UCL Institute of Education

Doctor in Education

Thesis

An investigation, in the context of the introduction of new English higher education public information requirements, into aspects of the expectations of the learning and teaching environment at university held by prospective young undergraduates.

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Abstract

This thesis, located within the field of student transition to university, investigates several aspects of the understanding of prospective students about learning and teaching in higher education; it does this within a geographical setting relevant to my own practice, which involves responsibility for students within a faculty of a large English medium-tariff university. The research is prompted partly by developments in higher education public information requirements, particularly those relating to information about the balance of class contact and independent study, and partly by the relative lack of empirical research amongst UK students before they enter university into what they are expecting.

The primary research tool was a short questionnaire completed by just over 500 prospective university students in their final year at post-16 institutions in the city region of my university. The questionnaire contained predominantly closed questions relating to expectations about aspects of learning and teaching at university and about the information which they had taken from the website of the university at which they were hoping to study. Subsidiary research tools were a content analysis of a sample of university websites undertaken to assist in the formulation of the questionnaire and a further email exchange with a few of the questionnaire respondents.

The main findings suggest that, even within a sample skewed towards traditional and academically high achieving students, there are very varied understandings of the nature of independent learning and a substantial minority of students have inaccurate expectations about university study. The entry tariff for the university which the respondents were hoping to attend and the level of higher education participation of their post-16 institution appeared to be more important variables in terms of levels of understanding than demographic differences. The new public information requirements relating to class time and independent study appeared to have little impact.

(300 words)

Thesis declaration and word length

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Personal Statement

Introduction

This personal statement aims to provide a summary and synthesis of my learning over the whole EdD programme, to make links between the elements of the programme and to demonstrate how it has contributed to my professional development and knowledge. I start by setting out the background to my professional identity before addressing these three issues in turn.

My professional identity

My professional identity has undergone a series of changes during my working life. I often describe myself as "originally a lawyer" since I have first and postgraduate degrees in law and started my working life as a solicitor. I should more accurately describe myself as "originally a professional lawyer" since professional and academic law are very different occupations.

I moved into higher education and became an "academic lawyer" in 1992 after several years teaching on the vocational (post-graduation) stage of the solicitors' qualification (an environment in which research was not relevant). I was first a lecturer and then became undergraduate course director in the Law School of a post-92 university; during that time I was registered for a while on an insolvency law PhD (which I abandoned partly because I had no framework within which to work) and also wrote an insolvency law textbook for students and contributed to a number of practitioner works. I also completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in 2001 which finally provided me with a theoretical underpinning for my teaching identity.

In 2002, I became director of undergraduate programmes for the Faculty of Business and Law and, as such, joined the Faculty senior management team. Between 2004 and 2006 I completed the MBA in Higher Education Management at the Institute of Education. This provided a theoretical framework for my new professional identities relating both to business education and to management. This shift in my professional identity was further enhanced when I became a governor of both a federation of local secondary schools and a College of Further Education. During this time I maintained an identity as an academic lawyer, teaching and writing about law as well as

becoming involved in setting up a cross-disciplinary insolvency research unit within the Faculty. This last demonstrated to me my lack of underpinning in research methods.

By 2007 it was clear that I was trying to juggle too many facets of my professional identity and I decided that I needed to drop the "academic lawyer" aspects (insolvency law changes too quickly for anything other than full attention to be devoted to it) and to reconceptualise myself as a higher education management professional with a research focus on education. The EdD describes itself as providing "a framework for experienced practitioners to examine and develop their practice through research and engagement with relevant theoretical perspectives and professional and academic literature"; this theoretical framework relating to research would work on two levels for me in supporting me in carrying out research into education and, secondly, in providing me, as a higher education manager, with a broader appreciation of research as an aspect of the activity within higher education.

In 2010, I moved to a different post-92 university in another part of southern England to become Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching in the Faculty of Business and Law.

My learning during the programme

The three stages of the EdD consisted of the taught courses (Foundations of Professionalism in Education, Methods of Enquiry 1, Methods of Enquiry 2 and, in my case, Contemporary Education Policy), the Institutionally Focussed Study ("IFS") and the thesis. The taught modules, which I completed between 2007 and 2009, were each assessed by a 5,000 word assignment which were combined into a portfolio accompanied by a reflection on my progress. This reflection was particularly commended by my then supervisor for showing how I had learnt from and progressed between each assignment. The IFS involved a 20,000 word study; during this stage and the thesis stage, I attended a series of workshops. The IFS was interrupted by my move and took me until late 2011. During 2012 I changed supervisors and had my thesis proposal accepted. The work for the thesis was carried out during 2013 and 2014 and the thesis was submitted at the start of 2015.

Foundations of Professionalism in Education sets out to provide a theoretical knowledge and understanding of the changing nature of professionalism. For this module, I submitted an assignment entitled "Constructing professional identity in higher education" in which I argued the case for a common professional qualification encompassing teaching, research and an understanding of the working of higher education as a means of enhancing the professional identity of academics and also of those in non-academic professional roles in higher education. This involved using my own personal experience and career history as a case study in the making of professional identity, a critical examination of the complexity of academic roles and how they are defined and benchmarked, together with an account of recent developments in UK higher education policy.

Methods of Enquiry 1 and 2 involved me in gaining a theoretical knowledge and understanding of the relationship between different epistemological and methodological positions and forms of research and in developing my research skills. My Methods of Enquiry 1 assignment discussed a proposed piece of research ("Transition into Higher Education: the staff perspective") into the views of staff in schools, colleges and universities about the difficulties facing students as they make the transition into higher education. The Methods of Enquiry 2 assignment was a report on the carrying out of the research which I had proposed in Methods of Enquiry 1. The first assignment developed my ability to formulate a research question, develop a research design and undertake a literature review whilst the second enhanced my data collection and analysis skills (I used interviews and a questionnaire to collect the data and nVivo and Excel to analysis it). It was at this stage that I developed a more thorough understanding of SPSS although I did not use it until later.

My elective module, Contemporary Education Policy ("CEP"), provided an opportunity for current research and analysis in a specialist area of education of direct relevance to my own professional practice and I undertook a study of the introduction of the implementation within Higher Education of the policy on personal development planning. For my IFS, I carried out some research into the preparedness for university study of students at the FE College of which I was a governor. This utilised all the skills which I had developed during the

taught stage and enabled me to understand the challenges of a larger piece (albeit still small-scale) of research and the difficulties of insider research.

In addition to the learning which I obtained and demonstrated through my assignments, the taught modules classes and the workshops for both IFS and thesis enabled me to participate in a wider community of researchers connected with education and to work with them in developing ideas and in learning from the research activities of others. Presenting elements of my EdD research at work-related events (and, in the case of the early stages of developing this thesis, at the SRHE Conference) has further enabled this.

Links between the various elements

I have not pursued one line of enquiry throughout the programme but there has been a common strand throughout in that every piece of work has had something to do with transition into higher education; even my Foundations of Professionalism assignment related to the transition of staff into higher education. I explain in the thesis itself how the findings from my earlier pieces of research linked with and influenced my thesis.

The greatest shift in my focus happened between making my application to enrol on the EdD and embarking on the Methods of Enquiry work; in my application, I expressed an interest in the then 14-19 vocational diplomas and the progression routes from them into higher education. By the time I came to identify my first area for enquiry, my professional interest had become more taken by issues of retention and the first year experience and I was less involved in work-based learning and so my research took the route it did. Reflecting now on the links between my research projects, I can see that they are also linked by my interest in how the nature of higher education should be understood. At the time of my application I had an interest in being able to describe the nature of higher education in a way which worked across both traditional and work-based contexts. Looking back now, I realise that I have retained this interest through looking at notions of "graduateness" and questions of what it is to be a student in higher education and that it re-emerged in the CEP module, the IFS and the thesis.

It is also interesting to reflect, in terms of the links between elements, on the mirroring in several respects in my own transition towards acquiring a research

identity of aspects of what I have been researching in relation to student transition. At the taught stage of the EdD, I came to "know" about doing research but it was only during the IFS that I felt that I was making the transition to becoming a researcher, able to give real meaning to much of what I had been reading and writing in the previous years; this mirrors the findings within my thesis (in relation to student expectations of what it will be like to be a university student) of the difference between "knowing" and "understanding".

Professional Development

The programme has contributed to my professional development in three main ways. I now have a greater insight into the issues (all relevant to my professional identity) which I have actually researched. I also have greatly enhanced research skills and a better general understanding of the research community in which I work.

This greater understanding is due to the shift in what could be described as my ontological and epistemological identity as well as my greater knowledge of research methods. I was taught law at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels by academics from a very "black-letter" tradition of a legal system being a 'closed logical system' in which correct decisions can be deduced by logical means from predetermined rules without reference to the social world in which they exist; the study of legal concepts was largely divorced from historical enquiry into their causes or origins or sociological inquiry into the relation of law and other social phenomena. Both my law degrees had involved dissertations but these had been desk-based exercises with no empirical research. The MBA involved a consultancy project which did involve me in carrying out a number of interviews but with no express focus within the programme on the development of research skills.

Accordingly I embarked on the EdD as, if not actually a positivist, only just about a post-positivist (although I would not have had the language to describe myself as such) and with a very limited knowledge of research methods. In the course of the taught stage of the doctorate, I moved from the positivist standpoint promoted by my "black-letter law" origins and inclination to think that quantitative research held the greatest validity to a more constructivist perspective with an appreciation of qualitative research and a better

understanding of the spectrum of ontological and epistemological standpoints (I commented at p14 of my IFS that "I am probably best described as a post-positivist with constructivist sympathies, or possibly vice versa"). Working as I do in the very interdisciplinary environment of a Faculty of Business and Law, this shift enables me to understand the multiplicity of perspectives on research to be found amongst my colleagues.

In terms of my professional development during the EdD programme, therefore, the whole is much greater than simply the contents of the assignments, the IFS and the thesis which are the outward manifestation of some of the outcomes.

(1987 words)

Chapter 1 Introduction and Context

1.1   Introduction

This Chapter sets the context for this thesis. I start by explaining how my personal and professional background has led to the research which is the subject matter of this thesis; I then explain my approach to research methodology since this underpins the whole project. In the following section, I describe briefly the wider context in which the research sits. Finally, I set out the aims and objectives of the research which arise from this combination of personal and wider contexts and provide an outline for the rest of the thesis.

1.2   My context

1.2.1   My personal and professional contexts

My professional and personal context frames this thesis both by explaining my interest in the topic and in providing the potential for the findings to benefit my practice. This context includes my involvement during the last decade in the management of undergraduate courses at two post-92 universities and my governorships during the early years of my doctoral research of both a federation of 11-18 secondary schools and of a Further Education college. A further interest is a personal one resulting from watching my own children progress into and through higher education. Additionally, since embarking on the thesis, I have become involved in review work for the Quality Assurance Agency ("QAA"), which is responsible for monitoring standards and quality in UK higher education, which gives me a further professional interest in the public information aspects of this thesis.

The potential for this research to contribute to my own practice rests in my role as Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching in one of the faculties of a university which, for the purposes of this thesis, I will call Radstowe City University ("RCU"). RCU is a large post-92 university (ie former Polytechnic) situated in a city in southern England which I will call Radstowe. In this role, I have responsibility for the experience of several thousand students in my own faculty and I contribute at a senior level to the collective responsibility of the university for the experience of all students. Increasingly, as explained below, this involves working with schools and colleges in the city region of Radstowe in

helping students to make the transition to university; the process of carrying out the research has helped me to build relevant relationships with schools and colleges within the region and the findings will help inform my future work.

