 9) (page 211&219).

Recognise students' engagement with additional opportunities through assessment (page 142&211).

Embed industry required qualifications into the curriculum and assessment (page 80, 122-124&289).

Self management

The alumni reported that their experiences at university helped them to develop the ability to 'self manage', by developing the ability to work independently, manage time, research, analyse and be more adaptable (Table 10, page 50).

Placing students in a position of responsibility will help reflect the self management that is required in the world of work. The phase 2 focus groups reported that they gained from working independently during their placement experience (page 187).

The Knowledge & Experience triad

The world class staff within the SSES means that the SSES provides excellent technical knowledge. However, the other world of work requirements are not accounted for to the same world class standard (page 133).

The SSES needs the staff expertise and specialism to account for the other components.

The SSES staff are not comfortable to account for preparing students for the other world of work requirements and make a call for 'focused assessment guidelines' (page 128&133).

The gaining of experience is essential. Experience encompasses numerous post HE preparing benefits (see pages 86-87, 126&137-140). Experience can be incorporated into the curriculum via shadowing, 'informational interviewing', block placements and gaining experience throughout the degree course (page 199).

Recognise students' engagement with work experience through assessment and evaluative feedback (page 142&211).

The phase 1, 2 and 3 subjects all reported that they learnt more through practical work and experience, and feel that students should be provided the opportunity to engage with more practical, experience based L&T (pages 82-83, 86-87, 131).

Assessment needs to be shifted from hypothetical to 'real world' scenarios. In essence, students need to be assessed on what they are doing rather than what they would do (page 131). For example, observations of practical L&T sessions, world of work scenarios, experiences (even via video recordings of work experience), responsiveness to questions in such scenarios, and targets to achieve during work experience (pages 136&220).

The Research Institute status of the SSES means that it holds countless opportunities to prepare students with invaluable practical, post HE preparing experiences. This resource should be utilised to full potential.

Professional standards could be used to determine assessments that relate to the practical requirements of the world of work.

A good work ethic

Assess enthusiasm and attitude in relation to a given entity, for example, the SSES student ambassador scheme (see Figure 9), labs, tutorials, placements (page 211&220). Students should be rewarded for proactive and hard working behaviour.

A good work ethic can be encouraged in students through creating a sense of accountability e.g. students who have to work within or outside of the SSES with members of the public will feel a need to ensure their knowledge base and professional conduct is sound. Creating a sense of community between the students and the staff within the SSES is another way of creating a sense of accountability within students. If students feel accountable to staff, they will not want to 'let them down' when doing work for them (page 277).

Page 280 demonstrates the impact interest and enjoyment can have on students' learning and engagement.

Self awareness and marketability

Mock interview scenarios with evaluative feedback will enhance students awareness of how to effectively market themselves to potential employers, and develop students' self awareness and ability to self assess (page 135). The phase 2 focus group students discussed gaining (from their pre-placement interview (page 186).

Reflective assessments can be used to develop students self awareness. A developmental approach over the duration of the degree combined with an effective mentoring system is required (see reflective practice recommendations) (page 210).

The ability to 'toe the line'

Assess students engagement with tutors, to reflect the discipline involved in the world of work (page 81&109).

Placing students in a position of responsibility will help reflect the accountability that is involved in the world of work. For example, students can be given targets to hit during placements (page 211), they could be observed on placement or in work settings; they could be required to report back to staff regarding their academic, professional and/or personal development. The focus group students demonstrated how their placement created a sense of accountability and need to engage (page 187).

Figure 8: The world of work requirements: transparent assessment and curriculum design

Guidelines for post HE preparing assessment have been synthesised from phases 1, 2 and 3 of this research programme and are presented below. Due to the assessment driven nature of students, assessments need to be effectively aligned to the intended learning outcomes and the realities and requirements of the world of work in order to effectively prepare students for post HE. Students need to be fully informed and understanding about the benefits of engaging with any given curriculum intervention in order to engage and gain from the totality of the experience and its intended benefits. It would be more appropriate to verbalise complexities, or 'wicked competencies', as opposed to presenting and assessing them in a written form. Assessment that makes students feel accountable enhances engagement and learning. Examples of accountable assessment referred to by the phase 2 and 3 subjects include presentations, group work and observations. The realities and requirements of the world of work need to be better aligned to assessment, in order to effectively prepare students. For example, group work needs to better reflect the reality of group work in the world of work, and presentations need to reflect presentations in the world of work. Assessment must prepare students for the world of work, not for passing exams. Evaluative feedback is a good way to assess, develop and prepare students for the world of work, by increasing students' awareness of what they did well and what they need to work on. This will effectively develop students' ability to self assess and identify what they have learnt, which will in turn prepare students for post HE and lifelong learning.

Reflective practice assessment recommendations have been created and are presented on page 209. Figure 9 below demonstrates how the support network can support and develop the world of work requirements throughout the duration of the degree programme.

Interpersonal working ability

There should be an enhanced community within the SSES involving more engagement and dialogue between the staff and the students, and within the student cohort. This will provide students with more opportunity to develop their communication skills, which will in turn enhance students' confidence in their interpersonal working ability. Enhancing community will also enhance student engagement with the opportunities provided by the SSES (pages 168-170).

Smaller sized L&T sessions can enhance community and interpersonal working ability (labs, practical, seminars, tutorials, tutor time) (page 172&219).

A better established support network will help to enhance engagement between the staff and students and the community within the SSES (page 174&305-306).

SSES social events could be organised e.g. days out, weekends away and a SSES pub night (page 168) (which could take place on a Friday night, encouraging a Monday to Friday working week (page 294)).

SSES clubs and teams will enhance the community and interpersonal working ability of the SSES student cohort. Examples of potential clubs include: sport, toast masters, qualifications and courses.

A team culture within the SSES could be created by getting students involved and inputting into their course in a team set up. This will get students used to inputting and contributing to process within a team (page 135).

Give students the resources to create their own placement opportunities e.g. student run community projects: play schemes, exercise referral, health testing/training for clubs (can be a component of the SSES student ambassador scheme, see below).

Students' contacts could be utilised to set up placement opportunities (page 197). Not only will this increase the placement opportunities and develop students' contacts, but it will engage students more in their course, enhancing ownership, accountability and engagement.

Many students will require support and guidance to help them develop and feel confident and comfortable engaging in dialogue with staff (page 265).

Students need to be provided with additional opportunities and suggestions to engage with, such as the opportunity to gain additional qualifications, courses and work experience (Table 13, page 74&218-219).

Keep in touch and build a network of contacts with SSES alumni. Utilise alumni for work experience and placement opportunities.

Careers & training fairs (Table 13, page 74) (including work experience/placement provider recruitment opportunities).

Added value: What can students offer over and above their academic qualifications?