Successful transition to university is something which has concerned me throughout the time during which I have been responsible for undergraduate courses. In the university in which I was employed at the start of my doctoral research only about two-thirds of the first year cohort in the courses for which I was responsible progressed to the second year. Concern about the relatively low percentage of firsts and upper seconds also suggested that the entire group might be failing to adjust appropriately to higher education. The retention rates in my current institution are better but it is still apparent that an average of just under 7% (according to the HESA data for 2011-12) of the first year students fail to adjust to university, that their disengagement is largely apparent by the end of the first semester and that some of them have barely engaged in the first place. The withdrawal of more than 400 students during their first year represents a considerable loss of the fee income which would have been forthcoming during their subsequent years and impacts on the position of the institution in those university league tables which include a student completion measure. More importantly, as Thomas (2012, p4) points out, in addition to the financial and reputational implications, there are also ethical and social responsibility dimensions in that "there is an obligation to take reasonable steps to enable [students they have admitted to the institution] to be successful".

During the early years of my doctoral research I was a governor both of a federation of 11-18 secondary schools and of a Further Education college which between them annually sent more than a thousand students into higher education. This gave me an additional interest in the transition process from the pre-entry stage and caused me to realise that the general view was that problematic transition was for the universities to address. I have also had the experience over the last decade, through watching my own children and their friends enter higher education, of observing the difficulties in transition which can be encountered by students who arrive in Russell Group universities (ie research-intensive "old" universities) from academically high-flying secondary schools. These particular perspectives account for my focus on the transition of young students, both traditional and from a widening participation background,

coming directly (apart from a possible gap year) into full-time higher education from school or college.

My current role involves me, amongst other things, in working with those within my institution responsible for outreach and widening participation activities. Increasingly the objective of this work is seen as going beyond attracting a more diverse student body to achieving success for all students within a diverse student body through initiatives to support the progress of students. Many RCU students, particularly those from widening participation backgrounds, come from the local region and the university has a well-established programme of outreach activity. I am currently involved in a pilot initiative to build relationships between my faculty and our main local "feeder" schools and colleges with a view ultimately to being able to work in a more targeted fashion with potential students so that we can both start the process of transition well before their places are confirmed and also report back to schools and colleges on the outcomes for their students. Understanding more about what our potential students think it will be like to study at university is an essential part of this.

My focus on the learning and teaching aspects of transition is the result of my previous research at earlier stages of my doctoral studies. The starting point for my research was my awareness of the pressure on universities to make adjustments to the first year experience coupled with my interest in finding out more about what was happening pre-entry and my sense that most of the research was being carried out with post-entry students rather than in the pre-entry environment. My first research project within my doctorate related to the perspectives on transition of a group of post-16 and university staff; the results of this narrowed my interest from the range of possible factors involved in adjusting to university to that of the difference in the nature of learning and teaching. I found that the post-16 staff thought that the social aspects of transition were the most challenging for students whereas university staff thought the learning and teaching aspects were more generally problematic. This led me to wonder whether the students who actually withdrew from university (and who were most likely to return to school or college for advice) were more influenced by social reasons whereas many more students might struggle with the learning and teaching aspects but not to the point of withdrawal so that the issue was not made apparent to the schools. I also noted

that there was no general mechanism whereby schools or colleges could track what happens to their alumni at university.

I became increasingly interested in what prospective students expected studying at university would be like whilst carrying out the research for the Institutionally Focussed Study ("IFS") within my doctorate; this involved some small-scale qualitative research amongst staff and students at one College of Further Education into the preparedness of the students for the transition to learning and teaching at university. I was struck by the fact that the students whom I interviewed were all very clear about why they were going to university (a mix of getting a qualification, becoming more employable and getting the "university experience") but largely unclear about what would happen at university to bring about that employability and without any thought about the possibility of independent thinking and learning being part of the process. In the course of that piece of research, I shifted my perspective from that of investigating possible reductions in the differences between post-16 and university to one of interest in how the process of transition between two different environments could best be enhanced. It became very clear to me how little incentive there was for schools and colleges to focus on successful transition to higher education; those involved in secondary education were incentivised to get good examination results and university places for their students but not judged by the subsequent outcomes for the students (as noted in 1.3.1 below, this appears now to be changing to some extent). At the time when I was embarking on the work for this thesis, I had, therefore, an interest in whether the findings about student expectations from that one College would be found more generally amongst students in a wider range of post-16 institutions in the region in which I was now working.

At about the same time, I became involved in the work of collecting the data on RCU class contact hours for publication as part of the new Key Information Sets (KIS). The KIS is explained further in section 1.3.3 below but, briefly, comprises a set of standard data which universities are now required to publish on their course pages to enable potential students to compare courses and universities across a range of features, including amount of scheduled class hours. I realised the potential for the KIS to impact on the expectations about learning and teaching of prospective students (as well as on their view of the "value for

money" of university, an issue already well to the fore in public discourse, as noted in 1.3.2 below) and it seemed to me that the KIS had the potential to cause students to think about the learning and teaching environment in terms of time spent in class. This led me to wonder what universities would do to counter the message this might be sending about the centrality of time in class and whether they would be prompted to provide information on their websites which might be helpful in making the transition to a more independent way of learning. Whilst the main focus of my research is that of the expectations of pre-entry students about the nature of learning at university, these changes in the public information requirements have influenced my framing of the research into those expectations.

1.2.2 My approach to research methodology

I am a practitioner researcher, interested mainly in Mode Two knowledge creation (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) positioned at the intersection of the empirical and the theoretical but driven at least as much by problems in practice as by the theoretical frameworks. As Drake and Heath (2010, p78) say, "Those with their hearts in the production of Mode Two knowledge will start from what is not 'known' already, i.e. the problems that are being experienced and will be reluctant to limit the options to those offered by any particular pre-formed theoretical framework" in contrast with those who start with what is known already and "framed within a theoretical schema" and look for a gap in that framework to be filled.

My methodological stance emerges from my epistemological and ontological outlook as well as from my own temperament of pragmatically using whichever approach works best to find evidence-based answers to the questions which concern me (using pragmatic in its ordinary sense, rather than with reference to any philosophical tradition). Grounded theory based research resonates considerably with me. My ontological view is that whether or not there is an objective reality capable of being discovered (and I think that, in theory at least, there probably is to some extent), the volatile and multi-faceted nature of the social world in which education exists is such that for practical purposes, as Bryman (2012, p34) says of culture, "it can be taken to be an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction". I am inclined to feel that, within social research, whatever the philosophical standpoint, it is rarely going

to be possible to make claims with useful predictive value about the connections between phenomena which can attain the status of what has been described by Cohen *et al.* as "law-like generalizations of the same kind that have been established in relation to natural phenomena" (2011, p7).

If it is necessary to position myself within a methodological paradigm, I can best be described as a qualitatively-leaning mixed-methods researcher using whatever approach (or mixture of approaches) is appropriate to the question which the research is seeking to answer; something referred to by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010, p8) as "methodological eclecticism". As Newby (2010, p47) says "A mixed methods approach downplays the influence of philosophy altogether because the need for pragmatism is paramount, because of the importance placed on the issue being researched and because of the need to find an answer to a specific question".

My sympathies, however, lie with Symonds and Gorard (2010) when they argue that the paradigmatic labels are unhelpful and that research should be seen as a craft which uses the appropriate combination of the appropriate research tools for the inquiry in hand. As Gorard (2010, p244) observes: "It is somewhat impractical to sustain an argument that all parts of all methods, including data collection, carry epistemological or ontological commitments anyway". The choice of research tools may be driven as much by practicality as by philosophy; data collection for social research can frequently be seen as a form of bricolage, using the word in its basic sense of making do with whatever resources are to hand, although if it is apparent that insufficient appropriate data can be accessed, a decision may have to be made that the research cannot be carried out (Cohen *et al*, 2011, p208).

I lean towards qualitative research approaches because my preferred way of understanding phenomena is through the medium of words and my use of quantitative methods is not in pursuit of precise measurement or statistical inferences but because descriptive statistics provide the most practical way of seeing the patterns in the words and of arguing for generalisability of findings. I would certainly always look for methods of analysis which are capable of general understanding rather than adopting the approach criticised by Gorard in his dialogue with Cook of "devising more and more complex methods of

analysis", presented in "exclusive and unnecessarily technical ways" (Cook and Gorard, 2007, p317).

1.3   The wider context

This section deals with the wider context of this research. I start by looking at the consequences of unsuccessful student transition into higher education. I then consider the nature of learning at university with a view to establishing what it is to which the transition is being made. Finally I consider the information environment as it relates to the nature of studying at university and provide a little more detail about the new Key Information Sets (KIS) which, as explained in 1.2.1 above, have influenced the scoping of the research.

1.3.1 Transition to higher education

The most extreme consequence of unsuccessful transition to higher education will be that the student leaves the university, either of their own volition or because of academic failure, before completing the course. This is also the aspect of unsuccessful transition which is most susceptible of measurement. The UK retention rate is good compared with many other countries (National Audit Office, 2007, p5) but the numbers withdrawing from UK courses remain a concern because of the undesirable consequences for both universities and the students themselves (Yorke and Longden, 2004, p6-10). The most recent available Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) figures on non-progression rates were published in March 2014 in relation to students enrolling in 2011/12. The UK average for young entrants not progressing to the second year was 5.7% (the lowest figure ever recorded, down from 6.3% the previous year) with an institutional range for the UK from 17.8% to 0.9% (HESA, 2014, Table T3a, 2011/12).

Table SN1, 2011/12 (HESA, 2014) breaks the data down by qualification and by subject for 2011/12. The subject area with the lowest continuation rate was computer science (9.8% non-progression), followed by engineering and technology (7.2%) and mass communication (7.1%). At the other end of the scale, medicine had the lowest non-progression rate (1.6%) followed by languages (3.7%) and historical and philosophical studies (3.8%). The high and

low subject areas seem fairly stable; in the previous year, computing and engineering had also been in the three highest non-continuation subject areas and medicine and history in the three lowest.

Those with at least three A grades at A level on entry to higher education had a low level (less than 2%) of non-progression compared with the average; the rate of non-progression was correlated with level of qualification (often measured in terms of UCAS "tariff", which allocates a value to particular grades at A Level and other qualifications which it deems equivalent). The HESA data are also broken down (excluding Scottish institutions) to distinguish between students from low participation neighbourhoods (7.9% no longer in higher education after the first year, institutional range from 14.7% to 0%) and other students (5.4% no longer in higher education after the first year, institutional range 13.6% to 0.9%).

The National Audit Office 2007 report, using continuation figures for 119 English institutions for full-time students starting first degrees in 2004-5, found that the (then) 15 Russell Group institutions had the highest average continuation rates, followed by the 24 other pre-1992 institutions and 35 small and specialist institutions. The 45 post-92 institutions had the lowest average continuation rates and were the only grouping below the sector average. Statistical analysis indicated that more than 70% of the difference between institutional continuation rates was explained by four factors; continuation rates were higher where more of the students were from higher participation rate neighbourhoods, had higher pre-entry qualifications, were under 21 on enrolment and studied particular subjects (education, medicine, subjects allied to medicine and the creative arts all correlated with higher continuation rates).

McCulloch (2014), in a report on factors associated with dropout from higher education produced (whilst this research was being written up) by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) for the Department of Business Innovation and Skills, analysed the data from the Futuretrack research (Purcell *et al.*, 2009b; Purcell *et al.*, 2008), a longitudinal study of the cohort who applied to enter full-time higher education through UCAS in 2005/6. The analysis, not surprisingly, noted the same correlations as reported above from the HESA data and the National Audit Office. It also noted that students from state schools had a non-continuation rate of 7.1% compared with 3.7% for those from independent schools. Using regression analysis, it also identified that socio-

economic background was not significantly associated with non-continuation once the academic achievement of the students was taken into account. Crawford (2014), however, analysed data for all English students who started university in the UK between 2004-5 and 2009-10 and found non-negligible differences in university outcomes between students from different socio-economic backgrounds at the same university, studying the same subject, who arrived with the same grades. Her research suggested that school characteristics correlated better with outcomes than individual or neighbourhood measures of disadvantage.

Schools and colleges have not had the same incentives as universities to be concerned about the successful transition of their students since they have been measured by the qualifications with which their students leave them and by the extent to which students get university places rather than by what happens to the students once they have enrolled at university. This is, however, changing. The Department of Education has now started publishing destinations measures for students at the end of Key Stage 4 and 5; data is available for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 cohorts in mainstream maintained schools (Department for Education, 2013). This data includes information not only about the proportions of students enrolling at university but also about the proportion who do not complete the first six months at university. The use of the data is currently being piloted but it seems likely that it will eventually form part of the information published in school league tables.

Student difficulty in adjusting to university does not always manifest itself in withdrawal and there are students who do not leave but who report problems in transition (Christie *et al.*, 2004; Lowe and Cook, 2003). Yorke and Longden (2007, p6) found that nearly 30% of the first year students surveyed had thought about either temporary or permanent discontinuance; over half of those who said they were having difficulty coping with academic study had considered withdrawal. "What Works? Student Retention and Success Programme", (Thomas, 2012) a large piece of research involving over 1,000 students in seven institutions funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), found that between 33% and 42% of first year students had thought about withdrawal (Foster *et al.*, 2012, p13; Thomas, 2012, p12). Failure to adjust appropriately to higher education,

even if it does not result in departure, is likely to impact negatively on student experience and outcomes.

1.3.2 Transition to what? The nature of learning at university

This section addresses the question of what pre-entry students should be expecting about the nature of learning at university according to government agencies with responsibility for higher education.

The QAA leaflet "Explaining Contact Hours" (2011), aimed at prospective students, attempts a general explanation of the nature of learning in higher education:

> *Higher education is distinguished from general and secondary education by its focus on independent learning. Scheduled learning and teaching activities typically feature alongside time in which students are expected to study independently, which may itself be 'guided'. Independent study might include preparation for scheduled sessions, follow-up work, wider reading or practice, completion of assessment tasks, revision, and so on. The relative amounts of time that students are expected to spend engaged in scheduled activities and independent study varies between courses.... In all cases, students are expected to be responsible for their own learning, with appropriate support being provided by the institution. (Quality Assurance Agency, 2011, p7)*

Further elaboration on independent learning as a hallmark of higher education can be found elsewhere in the QAA literature. The notion of independent study as personal responsibility involving thinking and other skills and working in partnership with staff is encapsulated in Part B of the QAA Quality Code. The Expectation quoted below highlights the requirement for students to act independently in taking responsibility for the management of their own learning and also says something about the development both of deep knowledge and of thinking skills which require independence of mind:

> *Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.(QAA Quality Code Chapter B3, p6)*

The language of developing students to be autonomous learners has been linked in recent years to notions of the "graduate skills" for employment of time

management and of being able to self-organise and problem-solve without constant supervision. The 2003 government White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* commented that:

> *Today's generation of students will need to return to learning – full-time or part-time – on more than one occasion across their lifetime in order to refresh their knowledge, upgrade their skills and sustain their employability. Such independent learners investing in the continuous improvement of their skills will underpin innovation and enterprise in the economy and society (DfES, 2003, p16)*

Arguably, however, this focus on developing intellectual independence is not particularly new or very different from the comments of the 1964 Report of the Hale Committee on University Teaching Methods that "the aim and nature of the undergraduate course … should be not only or even primarily to equip the student with knowledge, but also, and more importantly, to teach him to think for himself and work on his own" (Hale, 1964, para 28). Indeed, the notion of the essence of university study as relating to autonomous learning and thinking can be found not just in these references from the early twenty-first century and the mid-twentieth century but have similarities with that which can be found over a hundred years earlier in Newman's much cited *The Idea of a University* (1852) in which he wrote of the need for intellectual training rather than the transmission of a body of knowledge.

Chapter 2.2.3 below contains a brief discussion of the academic experience at the post-16 stage from which it can be seen that new university students are indeed likely to be making a very distinct transition to different ways of learning. This is not something which is highlighted by the public discourse on learning at university which has tended in recent years, particularly since the increase in tuition fees in 2006, to focus on how much time a student spends in face to face teaching rather than on other aspects of studying at university. There has (as will be illustrated in the next section) been considerable focus in the media on the issue since the publication in 2006 of the first of a series of reports by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) (Bekhradnia *et al.*, 2006), investigating the amount of time in class and total student workload.

These HEPI reports generated a series of media articles (listed In the Appendix to the 2009 QAA Report discussed below) and also the interest of the

parliamentary Innovation, Universities Science and Skills Select Committee. A QAA Enquiry into a set of issues including student workload and contact hours reported in 2009, noting (para 21) that "interviews conducted with representatives of key organisations working in higher education suggest that the recent focus on contact hours had produced a distorted view of the nature of the academic student experience in higher education"(Quality Assurance Agency, 2009). The Report quoted, in para 25, from evidence given by one institution to the select committee that

> *It is the space allowed for independent learning which characterises the UK higher education system. Provided that such independent learning and development is properly guided and supported by institutions, including access to substantial library and online resources, the outcome is a level of intellectual independence which cannot be delivered through the mere transmission of the syllabus through face-to-face direct teaching.*

The Report recommended the need for national discussion at discipline level of the appropriate range of contact hours and other learning activities and also that institutions should provide good information about contact with staff and "the expectations that the institutions have of students as independent learners" (para 30). The former has not really happened and, as will be seen in the next section which discusses the information environment, the new KIS requirements do not fully place on universities a requirement to do the latter.

The 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students At The Heart of the System* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011) almost entirely ignores the question of what the learning and teaching experience of students should be and concentrates on issues of finance, regulation, connections with employment and information. The little discussion there is of teaching (in Chapter 2, entitled "well-informed students driving teaching excellence") is almost entirely about class-based activity and things done to and for students with almost the only nod to student independent learning being the reference to "levels of student effort and engagement" (p27) as one of the "dimensions of quality" identified by Graham Gibbs (Gibbs, 2010).

1.3.3 The information environment

According to Diamond *et al.*(2014, para 5.1)*,* prospective students obtain (or fail to obtain) their information about the nature of learning in higher education from a variety of sources including friends, family, post-16 institution staff, higher education outreach activity, higher education marketing material and websites, the official Unistats site, other guides and comparison websites and the media generally. As explained in 1.2.1 above, my research is mainly concerned with understanding what expectations of university prospective students actually hold and with the potential impact of the new KIS requirements and university websites on those expectations.

As noted above, the media (which is potentially the most pervasive source of information) has been a rather one-dimensional source of information. HEPI has continued to report on various aspects of the student academic experience (in 2009, in 2012, in 2013 in collaboration with the Consumers Association and in 2014 with the Higher Education Academy); the research contained in these reports will be discussed further in Chapter 2. The 2014 HEPI/HEA report (Soilemetzidis *et al.*, 2014) does stress in the Executive Summary that "increasing the quality of contact (which is more probable in smaller classes) is likely to be more effective in improving the student learning experience than simply increasing contact hours" but that does not tend to be the way the story is reported.

The media coverage has reflected the increasing marketisation of higher education with the prospective student being seen as making a consumer choice; the focus has been on the measurement of contact hours, with the implicit message that this is what the student consumer is buying. The Telegraph headlines, after the publication of the 2013 and 2014 reports, for example, were "University teaching time 'fails to rise' despite fees hike" (15th May 2013) and "Students get just 10 minutes more coursework despite paying £9,000" (21st May 2014). The Daily Mail (22nd May 2014) was "Student fees triple for 10 MINUTES more tuition as growing numbers feel their degree is poor value for money" (in 2013 the corresponding headline had been "Students pay nine times more for their University fees... but get just 20 minutes more time with their lecturers") and the second sentence of the report on the BBC website

on 21st May 2014 was "A survey of 15,046 UK students found they have just 10 minutes extra with university lecturers despite the rise - for the majority - in fees since 2012". There is no focus within the media reporting on either the quality of the contact or the importance of independent study.

This "consumer choice" view has also driven the introduction of the new information requirements with the 2011 White Paper (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011) saying (para 2.4) that

> *While there is no single "right" measure for the amount of study that should be required for a degree, potential applicants and employers should know how much time will be spent on different learning and teaching activities before they select a course. This is why we are expecting higher education institutions to provide information on the proportion of time spent in different learning and teaching activities. This should be supported by links to more detailed information at module level, for example about the time engaged in different types of teaching and learning activities including lectures.*

From September 2012, higher education institutions have been required to produce Key Information Sets (KIS) for each course and make them available online through the web pages for their courses. The KIS data is made available on the website of Unistats (http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/), which is run by HEFCE on behalf of all the UK funding bodies and overseen by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG).

The KIS data set contains 15 pieces of information about the course including student satisfaction scores, destination and salary data, assessment methods and the division of time between scheduled class time and independent study. Searches can be undertaken on the Unistats site by subjects and university, with the ability to filter by identified element from the KIS data set (so that information can, for example, be presented in descending order of student satisfaction) and a comparison facility is available. Every course page on a university website is required to contain a KIS "widget" which displays the headline data in revolving fashion and links to the more detailed information on the Unistats site.

The required information is largely based on research carried out by Oakleigh Consulting (Renfrew *et al.*, 2010) with final year school students and first year undergraduates into which of 51 possible pieces of information might be most

useful. The research involved 1926 students from 38 educational establishments of varying types and established that 37.6% of the respondents thought that information about weekly hours of teaching contact time would be useful. Most of the possible pieces of information which the participants in the research were asked to consider related to levels of student satisfaction with various aspects of their experience; the only suggested pieces of factual information related to employment prospects, costs of halls, bursaries, contact hours and proportion of assessment by coursework.

Although the KIS data have the potential to impact on the formation of appropriate expectations of the nature of studying at university, the driver behind their introduction was the notion of the prospective student as "informed consumer". The HEPISG 2010 Consultation Document outlined (p6) three purposes for public information about higher education, which are also set out on the HEFCE website; two of the purposes related to quality assurance and enhancement of provision and the other was "To inform people about the quality of higher education and, in particular, to give prospective students information that will help them choose what and where to study". Part C of the Quality Code for Higher Education published by the QAA, against which institutional quality reviews will make a judgment about the information published by the institution, says that institutions should "make available to prospective students information to help them select their programme with an understanding of the academic environment in which they will be studying and the support that will be made available to them" (Indicator 3, Part C). The focus of recent QAA reports appears, however, to be the accuracy and clarity of the information presented rather than the extent to which it positively aids understanding of the nature of studying in higher education.