Getting students involved with their academic community e.g. social events, support network, SSES teams/clubs.

Getting students involved with inputting into their course e.g. student led conferences, placements initiated through students' contacts (page 197).

Getting students involved with RISES opportunities (Table 13, page 74&293) e.g. volunteering as a participant, helping postgraduate students with testing.

Developing new student run projects within the RISES and the community e.g. play schemes, exercise referral, health testing/training, testing/training for clubs.

Providing students with work experience opportunities.

A SSES student ambassador's scheme could be created which would involve:

Self management

The students' timetable could be filled with SSES student ambassador scheme components and factors to promote effective learning and preparation for post HE. Alumnus 11 advised students to gain qualifications whilst they are at university, stating: *'I don't think people realise just how much time you have available to yourself whilst you're at uni'* (page 78).

As demonstrated in the below quote, the phase 2 focus group students stated that a fuller timetable was desirable: *R: In first and second year you're like, 'woohoo, we've got hardly any hours in uni', but actually, you're paying to go to uni, and you're only there a couple of hours a week, it's a joke, and some courses, people are in 9 until 5 all the time, and have so much contact time and so much stuff, and reality, to learn, I'd rather be in uni all the time 2.3689-3693*

The alumni reported that their experiences at university helped them to develop the ability to 'self manage', by developing their ability to work independently, manage time, research, analyse and be more adaptable (page 51). However, it is important that students are made aware of the attributes that are being developed alongside their degrees (page 59-60).

Students will be provided with the opportunity to employ initiative through the SSES ambassador scheme activities, which can include students inputting into their course, developing contacts for placements and managing a student conference (amongst other things). The initiative students employ through these interventions can be marketed to potential employers, which is important since graduates have to exemplify what they 'have done', and not what employers can 'expect' them to do (page 192).

Students are not used to taking responsibility within an educational setting, which impacts on their engagement with post HE preparing opportunities provided by the SSES. Students need support, guidance and encouragement to help them develop the ability to take responsibility. Without this ability, students will not be prepared for the world of work, since they will have to self manage and do things for themselves post HE (page 291).

The Knowledge & Experience triad

The world class staff within the SSES means that the SSES provides excellent technical knowledge. However, the other world of work requirements are not accounted for to the same world class standard (page 133).

Students need more support in gaining experience to account for their individual post HE aspirations and needs (page 148). They need more insight into experience options and how to engage with work experience (page 152).

A broader range of experience and placement options need to be offered (pages 79-81, 197-198&246-247).

Students can be made to feel more accountable and aware of the importance of experience by gaining insight into the reality of the world of work and what employers want (page 141) (for example, via guest lectures).

Experience must reflect the true nature of the working world, by being 'meaningful' and having a purpose in which both the students and the placement providers gain from, providing students with a true experience of being an employee, as opposed to a placement student (page 82, 201&246-247).

Encourage and support students in developing contacts through experience (page 88, 137-138&242-243).

Students must be made more aware of the importance of passion, drive, enthusiasm, motivation and commitment , and finding post HE options that meet these requirements (page 71&146-147). The SSES needs to make students aware of all the potential post HE avenues, and guide and prepare students towards post HE options that are relevant to their individual needs, skills and interests (page 152). Insight into the career paths of alumni would be helpful (page 48). Encouraging students to engage with curriculum and WRL interventions that they feel passion, drive, enthusiasm, motivation and commitment towards will instil a sense of accountability within students, which will in turn create a perceived 'need' to engage.

A mock job interview process with evaluative feedback (page 135).

A good work ethic

Self awareness and marketability

Increase awareness of the world of work requirements + Increase self awareness of all attributes and how they relate to the world of work requirements = Increased marketability (page 217).

Peer mentors can be utilised to enhance students' awareness of the importance of the opportunities provided, which in turn will enhance student engagement (Table 13, page 74). A peer mentoring system will prepare both the students and mentors for the world of work requirements.

Insight into the applied experiences of others increased students' confidence in their knowledge and the ability to make a difference in the world of work, as it provided students with the opportunity to evaluate how they would react in the situations experienced by others (page 190).

Experience working with people from outside of the university context will increase students' confidence in the extent of their knowledge, increasing students' confidence in their ability to 'make a difference' in the world of work (page 113-114).

Utilise employers to enhance students' awareness of the world of work reality and requirements (page 140), for example, in the form of guest lecturers (page 113-114).

Provide continued support for students post HE to ensure they have a smooth transition into the world of work (Table 13, page 74&149). This could be achieved through an alumni network.

Students need to be engaged with an effective mentoring system to help students understand and become aware of the learning and development process that they are undergoing, and how that relates to the world of work requirements (page 218).

The ability to 'toe the line'

The alumni reported that their employers expected them to 'toe the line' (Table 11, page 61). Creating effective, disciplined relationships between SSES staff and students can prepare students for the relationships they will experience in the world of work (with both employers and colleagues). Embedding the 'toe the line' discipline work ethic and making students feel accountable to the support system, will better prepare students for what will be required of them in the working world. The support system should reflect the world of work.

World of work requirements: Transparent Support

Figure 9: The world of work requirements: transparent support

6.5 Recommendations for further research

An obvious limitation related to this research programme is the small sample size that was involved. Whilst qualitative research methods create in depth, detailed information about the sample and the situations studied, it lacks generalisability (Patton 2002). However, as stated by Smith and Fletcher (2001), qualitative research will not provide representative samples, but it will provide a representative reflection of the range of perceptions regarding the phenomenon in question. The apparent complexity of the findings from this research programme represents the need for doing qualitative, in depth research regarding the concept of employability and preparing students for post HE. Quantitative research masks the diversity of the student experience (Brennan *et al.* 2005), and does not do justice to the complexity of the issues being addressed. This research programme therefore challenges the use of positivist methodology research designs in relation to the concept of employability and preparing students for post HE, supporting the findings and subsequent recommendations of O'Regan (2009). Despite this, there is the potential to build on this research programme by triangulating its findings with the large pool of related quantitatively gathered data that exists both within the SSES and nationally (e.g. the internal SSES student evaluation questionnaires, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) questionnaires, and National Student Survey data). There is also other data that has been collected within the SSES as part of the CETL and as general L&T research that could be involved in triangulation. For example, CETL sabbaticals were conducted by two members of SSES staff. Such triangulation will build on and supplement understanding. Due to the small sample size involved in this research programme, further research could involve an investigation of the perceptions of a larger sample range regarding the phenomenon in question. Since the research programme only focused on the SSES, further research could involve applying the same research protocol to evaluate the post HE preparing opportunities provided by different degree courses, different disciplines, and different HEIs. This research programme involved gaining insight into the post HE advice and recommendations of staff, including SSES staff, university careers staff, and guest lecturers. Further research could involve interviewing such staff regarding their perceptions of the concept of employability and preparing students for post HE. Interviewing SSES staff regarding their perceptions and intentions of the post HE preparing opportunities that are being provided to students will further explore the dissonance between the opportunities provided by the SSES and students' engagement. SSES staff could be interviewed regarding the employability phenomenon alongside their perceived role and ability to prepare students for the world of work. This will identify any issues and needs that require addressing amongst the staff. Guest lecturers and other employees and employers could be interviewed in order to further explore the requirements of the world of work. Since, the ethnography phase of this research programme focused on the L&T culture of SSES students, ethnographic research could be conducted within the world of work in order to explore what is required of HE graduates.