There is an argument that, since the requirement for independent learning should be common to all higher education provision, it is not something which needs to feature in information whose object is to improve choice-making between institutions and courses. That view does, however, assume that the "consumers" have a fundamental understanding of what they are buying and this is the main concern of this research, which is driven by the assumption (discussed further below in 2.2.4) that, as noted by the National Student Forum Annual Report 2010, a positive university teaching and learning experience

involves a student being able to say that "before I arrived, I knew broadly what to expect"(National Student Forum, 2010, p38).

1.4   Aims and objectives of the research and outline of this thesis

This research seeks to investigate, within a setting relevant to my own practice and within the context of the new information requirements, what prospective students think learning and teaching in higher education will be like and, in particular, whether they have an understanding of the greater degree of independent thinking and self-management which is likely to be required of them. As the fieldwork was carried out in the year in which the KIS were introduced, this provided an opportunity to investigate the extent to which those pre-entry expectations are influenced by the KIS data and other material on university websites. My aim is both to enhance my professional practice and to make a more general contribution, at least within the UK context, to the literature on the transition to higher education and, in particular, to that relating to young students in the pre-entry phase of the transition to higher education.

As a practitioner, I tend to be involved in a continuous search for evidence-based answers to address permanently evolving situations rather than engaging in a series of discrete enquiries. Research projects, however, need limits with boundaries supplied by specific questions within a wider field of enquiry, to facilitate the management of the research and the dissemination of findings (Brown and Dowling, 1998). Identifying the precise research questions is a progressive process of focusing down (Bryman 2012, p89) and is particularly influenced by the literature review; further consideration is, therefore, given at the end of Chapter 2 after a discussion of the literature to the formulation of the research questions investigated in pursuit of these general aims.

This process of focusing down involves setting to one side issues and avenues of inquiry which may well be germane to the overarching research topic (transition to higher education), and to which I might want to return in the future, but are beyond the scope of this particular research project. For example, the overarching focus is on what students expect rather than (except in relation to KIS and other website material) where those expectations have come from and, therefore, I have excluded from the scope of the research itself any extensive

consideration of both the perceptions of post-16 staff and how these may have influenced their students and of the impact of outreach work.

As will be explained in Chapter 3, the main research tool for this project was a short questionnaire completed by just over 500 prospective university students in their final year at school or college. The respondents were drawn from schools or colleges in the region of the city which I am calling Radstowe. The questionnaire consisted of largely closed questions both about the respondents' expectations about learning and teaching at university and about the information relevant to this which they had taken from the website of the university at which they were hoping to study.

The demographic characteristics and educational context of the respondents to the questionnaire are set out in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings from the research and in Chapter 6 I consider both the limitations of the research and the implications of the findings in terms of the literature, the development of policy and my own professional practice.

Chapter 2 The literature

2.1   Introduction

2.1.1   The theoretical and empirical fields

As noted in Chapter 1, a particular feature of practitioner research is that the starting point for the search of the literature is likely to be a problem faced by the researcher in practice rather than a quest to identify an aspect of a theoretical framework which is missing. The literature relevant to the problem is likely, as will be seen is the case here, to be wide-ranging in disciplinary terms, drawing on the work of those who have engaged with the problem from a multiplicity of disciplinary perspectives.

I have described briefly in Chapter 1 the empirical field (the transition of students into the learning and teaching environment of higher education) and the current position in relation to public information in so far as it has a bearing on the empirical field. The empirical setting for the research is prospective undergraduates in their final year at schools and colleges in the region of my university; a substantial proportion of the students for whom I am responsible come from this setting and this is also the setting in which I get involved in outreach work.

The research involves, as described by Brown and Dowling (1998, p143), a process of bringing "the theoretical and empirical domains into contact in a very specialised and highly localized region". A specialisation of the theoretical field, or focusing down (Bryman, 2012), leads to the identification of the research questions within the empirical setting; these questions will set out to develop those parts of the overall theoretical field relevant to the empirical issue driving the research.

2.1.2   Outline of this Chapter

In the next section of this Chapter, I provide a framing for my subsequent review (in section 2.3 below) of the literature on expectations of learning and teaching at university by focusing the theoretical field down (Bryman 2012, p89) as shown in Figure 2.2 below. This involves considering the broad parameters of

the theoretical field relating to transition and then, within that field, identifying a framework for considering the stages of transition. Expectations can be viewed as one of the elements of the first stage within that framework.

Following on from this "focusing down", the next section contains my review of the literature on expectations of studying at university from which it will be seen that there has been relatively little research expressly within the pre-entry setting; the literature on expectations (and discontinuities between expectation and reality) largely relates to research amongst university students. The existing literature on the expectations about learning and teaching of pre-entry students is limited and fragmentary; an area which falls within the Brown and Dowling description, referred to above, of being in need of organisation.

Transition - the overall field

Preparation - the first stage of transition

Expectations
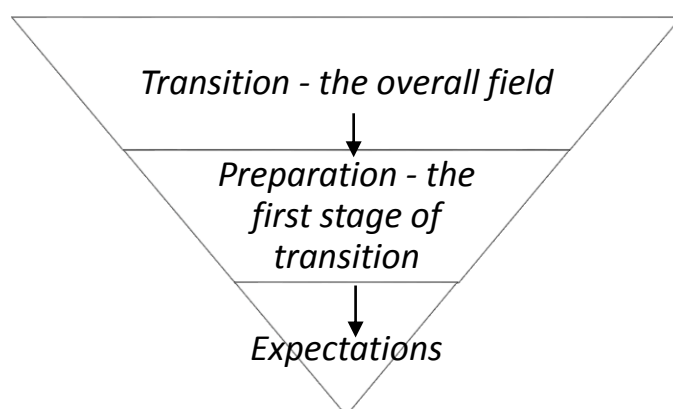
Figure 2-1 Focusing the theoretical field

My review of the literature leads me to a set of research questions, set out in the final section of this Chapter, which articulate more precisely, through a set of questions, the research problem for empirical investigation.

2.2   Focusing down to expectations of learning and teaching

2.2.1 Introducing the theoretical field – a multiplicity of perspectives

Transition to higher education is the subject of a wide-ranging literature which views the topic through a variety of different lenses in terms of both factual issues and disciplinary frameworks. The literature itself has been labelled in various ways, changing with the nature of the interest in the subject; over the years the discourse has changed from that of student retention to that of the

more general (and relevant whatever the student outcome) "first year experience" and "student engagement".

Jones (2008) in a synthesis of the research on retention to that date (including Thomas *et al., 2002;* Quinn *et al.*, 2005; York and Longden, 2007; National Audit Office, 2007) noted that students usually leave in response to a combination of factors and identified (p10) preparation for higher education, institutional and course match, academic experience, social integration, financial issues and personal as relevant to successful transition. The Higher Education Academy published an extensive literature review of the first year experience in 2006 (Harvey *et al.*, 2006) which notes (p viii) that "the policy implication of the review requires an approach that sees the first year as an important part of the long process of cultural, social and academic assimilation into the world of higher education". The literature is now as likely to have a focus on "student engagement" (see, for example, Hockings *et al.* (2007), Krause and Coates (2008)) as on retention or completion. The variety of the keywords used in this area (including retention, non-continuation, persistence, induction, integration, transition, assimilation, first year experience, student engagement) gives an indication of the sprawling nature of the literature. At this stage, I am clearly narrowing the scope of my inquiry considerably within the general theoretical field to focus on the time before the students enter university.

There are also multiple national perspectives and, whilst the underlying principles relevant to transitions may be common, the generalisability of much of the detailed research will be debatable. The US literature on transition and retention, resulting from long-standing concern about completion rates, now spans several decades and the work of Tinto (1975), using a model of "integration" into the academic community of the university, is often the starting point in any review of the literature in this field. Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998), writing specifically about non-completion, suggest that the North American literature is of limited use in the UK context, given the different cultural and policy contexts for higher education. Brinkworth *et al.* (2009, p158) note that Australian literature has burgeoned in recent years partly as a result of the linking with attrition rates of an Australian government initiative rewarding excellence in learning and teaching. It seems likely that the Australian research

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will be of relevance in the UK context; Yorke and Longden (2007) include in their UK based survey a comparison with a set of Australian reports into the first year experience and note that some common themes emerge. In setting the boundaries for the literature review in section 2.3 below of the research on expectations (as distinct from this discussion of the framing of the review in this section), I have included UK, Irish and Australian literature but not included literature from elsewhere.

Transition has also been viewed from the perspective of various student groups. Much of the writing on the subject has been in the context of widening participation (see, for example, Yorke and Thomas (2003); Quinn *et al.*, 2005; Hockings *et al,* 2007) because there have been suggestions that first generation higher education students, particularly if they are mature students, are more likely to struggle with transition (for example, Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p65), something which the non-continuation figures discussed in Chapter 1 above would support. Transition should, however, be seen as an issue of student experience rather than simply of retention (Whittaker, 2008) and Lowe and Cook (2003, p53) suggest that many of those who do complete their studies may under-perform as a result of failure to make an appropriate transition into higher education. In this context, it is increasingly recognised that "traditional" students also struggle with transition and it seems likely, as noted by Wingate (2007, p393), writing from a position of experience in high-tariff institutions with a high proportion of traditional students, that changes in secondary education, combined with the pressure on schools to get their students through exams and into "good" universities, may lead to learning and teaching transition problems for all students.

The literature encompasses a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives, mainly drawing on sociology and psychology although work from other fields, including economics and organisational studies, can also be found. The sociological models (usually influenced by Tinto's "integration" model) tend to lead to discussion of what the universities can do to make the culture more welcoming whilst the psychological models seek explanations of why some students will fare better in the same situation than others. Yorke and Longden (2004, p75) observe that the quest for one 'grand theory' of transition is unlikely to meet with

success and Harvey *et al* (2006, p15) note that "one clear message from the literature is that no one model fits all situations".

In recent years there has been a move towards describing models drawing on more than one perspective; Yorke and Longden (2004, p77), for example, suggest that it should be possible to bring together the sociological literature on institutional cultures with the psychological literature on student attributes in a consideration of how the one might impact on the other. Other examples of cross-disciplinary perspectives include Clark and Lovric (2008, 2009), who describe a model which draws on psychology, anthropology, education and cultural studies, and Kahu (2011, p758) who, writing about student engagement, draws on behavioural, psychological and socio-cultural perspectives.

An argument in favour of at least including the psychological perspective in any model used to explore student transition is that the experience of transition can have positive benefits for students in developing "resilience" in the face of uncertainty and change, something which is increasingly seen as necessary both in the world of education and that of work. Perry and Allard (2003) describe getting Australian first year education students to use the experience of transition into university to help them understand transitions more generally and particularly in the lives of their own potential students. Maunder *et al* (2013, p150) writing from a socio-cultural perspective in the context of higher education, observe that successful negotiations of transition bring personal development benefits. These perspectives suggest that attempts to "smooth out" the transition to university by assimilating the nature of the learning environments (Torenbeek *et al.*, 2010) in preference to adjusting student expectations might not be in the long term interests of the students, even if it were possible, since this would deprive them of the opportunity to meet and learn from the difficulties of transition.

Hockings *et al.* (2007) describe what they call a three-dimensional model for investigating, amongst other things, student conceptions of university learning and teaching. Their research (a two year ESRC/TLRP funded project also discussed in Bowl *et al* (2008) and Hockings *et al.* (2008)) set out to draw on the sociological, pedagogic and epistemological perspectives of the members of the research team. In Bowl *et al.* (2008) they note the challenges of

synthesising the different perspectives and of linking the data collected with the different theoretical perspectives and conclude (p92) that, as a result of their experiences:

> *"we are more comfortable with the idea of uncertainty in research. We have reaffirmed that theory and theoretical frameworks are tools, not solid structures. We can use them to help our thinking and test our conjecturing …."*

This approach resonates with me and the way in which I have attempted to draw on the various strands within this large literature to help me think about the issues within my empirical setting of pre-entry students, their expectations about higher education and the likely impact of those expectations on their transition to learning and teaching at university. In particular, I have sought theoretical frameworks for thinking both about transition and about student expectations in relation to transition; these frameworks are considered below. My discussion of them is an outline one only since at this stage of the literature review, I am still setting the frame around that part of the literature, to be considered in detail, which relates specifically to my research problem of what those expectations actually are.

2.2.2   A framework for transition

The language of induction, integration and assimilation can all be found in the transition literature; all these suggest that something is happening to students. I prefer the language of transition which suggests that this is something in which students are actively engaged. Thomas (2013, p7) notes that the "What Works" project findings point to the importance of student engagement as the means to foster a sense of belonging which is of overarching importance for retention.

Much of the literature, particularly that employing the language of "culture shock" and "rites of passage", conceptualises the topic as a "journey" into higher education. Mann (2001, p10) talks in terms of new students being "outsiders in a foreign land" and notes that even students from families with a tradition of higher education may suffer this sense of alienation:

> *Most students entering the new world of the academy are in an equivalent position to those crossing the borders of a new country— they have to deal with the bureaucracy of checkpoints, or matriculation, they may have limited knowledge of the local language and customs, and are alone.* (2001, p11)

Transition, in this empirical setting, is a journey in terms of physical and cultural surroundings, from the final year at school or college to the first year of university. It is also possible to construe the situation as one in which the students are making the transition to a new identity (Briggs *et al.*, 2012), from that of being a school or college student (probably still living at home) to that of being a university student (possibly living away from home for the first time) fully and successfully engaged with the activity of studying at university; Maunder *et al* (2013), who conceive transitions as "shifts in identity in response to periods of uncertainty", describe this perspective as sociocultural.

As well as the transition to a new environment and to having to take more responsibility for managing their own learning, new undergraduates also need to make epistemological and ontological transitions. The language of liminal spaces, transformation and crossing thresholds can also be found in this context in the literature on threshold concepts originating in the work of Meyer and Land (2003).

As a concept, transition is certainly not unique to higher education, or even to education, but is encountered throughout life. Literature from other contexts is therefore likely to be useful in thinking about the issue. Nicholson (1990) describes, in the context of transitions within the workplace, a framework consisting of a four-stage cycle of preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilization; this is a framework which has been adopted on several occasions within the higher education context (for example; Harris, 2009; Foster *et al*, 2011). Nicholson suggests that different areas of theory are likely to apply to each stage and that the preparation stage is ruled by expectations and motives (1990, p91).
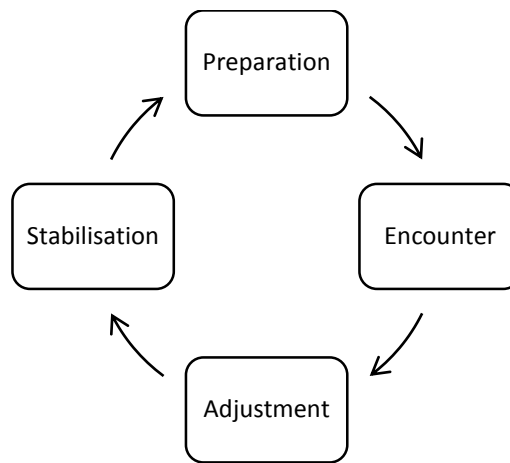
Figure 2-2 Nicholson's transition cycle

His model is cyclical rather than linear on the basis that life (and certainly working life) is a series of transitions and that the learning from each transition can improve the quality of the experience of the next transition.

My research is prompted by my interest in the "preparation" stage of Nicholson's cycle and, particularly, in what those who are about to embark on the journey expect to find when they get there. Pursuing the metaphor further, my sense from my earlier doctoral research, explained in Chapter 1, was that prospective students frequently saw university as a place of transit on the way to somewhere else (the good job they all envisaged getting as a result of having a degree) and had often not thought much about what traversing the terrain would actually involve other than to expect that there would be some partying on the way.

2.2.3 The preparation stage

General

Nicholson, as noted above, suggests that the preparation stage is governed by expectations and motives. In their introduction to their first year experience literature review, Harvey *et al*. (2006, p37) describe preparedness for university as including "being informed, making the right choices, having realistic expectations and being motivated". Thomas (2011, p246) suggests a framework against which interventions within the preparation stage could be evaluated which includes, in addition to the existence of appropriate expectations, the existence of pre-entry information relating to choosing and applying to higher

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education, the ability of students to articulate the fit between their choices and their future intentions and the possession of appropriate academic skills.

The focus of my research is on expectations and so the other aspects of the preparation stage, whilst clearly important in relation to successful transition, are only relevant in so far as they contribute to (or militate against) the acquisition of appropriate expectations. I consider further below the extent to which the elements of prior academic experience and of information contribute to the creation of the expectations of pre-entry students.

Prior academic experience

So far as prior academic experience is concerned, Foster *et al* (2011, p83) observe that new undergraduates will arrive having already experienced many of the practices common in higher education but that there are important differences between post-16 education and university; for example, post-16 teachers tend to support students in managing deadlines, in reading drafts and suggesting the notes which students should take in class. I encountered this last aspect at an earlier stage of my doctoral research when I was told during interviews with A Level teachers that they could not take the "risk" of letting students make their own notes or fail to read drafts or remind them of deadlines.

This reluctance of staff in post-16 education to allow students to develop habits of taking responsibility for their own learning is noted by several practitioner researchers from that context. Mistrano (2008), carrying out practitioner research as a director of post-16 education at a large community college in Bedfordshire, found that staff, as a result of being performance-managed to achieve good examination results, exercised considerable control over the learning of their students despite using the discourse of independent learning. He comments that this could lead to students becoming increasingly dependent learners; his research produced findings that the environments in which most studying was done were those which were tightly monitored and controlled and that if the monitoring was lifted the studying stopped happening.

Atherton (2006, p66), in an article which describes the nature of A Level English teaching, notes that secondary teachers, of whom she is one, are viewed as

contributing to transition difficulties in that they are propelled by school league tables to drill students to meet the assessment objectives. As Brinkworth *et al* (2009) point out, pressure on schools to get students into university can lead to assistance of a sort which sets up unrealistic expectations of what it will be like at university. Birch and Miller (2007) suggest that students from "elite" schools may struggle at university once the support to which they have become accustomed is removed.

Common terms can be used across post-16 education and higher education in a way which conceals the fact that those using them have very different things in mind. Green (2005), for example, refers to four highly consistent lists of the abilities needed to succeed in higher education English made by groups of sixth formers, undergraduates, A level teachers and lecturers and comments that the coincidence of vocabulary used to describe practices such as note-taking and analysis "instead of indicating commonality of practice, serves rather to mask divisions" (2005, p49). He notes that although what constitutes reading and effective understanding and use of literary theory and criticism is very different between sixth form and degree level study, the same language is used to describe those different things.

Those students who assume that learning in higher education will be much the same as learning in school or college are likely to be ill-prepared to meet the need for more autonomous learning. As Joint Information Systems Committee ("JISC") (2007) note (p12), "they [the pre-entry students] basically find it hard to imagine the kinds of learning and teaching that they might meet at university, and try simply to map their current sixth-form experiences onto this new world."

Information

The overlap between the literature on information and that on expectations is not total because much of the literature on information relates to choice-making about whether to go to university and, if so, to do what and where; it is apparent from the literature that students often make choices without a clear understanding of the nature of what they are choosing (Thomas, 2011, p240) and that the information which they may consider pertinent to their decision-making will not necessarily relate to the nature of studying in higher education.

The use of common language to mean different things in the various educational environments referred to above is only one of the difficulties which students may have in turning the information available to them into meaningful expectations. The literature on information asymmetry (largely to be found in contexts other than that of transition research) suggests that the ability to "decode" university websites may differ between socio-economic groups and, in particular, between "first generation higher education" and "traditional" students (for example, Reay *et al.* (2005)). As Askham (2008, p94) says: "our familiarity with the culture, norms and language of higher education means that we take so much for granted, leaving students to interpret the same environment in terms of their own biographies and experiences"; this will be true both of the experience of new university students in adjusting to the environment of higher education and of potential students in relation to the information which they encounter about life and studying at university.

Whilst it is clear that students would benefit from the provision of better information (Briggs *et al*, 2009, p24; Thomas 2013, p11), there is potentially tension between these public information purposes and the marketing communication strategies of universities as pointed out by both Gibbs (2011), discussing the ethics of university marketing, and Bradley (2012), noting that university prospectuses had been compared to tourist brochures, with potential customers seeking a "university experience". Both Bradley and Gibbs cite the conclusion of Klassen (2000), writing about US university marketing practices, that for the students in half of his sample, "the perspective of college life offered is practically devoid of commitment and loyalty to anything beyond having a good time while waiting to graduate"(p21). The focus of student decision-making is largely concerned with factors other than the difference in the learning and teaching environment which they will encounter and university prospectuses and websites reflect this; it has been suggested (Askehave, 2007) that the university prospectus is best understood as part of the tourist brochure genre. The research carried out by Stevenson *et al* (2014) is particularly relevant to this thesis in that it included a discourse analysis of the websites of a representative sample of eleven HEIs as part of an investigation of how institutions conceptualised "teaching excellence" and the "student learning experience". This research was published too late to inform my research design

but I will be returning in my discussion in Chapter 6 to their finding (p19) of "discursive silences around pedagogic issues" and that the websites were "frequently highlighting high quality facilities and resources provided rather than elaborating or exploring issues of pedagogical approaches".

Making information available does not, of course, ensure that prospective students will absorb it. Davies and Cook (2009, p117) observe that many students are "relatively passive in the planning of their higher education" and speculate that this is at least partly a function of university becoming more the norm rather than an exception. Renfrew *et al* (2010) found that many prospective students do not look for information even when they think it would be useful to them. They note that students from families with a tradition of higher education were more likely than first generation students to think information was useful and to make use of various sources of information. Students studying STEM subjects were also more likely to rate information as very useful and make use of available information sources. Those with a strong appetite for information included females, Asian/Asian British and those with high grades in school examinations.

The research by Scutter *et al* (2011), discussed further in 2.3.3 below, provides an example of a case when the provision of information did not appear to improve the quality of student expectations. Their questionnaire asked students to indicate how much time they would be spending on study for their courses; the website of the university indicated that 10 to 15 hours of study for each of the four courses in a semester would be required but only 20% of students nominated this as the amount of time they expected to spend with 12% indicating that they expected to study for more than 20 hours a week per course and 30% indicating that less than 6 hours would be sufficient.