It would be of interest to implement, monitor and evaluate the recommendations from this research programme. For example, the proposed support network, the world of work requirements curriculum, and opportunities to engage with post HE preparing opportunities could be implemented, with students' perceptions of such interventions monitored via interviews and focus groups. Students post HE preparation could be determined by assessing students' ease of transition from HE into the world of work by assessing students' satisfaction, perceptions of post HE preparedness and direction both prior to course completion and at appropriate time points post graduation. It would be of interest to research the implementation of the experience, placement and reflective practice assessment recommendations, in order to evaluate such recommendations and determine how best to incorporate the gaining of experience alongside degree courses.

During this research programme, the researcher felt that pursuing students' learning styles in relation to post HE would be fruitful. However, the vast data set that resulted from this research programme meant that not all points of interest that arose from the data could be pursued. The researcher recommends that further research utilises Dweck's (2000) work on self-theories and Meyer and Land's (Flanagan 2012, Meyer *et al.* 2010) work on threshold concepts to identify mindsets and learning styles in relation to intelligence that may negatively impact on students' personal development and post HE preparation, and utilise the recommended support network to develop students' accordingly. Such research could further explore how to overcome the apparent ADC that exists within HE. The researcher also felt that L&T methods for personal development and post HE preparation could be further explored. In particular, the researcher felt that the assessment and feedback work by Sadler (2009, 2010, 2010$_A$), Nichol (2010, 2011), Boud (2000) and Price (2012) could be utilised to build on the findings of this research programme, and further explore how to prepare students' for post HE.

This research programme recommends that policy and good practice sharing within courses and between HEIs should take place on a more precedential level in order to encourage student engagement with the L&T interventions and opportunities provided. As demonstrated within this research programme, students made reference to examples of good practice from other courses and HEIs that they would have liked been engaged with as part of their own course (see page 132 for examples). As noted by Kay *et al.* (2007) students know how they want to be taught, and have ideas for how to improve and enhance learning. Further research could collate students' examples of good practice from different courses and HEIs, in order to create good practice L&T curriculum recommendations that can be shared within the HE sector to create courses that promote student engagement, learning and post HE preparation.

On a final note, the researcher recommends that any changes that result from this or any other research involving students' perceptions of their HE experience is fed back to students. Since students are central to the HE system, it is important to make students aware that they are actively involved in their

HE experience, and that their voice is being heard.

6.6 Conclusions

This research programme aimed to identify what more can be done to prepare students for the world of work requirements and diminish the apparent skills gap that exists between HE graduates and the world of work. This research programme demonstrated that students enter university with differing needs, but in general envisage that HE will develop them personally and result in them feeling more prepared for their lives post HE. HEIs need to ensure that they meet the individual post HE preparing needs of students (Barrie 2007, O'Regan 2009). Understanding the individual needs of students and providing them accordingly with the post HE preparing nurture and support that they require will result in them being better prepared to meet the requirements of the working world, which will in turn lead to a more skilled workforce that can enhance the economy and society. Such support needs to be orientated around transparency, resulting in enhanced student awareness. Students need to be engaged with an effective support network that is transparent regarding:

- The competitive reality of the world of work.
- The reality and outcome of their degree.
- The world of work requirements.
- How curriculum interventions are preparing students for the world of work reality and requirements.

Alongside enhancing awareness, students need to be supported and guided through the process of determining and appropriately preparing for their post HE aspirations. This process should involve:

- Gaining an awareness of the wide range of post HE opportunities that are available, and considering how such options suit students' individual needs.
- Gaining experience and sampling potential post HE options.

In order to better prepare students for post HE and diminish the apparent skills gap that exists between the skills graduates posses and the requirements of the world of work, there needs to be a closer fit between what is taught in HE and the skills required in the economy. The world of work requirements need to be made more central to HE L&T culture and content. A student's university experience should effectively train them for post HE and the world of work. In essence, a students' HE experience should be:

"A bit like a rocket-powered aircraft being lifted by a conventional one up into the stratosphere so that it can maximise its performance at altitude without a prohibitive expenditure of fuel to get there"
(Yorke 2006).

References

Adecco Group (2012) *Unlocking Britain's Potential* [online] available from <http://www.unlockingbritainspotential.co.uk/download/Unlocking-Britains-Potential-Feb-2012.pdf> [13 March 2012]

Ainley, P. and Allen, M. (2010) *Lost Generation? New strategies for youth and education.* London: Continuum

Allen, T., McManus, S., and Russell, J. (1999) 'Newcomer Socialization and Stress: Formal Peer Relationships as a Source of Support'. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* 54, 453 – 470

Allen, J., Ramaekers, G., and Van der Velden, R. (2005) 'Measuring Competencies of Higher Education Graduates'. *Directions for Institutional Research* 126, 49 – 59

Alvesson, M. (1993) *Cultural Perspectives on Organisations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Alvesson, M. (2003) 'Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure'. *Higher Education* 46, 167-193

Andresen, L. (2000) 'Teaching Development in Higher Education at Scholarly Practice: A reply to Rowland *et al.* 'Turning Academics into Teachers?' *Teaching in Higher Education* 5 (1), 23-31

Anderson, S. and Marsh, E. (2011) *Working towards your future: Making the most of your time in higher education.* Hertford: CBI/NUS

Ashwin, P., Abbas, A., and McLean, M. (2011) 'A bad deal for 'consumers'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 17 November available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=418163> [15 December 2011]

(The) Association of Graduate Recruiters (1995) *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century* Cambridge: The Association of Graduate Recruiters

(The) Association of Graduate Recruiters (2010) *Talent opportunity prosperity: A manifesto for graduate recruitment* Warwick: The Association of Graduate Recruiters

Astin, A. (1997) *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Astin, A. (1999) 'Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education.' *Journal of College Student Development* 40 (5), 518-529

Atkins, M. (1999) 'Oven-ready and Self-basting: taking stock of employability skills'. *Teaching in Higher Education* 4 (2), 267-280

Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control* New York: Freeman

Barnett, R. (2000) *Realising the University in an age of supercomplexity.* Buckingham: Open University Press/SRHE