The 2013 HEPI/Which? Survey asked students which factors had been important in their decision making and found that only 17% specified class hours and 31% the learning and assessment styles whereas more than 50% were concerned about the course content (78%), the course reputation, the distance from home, the quality of the facilities and the prospects for graduate employability. The Report concludes (p27) that there are challenges in getting students to use the information available to them and that students seem to be confident in their choice making despite not having undertaken much research.

The multi-disciplinary literature review of information behaviour carried out by Diamond *et al* (2014) drawing on research from the fields of information science, cognitive and behavioural psychology, behavioural economics, and social theory suggests that this is not surprising. They note (p9) that students may be overwhelmed by any requirement to process large quantities of information and make the point that there is no "one size fits all" approach possible to information provision.

The behaviour of pre-entry students in relation to information and the way in which it impacts on their expectations is clearly very closely related to the question of the expectations which those students hold. In focussing down on a set of manageable research questions about the expectations held by pre-entry students, however, their information behaviour frames the research, and informs the way in which my questionnaire was worded, rather than being the subject matter of it. The limited exception to this, for reasons explained in Chapter 1, relates to their recall of KIS information and other website material.

2.2.4 Why are expectations important?

Expectations are often mentioned as being relevant to successful transitions in general (eg Nicholson, 1990; Thomas, 2011). As noted in Chapter 1 above, the National Student Forum said in their 2010 report that knowing what to expect when they arrived was the first element in a positive learning and teaching experience. There is, however, little in the higher education transition literature explaining a causal link between appropriate expectations and successful transition. This is partly a result of the absence of longitudinal surveys starting before students enrol at university. The Futuretrack research is the only example of a UK longitudinal study to be found in the transition literature but, although the second stage of the research (Purcell *et al.*, 2009b) investigated the experience of students of learning and teaching in their first year of study at university, it had not investigated their expectations before entering higher education (Purcell *et al.*, 2008) and could not, therefore, attempt to make any match between them.

Jackson *et al.* (2000) provides an exception to this general lack of longitudinal research; they carried out research with 107 students who studied at a Canadian university between 1993 and 1997 based on the hypothesis that

expectations "are of fundamental importance to adjustment, because our expectations about events often influence how we feel about and understand events, and how we choose to respond to them" (p 2010). They found a correlation between pre-entry expectations, classified by reference both to actual expectations and expectations of ability to adjust, and subsequent outcomes. Pancer *et al.* (2000a, p52), discussing the same piece of research, suggest that for those who find transition stressful, it is helpful to have acquired a relatively complex set of expectations; they describe this as potentially "stress-buffering" in that expectations are less likely to be breached and the students are likely to have developed coping strategies in advance.

The lack of discussion of why expectations impact on transition outcomes may be the result of a general assumption that learning (including learning to be a university student) builds on previous understanding and that there is not, therefore, anything in need of discussion. Green (2007), in a review of the literature on transition from English A level to English at university, comments that starting where the students are is almost the first principle of good teaching and adopts the suggestion of Booth (1997) that expectations are (p78) "key filters through which learning either passes or is blocked". In a slightly different conceptualisation of expectations as a filter, Kuh, writing in the US context and about student engagement, notes that student expectations have an impact on their behaviour and on their adjustment to higher education and observes (p36) that

> *Expectations can be a psychological catalyst or deterrent to certain types of behaviour, serving as a filter through which students compare what is unfolding with what they think should happen and decide whether certain activities are meaningful, relevant, and worth their time, and what opportunities and activities to ignore*" (Kuh, 2011, p16)

Clark and Lovric (2009) are amongst the few examples within the literature on transition to higher education to suggest an explanation for the importance of pre-entry students acquiring an appropriate set of expectations about university; they suggest that students who enrol and find discontinuities between their expectations and the reality are likely to suffer from cognitive dissonance as they try to absorb the new information into their existing framework of understanding.

A somewhat contrary view is expressed by Bates and Kaye (2014) who suggest, as a result of a small scale study with two cohorts of psychology undergraduates (n=61), that a mismatch of expectations and experiences may not cause difficulties if the students feel that the experience exceeds their expectations. They appear, however, to be examining the consequences of mismatch more from the perspective of student satisfaction than adjustment. It seems likely that a mismatch of expectations will cause more difficulty (even if other factors successfully counteract the effect of this) than will be encountered in the preferable situation in which expectations are accurately aligned with experience. References to the negative effects of "violation of expectations" can be found in literature investigating the link with prior expectations in other transition (such as entering parenthood or retirement) (Pancer *et al.*, 2000b; Taylor *et al.*, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2007).

Clark and Lovric (2009) suggest a psychological explanation for students making an easier transition if they come from family backgrounds with a tradition of higher education in that there is likely to be less cognitive conflict involved in adjusting to university. Baer (2008, p311) quotes one student as saying "that her older brother's experience at university helped her to make the transition; he had told her what university was like, and it was what she expected". Walker *et al* (2004) found a link between attending a school with a low rate of participation in higher education and non-completion by those with comparable academic qualifications; it seems quite possible that the smaller pool of collective knowledge to feed into pre-entry expectations might be part of the explanation. Hockings *et al.* (2007, p730), however, concluded that pre-entry students from diverse social, cultural and educational backgrounds shared similar concerns and expectations about going to university and similar approaches to learning and epistemologies.

Cognitive psychology seems to provide a possible explanation for the value of the exercise of investigating the expectations of pre-entry students but the theoretical context within which expectations should be studied is a much more complex and multi-disciplinary one drawing on wider aspects of psychology to do with personality and on sociological factors such as the contexts in which the individual is formulating and drawing on their expectations (Diamond *et al.*, 2014).

2.2.5 Shared vocabularies, different meanings

In searching the relevant literature, it became apparent that the word "expectations" has various shades of meanings, not all of which are relevant in this context. It can be used to discuss what students think they should encounter rather than what they necessarily think they will encounter (and is partially used in this sense by Kandiko and Mawer 2013) and can be found used in this way in discussions of managing expectations with a view to improving student satisfaction. The focus of this research is student expectations of the learning and teaching environment rather than of their own abilities to succeed in that environment which means that some of the literature identified via keyword searches based on "expectations" (such as that of Adcroft (2011), looking at expectancy value model of motivation) is also not relevant.

Conversely, the word "expectation" is not always used when discussing what students think will happen in the future; both "conceptions" (Hockings *et al* 2008) and perceptions are used synonymously with expectations.

There are many references in the literature to independent study but it is apparent that the term is used to signify different understandings with a lack of clarity. There has been something of a shift away from using the language of independent study to refer to solitary working to refer to the taking of personal responsibility. As described in Chapter 1 above, in the 1960s the University Grants Committee was referring to a primary purpose of university as being " to teach him to think for himself and work on his own" (Hale, 1964, para 28) whereas the Quality Code now uses the language of empowering students, in partnership with others, to take responsibility for their own learning. It is interesting to note the shift in use of language by Cottrell in one of the commonly used texts on higher education study skills; she currently says (2013, p4 -18), of independent study "this is the most common and possibly the most challenging feature of university study" and "typically this means managing your own study in between taught sessions" whereas in earlier editions she described independent study as "the most common and possibly most challenging feature of university study. Apart from timetabled elements such as lectures, almost all courses expect students to work on their own for the rest of the week".

This shift in language to align with notions of personal responsibility, autonomy and self-direction may derive from the principles of andragogy and the work by and derived from Knowles in relation to adult education (Knowles *et al.*, 2011) or, as suggested by some, it may be resource driven. For example, Leathwood (2006, p612) suggests that a lack of resource may partially explain what she describes as the "valorisation" of the independent learner. More recent references to resourcing issues can also be found in discussion of the final year dissertation (Todd *et al.*, 2004) and the provision of self-access language centres (Souto and Turner, 2000). Souto and Turner comment that increases in student numbers mean that more independent learning is "the only realistic way forward", although they do go on to say that "learner autonomy is a goal worthy of pursuit in its own right".

Whatever the explanation, this instability of meaning has considerable potential for ambiguity, as noted by Mckendry and Boyd (2012). As Leathwood (2006, p623) points out, there is the potential for the requirement for independent study to be seen as a requirement to be "able to study in isolation from, and without the need for, others". In McKendry and Boyd's research, a quarter of the respondents felt that it involved completing assignments without support; Mckendry suggests that the scope for misunderstanding includes interpreting independent learning as a solitary activity and that by promoting independence a requirement for support may be pathologised with the result that students are deterred from seeking assistance, seeing it as an admission of failure. This may be an understanding which students are bringing with them from school (possibly encouraged by those who were at university when it was more likely to be seen as synonymous with working alone); Broad (2006), carrying out research amongst FE students, found a common thread in terms of the solitary or individual nature of learning independently, quoting comments that independent learning is "trying to understand the concepts on your own" and "learning on your own – any other means of actively learning by teaching ourselves". Mistrano (2008) concludes that staff were sending out mixed messages in that, whilst they might be talking about intellectual curiosity and deep learning, they were more likely to be setting practice examination questions or examination revision as homework than coursework-related research.

This potential for ambiguity needs to be taken into account in trying to understand what students are envisaging when they talk about independent study.

2.3   Expectations of studying at university held by pre-entry students

2.3.1 Introduction

This section contains the core of my literature review in that it considers the literature most closely related to my research problem. I start by discussing the design of the research reported in the literature on the learning and teaching expectations of pre-entry students with a view to this informing my own research design. I then consider the findings which emerge from the research; in particular I note that the literature suggests that although students may appear to know what it will be like to study at university that does not mean that they will necessarily understand the implications of the expectations which they say that they hold.

2.3.2 The research settings and methods

A review of the literature establishes that the expectations of pre-entry students about learning and teaching at university has not been the subject of much focussed empirical research in a post-16 setting; those studies which have been undertaken are set out in Table 2.1 below.

Joint Information Systems Committee ("JISC") (2007) also involved empirical research with pre-entry students but was solely concerned with expectations about the use of information technology and, other than highlighting how under-developed the notions of pre-entry students are about university, does not contribute to my search for literature on pre-entry expectations about learning and teaching. Only Smith and Hopkins (2005) and Scutter *et al* (2011) were specifically focussed on the expectations of the students; in the other studies, expectations were only one aspect of the research.

With the exception of Scutter *et al* (2011), these studies all involved fewer than 250 students, whose representativeness was unclear, and produced largely qualitative findings. Hockings *et al.* (2007) produced quantitative findings in relation to the characteristics of the participants but, since the questionnaires

providing this data were anonymous, this information could not be linked with the findings from the focus groups and interviews.