Barnett, R. (2007) *A Will To Learn: Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty.* Buckingham: Open University Press/SRHE

Barnett, R. (2010) *Life-wide education: a new and transformative concept for higher education?* [conference presentation] Enabling a More Complete Education, 13 April 2010. Surrey, University of Surrey

Barrie, S. (2007) 'A conceptual framework for the teaching and learning of generic graduate attributes'. *Studies in Higher Education* 32 (4), 439-458

BASES (2008) *A Guide to Careers: In Sport and Exercise Sciences.* Leeds: Human Kinetics

BASES (2010) *A Guide to Careers: In Sport and Exercise Sciences.* Leeds: Human Kinetics

Bauer, K. and Bennett, J. (2003) 'Alumni Perceptions Used to Assess Undergraduate Research Experience'. *The Journal of Higher Education* 74 (2), 210-230: 214

Becker, H. (1958) 'Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation'. *American Sociological Review* 23 (6), 652-660

Bennett, N., Dunne, E., and Carré, C. (1999) 'Patterns of Core and Generic Skill Provision in Higher Education'. *Higher Education* 37 (1), 71-93

Berk, R. (2005) 'Survey of 12 Strategies to Measure Teaching Effectiveness'. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 17 (1), 48-62

Biddle, S., Markland, D., Gilbourne, D., Chatzisarantis, N., and Sparkes, A. (2001) 'Research methods in sport and exercise psychology: quantitative and qualitative issues'. *Journal of Sports Science* 19, 777-809

Biggs, J. (1999) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University.* 2nd edn. Berkshire: Open University Press

Black, P. and William, D. (2001) *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment.* King's College London School of Education: BERA short Final Draft

Blair, A. (2006) 'Graduates unfit for work, say top firms'. *Times Online* [online] 7 February available from < http://wwwteach.phy.bris.ac.uk/placements/Times.pdf> [27 February 2012]

Bloxham, S. and Campbell, L. (2010) 'Generating dialogue in assessment feedback: exploring the use of interactive cover sheets'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 35 (3) 291 300

Bogdan, R. and Biklen, K. (2007) *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theory and methods.* London: Pearson A & B

Boud, D. (2000) 'Sustainable assessment: rethinging assessment for the learning society'. *Studies in Continuing Education* 22 (2), 151-167

Boud, D. and Falchikov, N. (2006) 'Aligning assessment with long-term learning'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 31 (4), 399-413

Boud, D. and Walker, D. (1990) 'Making the most of experience'. *Studies in Continuing Education* 12 (2), 61-72

Bowers-Brown, T. and Harvey, L. (2004) 'Are there too many graduates in the UK? A literature review and an analysis of graduate employability'. *Industry & Higher Education* 18 (4), 243-254

Bowles (2011) 'Putting student engagement at the heart of HE – live chat best bits'. *The Guardian* [online] 26 October. available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/oct/26/student-engagement-tips> [10 March 2012]

Brennan, J., Williams, R., and Woodley, A. (2005) 'Alumni Studies in the United Kingdom'. *New Directions for Institutional Research* 126, 83-94

Brewer, G. (2009) 'Career planning and awareness in psychology undergraduates'. *Psychology Learning and Teaching* 8 (2), 37-42

Brown, P. (2007) 'When merit means nothing'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 20 July available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=209727&sectioncode=26> [7 January 2010]

Brown, S. and Knight, P. (1994) *Assessing Learners in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page

Brown, G., Bull, J., and Pendlebury, M. (1997) *Assessing student learning in higher education*. London: Routledge

Brown, P., Hesketh, A., and Williams, S. (2003) 'Employability in a Knowledge-Driven Economy'. *Journal of Education and Work* 16 (2), 107-126

Browne Report (2010) *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance* [online] available from <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/s/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf > [2 February 2009]

Burgess (2007) *Beyond the honours degree classification: The Burgess Group final report* London: Universities UK

CBI (2008) *Taking Stock: CBI education and skills survey 2008*. London: CBI

CETL AfL (2008) 'Assessment for Learning (AfL)' [online] available from <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sches/lt/afl/cetl_afl/whatis/?view=Standard> [15 November 2010]

CIPD (2010) *Employee Outlook report: Focus on graduate jobs*. London: CIPD

Coffey, A. (1996) 'The power of accounts: authority and authorship in ethnography'. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 9 (1), 61-74

Committee on Higher Education (1963) *Higher education: report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins* [online] available from <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/> [20 January 2012]

Cooper (2011) 'Putting student engagement at the heart of HE – live chat best bits'. *The Guardian* [online] 26 October. available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/oct/26/student-engagement-tips> [10 March 2012]

Coughlan, S. (2011) 'University applications for 2012 down 9%'. *BBC News Education & Family* [online] 24 October, available from < http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15430180> [13 November 2011]

Cunnane, S. (2012) 'Turn on, tune in, don't drop out'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 16 February. available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=419020> [18 February 2012]

Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B., Patrick, C., and Cragnolini, V. (2004) 'Developing generic skills at university, during work placement and in employment: graduates' perceptions'. *Higher Education Research & Development* 23 (2), 147-165

Creswell, J. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 2nd ed. London: SAGE

Creswell, J. and Miller, D. (2000) 'Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry'. *Theory into Practice* 39 (3), 124-130

Dacre Pool, L. and Sewell, P. (2007) 'The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate employability'. *Education + Training* 49 (4), 277-289

Delaney, A. (2004) 'Ideas to enhance higher education's impact on graduates' lives; alumni Recommendations'. *Tertiary Education and Management* 10 (2), 89-105

Denholm, J. (2011) *Scottish Higher Education Employability Conference: strengthening partnerships with employers, evaluation report* Edinburgh: The Higher Education Academy

Denzin, N. (1994) 'The Art and Politics of Interpretation'. in *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* ed. by Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. London: Sage, 500-515

Denzin, N. (1997) *Interpretive ethnography: ethnographic practices for the 21st century.* London: Sage

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (ed.) (2000) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* [white paper] London: The Stationery Office (Cm 8122)

doctorjob.com (2004) *Are graduate employability initiatives worth it? Student Survey July 2004.* Oxon: GTI Specialist Publishers

Drust, B. (2007) 'Observations from the football world: an outline of current practice in English football' [online] available from <http://www.slidefinder.net/d/drust_sabbatical_presentation/b_drust_sabbatical_presentation/15827402> [10 April 2012]

Drust, B., Mitchell, M., Zaitseva, E., Thompson, S., and Scott, M. (In submission) 'Lessons from the football world: developing a curricula that prepares science and football students for the real world.' *Industry and Higher Education*