Researchers	Setting	Participants	Method
Green (2005; 2007)	Two state comprehensives, two independent schools and a sixth form college – location unidentified	128 students studying English A level – states that not claimed to be a representative sample (no further detail)	Questionnaire relating to post-16 teaching methods and expectations of methods and class time at university
Smith and Hopkins (2005)	Sheffield – 3 comprehensives, an independent girls' school and an FE college.	35 students studying A Level English (no information about sampling strategy)	Focus group including questionnaire – aim to investigate expectations of studying English at university
Hockings *et al* (2007; 2008)	2 FE colleges, 6th form college and comprehensive in Birmingham area	225 students	Questionnaire investigating demographics and intentions of students. Unrelated focus groups and interviews.
Briggs *et al* (2009; 2012)	Newcastle – 4 schools and 4 colleges	87 students (sampling strategy not clear)	Focus groups involving written questionnaire – research largely into outreach activities rather than expectations
Harnisch *et al* (2011)	One high-performing sixth form college	142 students studying A Level modern languages	20 focus groups – largely relating to choice rather than expectations
Scutter *et al* (2011)	Amongst students just about to enrol at 3 universities in South Australia	3,000 students (70% had just left secondary school)	Survey of expectations

Table 2.1 Research studies in the pre-entry setting

Reviewing the research methods used in these studies reminded me of the difficulties of avoiding the research activity itself influencing the outcomes. Smith and Hopkins (2005) used an exercise which asked participants to decide in pairs how they would expect to be spending the 200 hours of notional study

time attributed to an exemplar module. The sessions finished with a short questionnaire which was said to give "the students an opportunity to answer as individuals" (p308); it would seem likely that their answers might differ after the collective discussions from those they might have given if the questionnaire had been administered at the start of the session. In Briggs *et al* (2009; 2012) the data were also collected in focus groups in which, as well as engaging in discussion, the students were asked to write answers to the questions being discussed. It is not clear whether the discussion came first as in the case of Smith and Hopkins but there is a suggestion in the briefing note to the interview schedule that it may have done. Furthermore, the interview schedule (which is available on the website connected with the report) shows that there was a question about what the students are most worried about in relation to going to university (which could be argued to prompt them to feel that they should be worried when they might otherwise not have been).

Scutter *et al.* (2011) carried out a large scale (over 3,000 students) study in South Australia into the expectations of students about aspects of learning and teaching as they entered undergraduate study (70% of them directly from secondary school) at Flinders, the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia. The research involved a survey administered before any university based induction activities had taken place so it was as close as it could get to being administered whilst the respondents were still at school. The questionnaire, which was based on one which had previously been used with first years in one of the universities (Brinkworth *et al.*, 2009; Crisp *et al.,* 2009) was entirely about expectations and asked some detailed questions about levels of support and amount of class time which they were expecting. The findings are discussed in 2.3.3 below.

Apart from this small amount of research in a pre-entry setting, the literature on expectations about learning and teaching at university is largely based on research which has been carried out amongst students already at university and can therefore only produce findings about what students had encountered which was unexpected rather than about what they had actually expected before they got there. As Smith and Hopkins (2005) remark

> *the tendency has been to interview students who are at university, asking them to reflect on their A-level experiences and to remember*

the expectations they had then. These students, however, have already experienced university and will describe their expectations through their lived experience. The only way to tap into actual pre-university expectations is to explore them with those who are still at school.

Whilst this is true, research amongst university students is capable of producing very useful findings, particularly if it is carried out very early in the first year.

Much of the literature relating to the match (or otherwise) of pre-entry expectations with reality based on post-entry research is small scale research, often with a single group of students at a single institution (Christie *et al.*, 2013; Cook and Leckey, 1999; Crisp *et al.*, 2009; Haggis and Pouget, 2002; Maunder *et al.*, 2013; Murtagh, 2010; Rowley *et al.*, 2008) or with various groups of students in one university (Brinkworth *et al.*, 2009; Foster *et al.*, 2011; Gibney *et al.*, 2011; Ozga and Sukhnanden, 1998; Read *et al.*, 2003). The generalisability of this research on an individual basis is clearly an issue, although the totality of the picture which they provide is persuasive.

Research involving an investigation of match with previous expectations involving respondents from more than one institution is relatively unusual. Where these are encountered (Foster *et al.*, 2012; Higher Education Policy Institute, 2013; Kandiko and Mawer, 2013; Purcell *et al.*, 2009b; Quinn *et al.*, 2005; Soilemetzidis *et al.*, 2014; Yorke and Longden, 2007; Yorke and Longden, 2008; Yorke and Vaughan, 2013), the issue of expectations tends to be only part of a study with a different focus.

The 2014 Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) Academic Experience Survey (Soilemetzidis *et al.*, 2014), which involved 15,046 respondents self-selected from a student panel of about 60,000 maintained by the research agency running the survey, does have a greater focus on contrasting experience with expectations. One problem with this study is that it involves students from across all years of undergraduate study which means that their responses to questions about whether their course has been as expected in terms of class hours and support for independent study will have been made at least six months (more in the case of those first years who have not come straight from school) and frequently several years after they left school. Another is that students are offered a menu of choices of aspects in which their

expectations might not have been met which may prompt particular responses. A further issue is that it is hard to be sure when students are asked in hindsight in general terms about their previous expectations, whether they are talking about what they foresaw themselves as encountering or what they thought they ought to encounter.

This final issue of the ambiguity inherent in the notion of expectations is one which is shared by the research of Kandiko and Mawer (1913), a QAA-commissioned qualitative study (concept-map mediated interviews) with 150 students in 16 institutions of four different types, which, like the HEPI study, links the question of expectations with investigation into perceptions of value for money. The aim of the research was said to be to investigate the expectations and perceptions of students in higher education of the quality of their learning experience and the academic standards of their chosen programme of study. The focus is not on discovering what they had actually expected or, particularly, on improving transition.

2.3.3 Findings on expectations about studying at university

The literature suggests, as a result of research carried out both pre-entry and at university, that there are expectation mismatches in a number of areas, discussed below, and that there may also often be a lack of clear expectations.

That this is not a new problem is evidenced by the Hale Report back in the 1960s; reference was made (Hale, 1964, paragraph 96) to evidence received during the inquiry from the National Union Students about the "'deep gulf' between school and university teaching methods as a factor leading to psychological disturbances and failure" and to similar evidence from the Scottish Union of Students (which referred to the prevalence of school students "being spoon fed with detailed information necessary to pass examinations") and each "was as critical of the schools as of the universities in this matter". Following receipt of this evidence, a survey was administered in autumn 1961 to 1,133 first year students which found that 66% of the students said that they had needed help from their schools in understanding the nature of university work and that 28% of those students had not received that assistance. This piece of research did not actually investigate expectations but the findings point

to a likelihood that some students were arriving at university with unclear expectations about the nature of studying there.

The findings of the 2014 HEPI-HEA report (Soilemetzidis *et al.*, 2014) suggest that nothing much has changed in the intervening fifty years. The 2014 survey asked students to compare their expectations when they applied for their course with the reality of their academic experience so far. Only 9% of the respondents (n= more than 15,000) said that it had been exactly how they expected (2% did not know). Twenty-seven percent of respondents said that their expectations had been exceeded compared with 12% who said their experience was worse than expected. Another 50% of the respondents said that their experience was better in some ways and worse in others.

This sort of question, asking for a comparison with prior expectations, assumes that the students positively had expectations in the pre-entry stage rather than that they had just not particularly thought about what it might be like. The findings in Hockings *et al.* (2007) in the pre-entry setting suggest that this absence of any definite expectation about learning and teaching is entirely possible since the themes they identified as being at the forefront of the respondents' minds related to finances, identity, making friends and fitting in and how they would be treated by staff. Thomas (2013, p12) reports that a number of the What Works? Projects found that students often have unrealistic expectations which tend to "relate to the academic experience, assuming it will be the same as school or college and being under-prepared to be autonomous learners with responsibility for organising and structuring study" and Davies and Cook (2009, p114) note that "many applicants are simply unprepared for life as university students; there may not be mis-expectation, simply, no expectation".

A lack of clear prior expectations might be part of the explanation of the results of the research which Gibney *et al.* (2011) undertook with students at University College Dublin eight weeks into their first year. Their online survey included a question about whether the student experience so far matched their previous expectations of university. Half the respondents agreed that their expectations had been accurate, 20% said they had been inaccurate and 30% were not sure which would mean either that they had not had clear expectations or that they were still confused about whether university met their expectations.

The literature demonstrates the existence of expectation mismatches in relation to the following:

- amount of time spent in class
- independent study and total workload demands
- level of difficulty and nature of the work (including epistemological difficulties)
- the need to take responsibility for their own learning

Amount of time spent in class

In relation to class hours, several of the studies show inappropriate expectations. The potential English students in the Smith and Hopkins (2005) study expected the same amount of time in class as in the sixth form; Green (2005) had made similar findings. Cook and Leckey (1999) found that a large majority of new students were under-estimating the quantity of class hours and Lowe and Cook (2003), in a much cited article, extended the work of Cook and Leckey across a broader spread of subjects in the same institution and found that 57% knew nothing of the number of hours of classes per week (with a minority also knowing little about the course structure or methods of assessments).

It is possible that the greater public discussion of class hours might result in different findings now although the findings of the HEPI-HEA 2014 report suggest that an expectation gap still exists; 32% of those respondents who said that their experience was worse than they had expected attributed this, at least in part, to the fact that they received fewer contact hours than they were expecting (Soilemetzidis *et al.*, 2014, p22). An analysis of the SPSS file on which the report is based, which is publicly available on the HEPI website, shows that this was 15% of the total respondent group.

Independent study and total workload demands

Cook and Leckey (1999) found that a large majority of new students were under-estimating their total workload and Lowe and Cook (2003, p73) comment that students arrived with misconceptions about private study. Scutter *et al.* (2011), in a survey which asked much more detailed questions about what students expected, found that only 30% of the students had realistic

expectations about the required amount of study A disparity in understanding the importance of out of class study was noted by Briggs *et al.* (2009), who comment that:

> *Some, on seeing four hours of lectures on the timetable, assume that they are free of study for the rest of the week.* (p24)

Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998, p321), during research, on a fairly small scale at one institution, found evidence amongst both completers and non-completers of unrealistic expectations of "only moderate academic demands" coupled with an exciting social life; in the case of non-completers, this tended to be coupled with poor motivation and poor choice of course . Maunder *et al.* (2013) made a similar finding amongst a very small group of psychology students in one institution of inaccurate expectations of the balance between studying and partying.

In the second stage of the longitudinal Future Track project (Purcell *et al.*, 2009b), first year students were asked whether the volume of work-load had been as they expected and only 40% said that it had. Purcell *et al.* remarked (p33) of those moving on to university from secondary education that "it is likely that ….. they found the requirement to take considerably more responsibility for less structured learning unexpected" but it is not clear that this was actually a finding of the research.

Nature and level of difficulty of work

A Higher Education Academy survey of first year students (Yorke and Longden, 2007) found that about one-third of respondents said that the academic work was harder than they expected. This finding is supported by that of the Future Track project (Purcell *et al.*, 2009b) in which 59% of the first year students surveyed reported the standard of work as having been as they expected with a quarter saying that the standard was higher than expected. Lowe and Cook (2003, p73) note that the "gap between prior expectations and experiences is particularly wide regarding students' predictions of the level of academic difficulty they would experience and the difficulty that they experienced". Foster *et al.* (2012, p93), reporting the outcomes of the HERE project, note the association between students contemplating leaving university and poor prior understanding of the nature of studying at university.