Duffy, K., Anthony, D., and Vickers, F. (2008) 'Are E-portfolios an Asset to Learning and Placement?' [online] available from <http://www.asetonline.org/documents/AreE-PortfoliosAnAssetToLearningandPlacement-ASETandDMUReport-March2008_001.pdf> [12 March 2012]

Duncan, M., Lyons, M., and Al-Nakeeb, Y. (2007) 'You have to do it rather than being in a class and just listening.' The impact of problem-based learning on the students experience in sports and exercise biomechanics'. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education* 6 (1), 71-80

Dunne, E. and Zandstra, R. (2011) *Students as change agents: new ways of engaging with learning and teaching in Higher Education.* Bristol: ESCalate

Dweck, C. (2000) *Self-theories: Their Role in Motiavation, Personality, and Development (Essays in Social Psychology.* E.Sussex: Taylor & Francis Group

Ehiyazaryan, E. and Barraclough, N. (2009) 'Enhancing employability: integrating real world experience in the curriculum'. *Education + Training* 51 (4), 292 - 308

El Ansari, W. (2002) 'Student nurse satisfaction levels with their courses: Part II – effects of academic variables'. *Nurse Education Today* 22 (2), 171-180

Ely, M. (1991) *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles Within Circles.* London: The Falmer Press

Fearne, H. (2008) 'The class of 2020?' *Times Higher Education* [online] 27 November. available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=404431> [21 May 2009]

Fearne, H. (2009) 'Graduate unemployment rises'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 19 July. available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=407431> [17 September 2009]

Flanagan, M. (2012) 'Threshold Concepts: Undergraduate Teaching, Postgraduate Training and Professional Development. A short introduction and bibliography'. [online] 24 July. available from < http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/thresholds.html#ML2003> [12 April 2010]

Fontana, A. and Frey, J. (2000) 'The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text'. in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research.* ed. Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. London: Sage Publications, 645-672

Fullan, M. (2001) *The new meaning of educational change: Third Edition.* London: RoutledgeFalmer

GEES (2008) '42 key ideas on employability, employer engagement and entrepreneurship in the GEES disciplines'. *Planet* [online] 21, 68-71 <http://www.gees.ac.uk/planet/p21/p21.pdf> [4 July 2009]

Genzuk, M. (2003) *A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research* [online] available from <http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~genzuk/Ethnographic_Research.html> [25 February 2009]

Gibbs, G. (1992) *Improving the quality of student learning.* Bristol: Technical and Educational Services Ltd.

Gibbs, G. (2012) 'Will chasing the market really result in an increase in quality?' *Times Higher Education* [online] 16 February. available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=419041> [18 February 2012]

Gillinson, S. and O'Leary, D. (2006) *Working Progress: How to reconnect young people and organisations.* London: Demos

Glover, D., Law, S., and Youngman, A. (2002) 'Graduateness and Employability: student perceptions of the personal outcomes of university education.' *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 7 (3), 293-306

Graduate Prospects (2011) *Real Prospects 2011: the reality of UK graduate recruitment, as told by graduates.* Manchester: Graduate Prospects

Graduate Recruitment Bureau (2010) *The 7 Benefits of Hiring Graduates* [online] available from <http://www.grb.uk.com/7-benefits-of-hiring-graduates.0.html> [3 February 2012]

Green, S. (2009) *The shift in the world's centre of gravity: the rise of Asia and implications for the UK* [online lecture] Universities UK Annual Lecture, 14 January 2009. London: The Hoare Memorial Hall. available from <http://www.hsbc.com/1/2/newsroom/speeches/2009> [11 June 2011]

Hadfield, M., Dhillon, J., Jopling, M., and Goffe, R. (2012) *Teaching that matters.* London: million+

Hammersley, M. (1992) *What's Wrong With Ethnography?: Methodological Explorations.* London: Routledge

Hammersley, M., and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: principals in practice.* London: Routledge

Harvey, L. (2003) *Transitions from higher education to work.* [online] available from <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/esecttools/esectpubs/harveytransitions.pdf> [14 August 2011]

Harvey, L., Moon, S., Geall, V., and Bower, R. (1997) *Graduates' work: organisational change and students' attributes* [online] available from <http://www0.bcu.ac.uk/crq/publications/gw/gwcon.html> [20 March 2012]

Hawkins, P. and Gilleard, C. (2002) *If only I'd know: making the most of higher education, a guide for students and parents.* Warwick: AGR

HECSU/AGCAS (2010) *What do graduates do?* Gloucester: UCAS Publication Services

HECSU/AGCAS (2011) *What do graduates do?* Gloucester: UCAS Publication Services

HEFCE (2007) *HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-11, Updated April 2007.* Bristol: HEFCE

HEFCE (2010) *The King's-Warwick Project: Creating a 21st Century Curriculum.* Bristol: HEFCE

Henderson, S., Holland, J., McGrellis, S., Sharpe, S., and Thomson, R. (2007) *Inventing adulthoods: a biographical approach to youth transitions.* London: Sage

High Fliers (2011) *The Graduate Market in 2011: Annual review of graduate vacancies & starting salaries at Britain's leading employers.* London: High Fliers Research

High Fliers (2012) *The Graduate Market in 2012: Annual review of graduate vacancies & starting salaries at Britain's leading employers.* London: High Fliers Research

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2011) *HE qualifications obtained by subject of study(#1), level of qualification and class of first degree 2009/10* [online] available from <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/dataTables/studentsAndQualifiers/download/qualsub0910.xls> [14 July 2011]

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2012) *Statistics – Students and qualifiers at UK HE institutions* [online] available from <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/> [20 July 2010]

Higson, H. (2012) 'How to improve employability: Aston University's placements programme'. *The Guardian* [online] 29 February. available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2012/feb/29/aston-university-student-placements?INTCMP=SRCH> [28 February 2012]

Hill, Y., Lomas, L., and MacGregor, J. (2003) 'Students' perceptions of quality in higher education'. *Quality Assurance in Education* 11 (1), 15 - 20

Hogarth, T., Winterbotham, M. Hasluck, C., Carter, K., Daniel, W., Green, A., and Morrison, J. (2007) *Employer and University Engagement in the Use and Development of Graduate Level Skills*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills Publications

Holland, J. and Holland, J. (1977) 'Vocational Indecision: More evidence and speculation'. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 24, (5) 404-414

Hounsell, D., McCune, V., Hounsell, J., and Litjens, J. (2006) 'Investigating and Enhancing Guidance and Feedback to Undergraduate Students'. [online] available from <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/earlinth06.pdf> [20 June 2010]

Institute of Directors (2007) *Institute of Directors skills briefing – December 2007: Graduates' employability skills* [online] available from <http://www.iod.com/MainWebSite/Resources/Document/policy_paper_graduates_employability_skills.pdf> [4 March 2012]

James, R., Krause, K., and Jennings, C. (2010) *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from 1994 to 2009.* The University of Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education

Janesick, V. (2007) *Peer Debriefing* [online] available from <http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405124331_chunk_g978140512433122_ss1-14#citation> [8 July 2010]

Jewell, S. (2008) *Labour Market Outcomes for University of Reading Students* [online] available from <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/ccms/Jewell_Labour_Market_Outcomes_Report_Three_2010.pdf> [4 March 2012]

Jewell, S. (2008ₐ) *Degree Outcomes for University of Reading Students* [online] available from <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/ccms/Jewell_Degree_Performance_Report_One_2010.pdf> [4 March 2012]

Johnston, B. (2003) 'The Shape of Research in the Field of Higher Education and Graduate Employment: Some issues'. *Studies in Higher Education* 28 (4), 413 - 426

Kay, J., Marshall, P., and Norton, T. (2007) *Enhancing the Student Experience.* London: 1994 Group

Kember, D., Lee K., and Li, N. (2001) 'Cultivating a sense of belonging in part-time students'. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20 (4) 326-341

Knight, P. (2007) *Fostering and assessing 'wicked' competences* [online] available from <http://www.open.ac.uk/cetl-workspace/cetlcontent/documents/460d1d1481d0f.pdf> [24th February 2009]

Knight, P. and Page, A. (2007) *The assessment of 'wicked' competences: report to the practice-based professional learning centre* [online] available from <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:yPis-2KwnIAJ:kn.open.ac.uk/public/getfile.cfm%3Fdocumentfileid%3D11063+The+assessment+of+%E2%80%98wicked%E2%80%99+competences:+report+to+the+practice-based+professional+learning+centre&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk> [5th December 2008]

Knight, P. and Yorke, M. (2004) *Learning, Curriculum and Employability in Higher Education.* London: Routledge Falmer

Knight, P. and Yorke, M. (2006) 'Curricula for economic and social gain'. *Higher Education* 52, 565-588

Knowles, Z. (2008) 'Reflective practice: Curriculum development through research informed teaching in sports science'. *LJMU Learning & Teaching Press* 7, 17-20

Krane, V. and Baird, S. (2005) 'Using Ethnography in Applied Sport Psychology.' *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 17 (2), 87 — 107

Krane, V., Strean, W., and Andersen, M. (1997) 'Issues of Qualitative Research Methods and Presentation'. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* 19, 213-218

Krauss, S. (2005) 'Research Paradigms and Meaning Making: A Primer'. *The Qualitative Report* 10 (4), 758-770

Lamners, W. and Murphy, J. (2002) 'A profile of teaching techniques used in the university classroom'. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 3 (1), 54-67

Larson, B. (2000) 'Classroom discussion: a method of instruction and curriculum outcomes'. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16, 661-677

Leggott, D. and Stapleford, J. (2004) 'Enhancing student awareness of employability skills through the use of progress files'. [online] available from <http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/paper/2279> [6 March 2012]

Leitch, S. (2006) *Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills.* London: The Stationary Office

Lexmond, J. and Bradley, W. (2010) *Class of 2010: A report into the attitudes and aspirations of this year's graduates.* Demos

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. (2000) 'Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences'. in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2nd ed. ed. by Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. London: Sage Publications Inc., 163-188

Liverpool Students Union (2009) *Liverpool Students' Union Constitution* [online] available from < http://liverpoolsu.com/files/lsu_constitution_final_09.pdf> [13 April 2012]

LJMU (2007) *Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Professional Learning Interim Evaluation Report* [online] available from <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/lid/lid_docs/CETL_Interim_Evaluation_2007.pdf> [5 January 2009]

LJMU (2010) *Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Final HEFCE Self-Evaluation Report* [online] available from <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/lid/lid_docs/LJMU_CETL_Evaluation_Report.pdf> [20 June 2010]

LJMU (2010ₐ) CETL Skills and Career Prospects (Graduation) Questionnaire Report: 4 Years in Figures [online] available from <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/lid/lid_docs/CETL_report4years.pdf> [10 April 2012]

Maher, A. (2004) 'Oven-ready and self-basting? Taking stock of employability skills'. *Higher Education Academy Network for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Link 11*, 7-9

Mail Online (2007) 'The Grade, Graduates aren't worth hiring'. *Mail Online* [online] 30 January. available from <www.dailymail.co..uk/news/artocle-432321/The-grade-gradutes-arent-worth-hiring.html> [2 February 2012]

Martin, A., Milne-Home, J., Barrett, J., Spalding, E., and Jones, G. (2000) 'Graduate Satisfaction with University and Perceived Employment Preparation'. *Journal of Education and Work* 13 (2), 199 – 213

Marzano, R. (1992) *A Different Kind of Classroom: Teaching with Dimensions of Learning.* Alexandria, VA: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Marzano, R. (1998) *A Theory-based Meta-analysis of Research on Instruction* [online] available from <http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Instruction/5982RR_InstructionMeta_Analysis.pdf> [15 November 2008]

Mason, G., Williams, G., Cranmer, S., and Guilde, D. (2003) *How much does higher education enhance the employability of graduates?* [online] available from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/rdreports/2003/rd13_03/> [2 December 2008]

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, E. (1994) *Beginning Qualitative Research: a philosophical and practical guide.* London: The Falmer Press

Minten, S. (2010) 'Use Them or Lose Them: a study of the employability of sport graduates through their transition into the sport workplace'. *Managing Leisure* 15 (1), 67-82

Mishler, E. (1986) *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative.* London: Harvard University Press

Mitchell, E., Zaitseva, E., and Clifford, E. (2008) 'Valuing the voice of past students: a dual perspective.' SRHE Conference, Liverpool, 9-11 December

Mitchell, E., Zaitseva, E., and Drust, B. (2007) 'Tackling Work- Related Learning: Blogging From the Touchline'. WACE Conference, Singapore, 26-29 June

Mitchell, R. (2002) *Dancing at Armageddon: Survivalism and Chaos in Modern Times.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Miveld, Z. (2010) *Everton Active Family Centre, Latest News: Extra Time* [online] available from <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/sps/RISES/102606.htm> [10 November 2011]

Moon, J. (2004) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice.* Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer

Moreau, M. and Leathwood, C. (2006) 'Graduates' employment and the discourse of employability: a critical analysis'. *Journal of Education and Work* 19 (4), 305-324

Morton, J., Scott, M., and Drust, B. (2008) 'Preparing 'Science and Football' Students for the Real World: Critical Reflections on 'Mandatory' Employability Skills and the Student Learning Experience of the Football Environment'. Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network Annual Conference, Oxford, October 2008

Murphy, R. and Scott, M. (2008) 'Employers' perspectives of the most appropriate 'knowledge, skills and personal attributes' required of individuals working in physical activity, exercise and health.' HEA Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network Conference: Employer Engagement – What does it all mean for HLST education? 6th November

National Union of Students (2008) NUS Student Experience Report. London: National Union of Students

National Union of Students (2010) Surfing the Wave: A Strategic Response to 'A Wave of Change: The Future Landscape of the Student Movement'. London: National Union of Students

National Student Forum (2010) National Student Forum – Annual Report [online] available from < http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/n/10-p83-national-student-forum-annual-report-2010 > [9 March 2012]

National Student Forum (2009) National Student Forum – Annual Report [online] available from < http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/n/09-p83-national-student-forum-annual-report-09> [9 March 2012]

Newstead, S. (2002) 'Examining the examiners: why are we so bad at assessing students?' Psychology Learning and Teaching 2 (2), 70-75

Nguyen, N. D., Yoshinari, Y., and Shigeji, M. (2005) 'University education and employment in Japan: Student's perceptions on employment attributes and implications for university education'. Quality Assurance in Education 19 (3), 202-218

Nichol, D. (2011) Assessment and Feedback [expert lecture] 9th February 2011. Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University

Norton, T. and Thomas, H. (2009) Beyond the Curriculum: Opportunities to enhance employability and future life choices. London: 1994 Group

O'Regan, M. (2009) Career pursuit: towards an understanding of undergraduate students' orientation to career [online] available from <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/ccms/ORegan_Orientations_to_career_summary_report_Jan_2010.pdf> [4 March 2012]

O'Regan, M. (2010) Graduate transitions to employment: career motivation, identity and employability [online] available from <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/ccms/Graduate_transitions_to_employment.pdf> [4 March 2012]

Patton, M. (1999) 'Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis'. HSR: Health Services Research 34 (5.2) 1189-1208

Patton, M. (2002) Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods 3rd ed. London: Sage Publications Inc.

Pegg, A., Waldock, J., Hendy-Isaac, S., and Lawton, R. (2012) Pedagogy for employability. York: The Higher Education Academy

Pettit, J. and Litten, L. (eds.) (1999) *A new era for alumni research: improving institutional performance and better serving alumni. New Directions for Institutional Research, 101*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. cited in Bauer, K. and Bennett, J. (2003) 'Alumni Perceptions Used to Assess Undergraduate Research Experience'. *The Journal of Higher Education* 74 (2), 210-230: 214

Philip, L. (2006) 'Encouraging reflective practice amongst students: a direct assessment approach'. *Planet* 17, 37-39

Porter, A. (2008) *The Great NUS Feedback Amnesty* [online] available from <http://www.gees.ac.uk/planet/p23/NUS.pdf> [23 March 2012]

Price, M. (2012) 'Putting students in the driving seat. Is it safe to remove the L-plates?' *Enhancing Learning in Social Sciences* 4 (1), 1-4

QAA (2010) *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit: Student representation and mechanisms for feedback.* Gloucester: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

QAA (2011) *Institutional review 2011-12 theme: First Year Student Experience.* Gloucester: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

QAA (2012) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality, Chapter B5: Student engagement.* Gloucester: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Quek, H. (2005) 'Learning for the workplace: a case study in graduate employees' generic competencies'. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 17 (4), 231-242

Rae, D. (2007) 'Connecting enterprise and graduate employability. Challenges to the higher education culture and curriculum?' *Education + Training* 49 (8/9), 605-619

Rae, D. (2009) 'Enterprising Learning in the New Era: Where will the new graduate jobs come from?' *Graduate Market Trends* Spring 2009, 3-5

Ramsden, P. (1992) *Learning to teach in higher education.* London: Routledge

Redmond, P. (2010) *The Graduate Jobs Formula: How to land your dream career.* Surrey: Trotman Publishing

Redmond, P. (2011) 'Graduate employability 2012'. *Graduate Market Trends* Autumn 2011, 4-7

Research, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement (2010) *Working definition of student engagement* [online] available at <http://raise-network.ning.com/> [10 February 2012]

Rissmeyer, P. (2010) 'Student Affairs and Alumni Relations'. *New Directions for Student Services* 130, 19-29

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (ed.) (2003) *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers.* London: Sage Publications

Roberts, Y. (2009) *Grit: the skills for success and how they are grown.* London: The Young Foundation

Romzek, B. and Dubnick, M. (1998) 'Accountability'. in *The International Encyclopaedia of Public Policy and Administration.* ed. by Shafritz, J. Oxford: Westview Press, 6-11

Rothblatt, S. (1996) 'Inner life of don-dom'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 22 March. available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=93043&sectioncode=26> [23 February 2012]

Royal Society of Arts (1979) *The Education for Capability Manifesto* [online] available from <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/heca/manifesto> [15 February 2012]

Sadler, R. (2010) 'Beyond feedback: developing student capability in complex appraisal'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 35 (5), 535-550

Sambell, K., Brown, S., and McDowell, L. (1997) '"But Is It Fair?": An Exploratory Study of Student Perceptions of the Consequential Validity of Assessment'. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 23 (4), 349-371

Scanaln, T., Ravizza, K., and Stein, G. (1989) 'An in-depth study of former elite figure skaters: II. Sources of enjoyment'. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 11, 65-82. cited in Biddle, S., Markland, D., Gilbourne, D., Chatzisarantis, N., and Sparkes, A. (2001) 'Research methods in sport and exercise psychology: quantitative and qualitative issues'. 19, 777-809: 797

Schwartz, S. (2003) 'The higher purpose'. *Times Higher Education* [online] available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=176727> [21 May 2009]

Schwartz, S. (2011) 'Not by skills alone' *Times Higher Education* [online] available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=416482> [22 August 2009]

Seale, J. (2009) 'Doing student voice work in higher education: an exploration of the value of participatory methods'. *British Educational Research Journal* 1-21

Shenton, A. (2004) 'Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects'. *Education for Information* 22, 63 – 75

Shuell, T. (1986) 'Cognitive conceptions of learning'. *Review of Educational Research* 56 (4), 411-436

Silverman, D. (1985) *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology: Describing the Social World.* Aldershot: Gower

Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* 2nd ed. London: SAGE

Sleap, M. and Reed, H. (2006) 'Views of sport science graduates regarding work skills developed at university'. *Teaching in Higher Education* 11 (1), 47-61

Smith, D. and Fletcher, J. (2001) *Inside Information. Making Sense of Marketing Data.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons

Smith, H. (2008) 'Spoon-feeding: or how I learned to stop worrying and love the mess'. *Teaching in Higher Education* 13 (6), 715-718

Smith, J. (2006) 'Lost in translation: Staff and students negotiating liminal spaces'. SEDA Annual Conference, Liverpool, 2006

Snowdon, G. (2012) 'Graduates: is a 2:1 the best qualification for landing a job?' [online] 10 February. available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2012/feb/10/graduates-best-qualification-landing-job> [15 February 2012]

Spencer, L. (2009) *An Introduction to In-depth interviewing.* Unpublished booklet. London: Social Research Association

Spindler, G. and Spindler, L. (1987) 'Teaching and learning how to do the ethnography of education'. in *Interpretive Ethnography of Education: At home and abroad.* ed. by Spindler, G. and Spindler, L. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 17-33. cited in Cresswell, J. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications: 217

Stephenson, J. (1998) 'The concept of capability and its importance in higher education'. in *Capability and quality in higher education.* ed. by Stephenson, J. and Yorke, M. London: Kogan Page, 1-13

Strathern, M. (1997) "Improving Ratings': audit in the British University system'. *European Review* 5 (3), 305-321

Swain, H. (2011) 'What are universities for?' *The Guardian* [online] 10 October. available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/oct/10/higher-education-purpose> [15 October 2011]

Talabi, M. (2012) *What on earth is "employability" (and how can it help me get a job)?* [online] available from <http://mildredtalabi.com/what-on-earth-is-%E2%80%9Cemployability%E2%80%9D-and-how-can-it-help-me-get-a-job> [2 February 2012]

Tatlow, P. (2012) 'British universities are in need of a teaching revolution'. *The Guardian* [online] 15 February. available from < http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2012/feb/15/uk-universities-teaching-revolution> [15 February 2012]

The Higher Education Academy (2006) *Employability & Enterprise: Employability - Why Bother?* [online] available from <http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/careers/bother.php> [20 November 2008]

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in the learning society* [online] available from <https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/> [4 July 2009]

The Pennsylvania State University (2009) *Educational Planning Survey* [online] available from <http://dus.psu.edu/eps2009/recol.htm> [4 March 2012]

Think Global and British Council (2011) *The Global Skills Gap: Preparing young people for the new global economy.* London: Think Global and British Council

Thompson, S., Cable, T., and Vickerman, P. (2008) 'Developing Learning and Assessment Opportunities for a Complex World'. *NTF Project Stage Two Project Bid, The Higher Education Academy National Teaching Fellowship Scheme*

Thompson, S., Cable, T., and Vickerman, P. (2008$_A$) 'Developing enterprising learners, learning to lead'. The First CGU – WACE Joint International Symposium & WACE's Seventh International Symposium on Work Integrated Learning: Challenging Higher Education: Developing Enterprising Graduates for a Changing World of Work, Madrid, 3-5th December

Thomson, A. (1999) 'Labour targets skills of 18 to 30s'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 12 March. available from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=145415&sectioncode=26> [1 March 2012]

Tod, D., Marchant, D., and Andersen, M. (2007) 'Learning Experiences Contributing to Service-Delivery Competence'. *The Sport Psychologist* 21, 317-334

Tomkins, A. (2005) 'Graduate Skills for the Leisure Industry – a Gloucestershire Perspective'. *Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Network: Project Report Summary*

Tomlinson, M. (2005) *Higher Education and Graduate Employability: Student and academic attitudes to graduate work, careers and employability.* Unpublished PhD thesis. Cardiff: Cardiff University

Tomlinson, M. (2007), 'Graduate employability and student attitudes and orientations to the labour market.' *Journal of Education and Work* 20 (4), 285-304

Tomlinson, M. (2008) "The degree is not enough': student's perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29 (1), 49-61

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009) *The Employability Challenge.* London: UKCES

UNITE (2007) *The Student Experience Report.* Bristol: UNITE

Universities UK (2006) *Higher level learning: Universities and employers working together.* London: Universities UK

Volkwein, F. (2010) 'Assessing Alumni Outcomes'. *New Directions for Institutional Research* 9 (1), 125-139

Webb, C. (1992) 'The use of the first person in academic writing: objectivity, language and gatekeeping'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17 (6), 747-752

Weerts, D., Cabera, A., and Sanford, T. (2010) 'Beyond Giving: Political Advocacy and Volunteer Behaviors of public University Alumni'. *Res high Educ* 51, 346-365

Weerts, D. and Ronca, J. (2007) 'Profiles of Supportive Alumni: Donors, Volunteers, and Those Who "Do It All"'. *International Journal of Education Advancement* 7 (1), 20-34

Wickramasinghe, V. and Perera, L. (2010) 'Graduates', university lecturers' and employers' perceptions towards employability skills'. *Education + Training* 52 (3), 226-244

Wiley, C. (2011) 'Intellectual Development vs. Jobs?' *Inside Higher Ed* [online] 26 August. available from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/08/26/wiley_essay_whether_college_students_are_motivated_by_intellectual_development_or_jobs> [1 March 2012]

Wilkinson, S. (1999) 'Focus Groups: A Feminist Method'. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 23, 221-244

Wilson, T. (2012) *A Review of Business-University Collaboration.* London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Wilson-Medhurst, S. (2005) 'Using Assessment to Support Employability Awareness and Development'. *Investigations in university teaching and learning* 3 (1), 71-78

Wilson, C. and Tong, R. (2009) 'Personal Tutoring: A Comparison of Two Systems'. *Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network* Link 23, 4-5

Wright, J., Brinkley, I., and Clayton, N. (2010) *Employability and Skills in the UK: Redefining the debate.* Lancaster University: The Work Foundation

Yorke, M. (2000) 'Developing a Quality Culture in Higher Education'. *Tertiary Education and Management* 6 (1), 19-36

Yorke, M. (2004) 'Employability in the Undergraduate Curriculum: some student perspectives'. *European Journal of Education* 39 (4), 409-427

Yorke, M. (2006) *Learning & Employability Series One: Employability in higher education: what it is – what it is not.* York: The Higher Education Academy

Yorke, M. and Knight, P. (2006) *Learning & Employability Series One: Embedding Employability into the Curriculum.* York: The Higher Education Academy

Zaitseva, E., Thompson, S., Mitchell, E., and Scott, M. (2007) 'Time to Take a Sabbatical: Building Relationships with Employers'. WACE Conference, Singapore, 26-29th June

Zaitseva, E. and Mitchell, E. (2007) 'Employability Sabbaticals: Experience of 'Boundary Crossing''. International Conference 'Education in Changing Environment', University of Salford, September 2007

Zaitseva, E., Mitchell, E., Thompson, S., and Clifford, E. (2008) 'Collision Course or New Galaxy?: Exploring the Complexity of Staff Responses to the Implementation of an Employability-Focused Curriculum'. Higher Education Close Up Conference, Cape Town, June 2008

Zhao, C. and Kuh, G. (2004) 'Learning Communities and Student Engagement'. *Research in Higher Education* 45 (2), 115-138

Appendices

Appendices can be located on the disc attached to the back page of this thesis.