It seems likely that there is a connection between students finding the work more difficult than they expected and the need to adjust to the different epistemological approach which they are likely to encounter at university. Harvey *et al.* (2006, p93) refer to a small body of literature (of which Kember (2001) was the most recent), relating to students, across a range of subjects, who arrive with pre-fixed or misleading views about their subject or how it might be taught which do not match what they encounter. Kember (2001), in a study in a number of Hong Kong universities, identified that difficulties were caused by a mismatch between didactic/reproductive expectations of teaching and a learning and teaching environment based on very different epistemological expectations. This may be a culturally specific finding but Hocking *et al.* (2007) found that the most prevalent view amongst the pre-entry participants in their Birmingham research was of knowledge "as a body of absolute truth held by experts, teachers or some other authority" (p729) . Green (2007, p83) notes, in a literature review relating to transition to studying English at university, that "students entering higher education need to come to terms with epistemological and ontological shifts which affect not only how they view their subject, but also the very nature of that subject".

Brownlee *et al.* (2009) consider the range of personal epistemologies with which students may arrive at university and note, referring to work by Perry (1970), that students tend to arrive with a view that knowledge is "simple and certain, and could be transmitted by authorities"(p602) and with ill-formed views of how that knowledge is constructed. Wingate (2007, p392) suggests that "learning to learn at university means a fundamental change in students' beliefs" and that becoming an independent learner involves changing from being the passive absorber of information to learning in a way which includes critical thinking and the application of knowledge to different contexts. Failure to develop in this way is likely to result in students encountering difficulty, particularly in relation to demonstrating appropriate learning when assessed (Haggis, 2006; Jessen and Elander, 2009).

A small-scale research project by Jessen and Elander (2209) (in a single institution which provided both Further and Higher Education) found that the A Level psychology students were more likely to interpret assessment criteria as requiring the inclusion of "correct" content material and the reproduction of facts

rather than, as understood by the HE psychology students, as requiring analysis and transformation of material (Jessen and Elander, 2009).

Taking responsibility for managing their own learning

Coming to terms with the need to take greater responsibility for managing their own learning is one of the difficulties most commonly encountered by new university students. For example, Read *et al.* (2003) report, from research based on 33 focus groups with a total of 175 students from a variety of disciplines in one 'new' university, that "for many respondents, their encounter with the prevalent higher education discourse of students as 'independent learners' came as a considerable shock .. Many were surprised at the relative lack of supervision by lecturers compared to school or college". (p270). This is not surprising in the light of the findings of Mistrano (2008) that more than half the sixth-form students surveyed said that they did not plan their homework or discuss learning strategies and that the students had mixed views as to whether it was they or their teachers who had responsibility for their results.

Briggs *et al.* (2009) found a mixture of views amongst the pre-entry students to whom they talked:

> *Some students look forward to learning more independently, and feel that they are developing the necessary skills. Most are concerned about achieving the balance of time for study and working for assessment with time for other aspects of university or family life. Living independently (for those who choose to study away from home) is often seen as a bigger challenge than studying independently, with finance at the top of most students' 'worry list,' and some respondents wish that they could access life-skills classes at school or college.* (p23, Bridging the Gap final report)

It is not possible to tell whether the students who were more concerned about living independently than studying independently had realistic expectations of both activities. Harnisch *et al.* (2011, p167) comment that "a number of students acknowledged that at university they would be expected to learn and manage their studies in a much more independent way. However, they did not generally feel this would be a huge problem for them as the college encouraged them to work independently".

Scutter *et al.* (2011) found that most of the questionnaire respondents expected a level of feedback on both submitted work and drafts which staff felt to be unrealistic. Nearly all (95%) of students either agreed or strongly agreed that feedback on drafts of their work would be important for their learning and 68% expected that university teachers would provide all of the materials required for their learning. Only 31% thought time management and self-organisation would be important. Despite this, 55% thought they were well prepared for university and 7% were not sure if they were well-prepared.

Foster *et al.* (2011, p84) note the issue of feedback on drafts as a difference encountered by university students:

> *In post-16 education, feedback is often formative, providing guidance to help the student improve a particular piece of coursework. In higher education, coursework feedback is normally summative and focused on the next piece(s) of work, not improving the one at hand.*

In contrast to this, Hockings *et al.* (2007) found that the students (a diverse group from various backgrounds) had constructed a picture of "inaccessible lecturers, large groups, high academic standards, increased workload, and a need to be highly organised, punctual, self-motivated and independent in order to survive" (p728) and were concerned that they had been 'spoon-fed' and ill prepared. It is not possible to tell from the research whether these were expectations grounded in real understanding of what this might mean in practice. The potential gap between knowledge and understanding is discussed in the next section.

2.3.4 Knowledge-based and understanding-based expectations

Research amongst post-entry students has produced clear findings that there is a difference between students "knowing" that they will need to be more independent and understanding the significance of that. Cook and Leckey (1999), for example, found that students surveyed at the start of their first year and then again later were considerably less confident in the second semester than they had been in the first semester about their ability to work with minimal supervision, which suggests that their original expectations of what it meant to work independently had been unrealistic.

A Rowntree Foundation study (Quinn *et al.*, 2005) into working-class 'drop-out' from university which drew on detailed interviews with 67 students who had withdrawn from their courses in four different universities established that new students often found it difficult to adjust to greater amounts of "free" time, less close supervision and different conceptions of knowledge:

> *"although students felt that they were 'warned' of this prior to entering HE, for many the extent of this change was something they were unprepared for in reality"(p22)*

Rowley *et al.* (2008) looked at the preparedness for study of a group of psychology students at one university and observe that:

> *many of the difficulties reported by our students during their first year related to a lack of guidance from academic staff and the need for independence in their approach to study. It was clear that, despite being aware at the outset that they would have limited contact with lecturing staff, many students were still surprised that they had so little. Students had to experience university study before they could appreciate how different it was from their earlier learning experiences. (2008, p410)*

The students were questioned at the start of their first year and then again later; they were aware at the start that they would have less contact with academic staff at university but many students were still surprised by how little contact they had had. At the beginning of their course the students were likely to say that they expected to have no problems organising their workload but at the end of the year they were less likely to say that they had experienced no problems. Similar findings in relation to the reaction to the amount of contact with staff were made by Murtagh (2010) in another small-scale case study, this time amongst initial teacher training students, although the focus of the questioning in that research appears to have been on whether the students felt well prepared rather than what they had actually expected.

Kandiko and Mawer (2013, p13) noted of their research (focus groups and interviews amongst 150 students across 16 diverse institutions) into student expectations and perceptions that there was a recurrent theme about "transgression of expectations" including those about difficulty of work and degree of independent learning. They quote (p64) one student at a research intensive university as saying:

> *I was not prepared for uni, let's say in terms of how to actually learn that was a massive, massive shock to me in terms of, you know, how to proactively go to the library and get all this information…*

I found this observation about being expected to "proactively go to the library" particularly striking as it resonated with one of the incidents which had originally sparked my interest in researching this area: a complaint from a previously academically high-flying student that his tutors at a Russell Group university expected him to go and find the reading in the library rather than providing the printed "readers" of the materials which he had been accustomed to receiving at his academically selective independent school.

Haggis and Pouget (2002) explored the perspectives of the experience of preparing for and entering higher education of one group of students in one Scottish institution and observed (p328) that

> *it became clear that most of them were completely mystified by what 'working hard' might mean in terms of actual activity. They knew, intellectually, that they were going to have to be more 'independent' in their learning, but they seemed to find this extremely difficult in practice.*

The difficulties appeared to arise partly from poor time management skills and partly through having less access to tutor support than they had previously experienced.

Christie *et al.* (2013) classified the students in their study (semi-structured interviews with 20 students from a sample size of 120 students across a range of programmes in one Scottish Business School) into three groups in relation to transition; a group of successful independent learners, a second group who were conscious of the need to develop as independent learners but finding the adjustment hard and a third group, who were struggling to cope, characterised by limited understanding of what independent learning entailed, allied with poor time management skills. They observe that this third group expected to be able to continue to study as they had previously and to rely on lecturers to guide them through the coursework and refer them to reading material: "they did not understand how university would require them to take active control over their learning and this came as a shock" (p632).

These findings about the difference between knowledge and understanding emerged from qualitative research but it is possible for survey based research

to make the same finding. Crisp *et al.* (2009) conducted a survey in Orientation Week at the University of Adelaide and obtained responses which indicated that students thought studying at university would be different to secondary education but consistently indicated in response to questions about access to teachers, response times for work and the reviewing of drafts, that their expectations were not different from secondary education. Brinkworth *et al.* (2009), drawing on the same research, observe that "this suggests that while they knew there would be a change they did not really appreciate the nature of the change"(p159) and note (p168) that student responses indicated that successful transition was dependent in part on the ability to adjust rapidly to a learning environment requiring greater individual responsibility than students expected at the start of their time at university. The research by Brinkworth *et al.* was taken forward using a similar methodology by Scutter *et al.* (2011) in a pre-entry context, demonstrating that an appropriately drafted survey is capable of distinguishing between knowledge and understanding.

2.4   Research questions arising from the literature review

This review of the literature indicates that there are gaps in our knowledge of prospective students' pre-entry understanding of the nature of studying at university; the literature suggests both that students arrive at university with gaps and/or inaccuracies in their expectations about university study and also that a mismatch in expectations is likely to contribute to difficulties in adjusting to university (eg Foster *et al.*,2012; Yorke and Longden, 2008) so that a better understanding of pre-entry expectations could assist in developing ways of improving the student experience of transition.

These findings largely come, however, from research amongst post-entry students, with the difficulty discussed above of establishing their actual original expectations or, indeed, whether they had any definite expectations that it would be any different from their previous experience. The UK research amongst pre-entry students has been undertaken on a small scale (with the largest individual research project involving 225 respondents) and generally in discrete regions of the UK (eg Sheffield, Birmingham, north-eastern England) not apparently including the region of my own university in southern England. My proposed research, whilst still relatively small scale, set out to extend the

geographical spread of the research and to make a proportionately substantial increase in the number of pre-entry students who have been involved in such research. Unlike most of the previous research projects, it focuses the investigation solely on the respondents' expectations of the experience of studying at university rather than on the wider aspects of university life.

As a consequence of the literature review, I formulated seven research questions, which can be clustered into four themes, to guide my overarching research problem of investigating pre-entry expectations of learning and teaching at university.

The first theme is the single question:

1. Do pre-entry students expect that studying at university will be different from studying in a post-16 institution and, if so, how?

The second theme relates to the extent to which their expectations of the nature of studying at university are accurate and to their confidence in their expectations. This can be investigated through the following three questions:

2. Do pre-entry students expect to take responsibility for their own learning?
3. Do pre-entry students have realistic expectations of the workload and of the split between class and independent study?
4. How confident are they about their expectations of the nature of studying at university and are they likely to be correct in those expectations?

As noted above, inaccurate expectations appear from the literature to relate particularly to the amount of time to be spent in class, the overall workload and the much greater need for students to take responsibility for managing their own learning and to become autonomous and independent learners in relation to both the organisational and epistemological aspects of their learning. The section of the literature discussed in 2.3.4 above demonstrates that "knowing" about aspects of learning and teaching at university is not the same as understanding what it will actually be like. Research into expectations can, therefore, best be met not by asking questions using potentially ambiguous terms such as "independence" but by asking precise questions about

expectations of particular aspects of studying at university which are likely to differ from the school experience (such as deciding what to study and taking responsibility for coursework); this is an approach which was demonstrated in the research carried out in Australia by Crisp *et al.* (2009), Brinkworth *et al.* (2009) and Scutter *et al.* (2011). The overarching concept of "independent study" involves issues of both organisational independence (eg time management and self-direction of study) and of what may be described as epistemological independence (understanding that there may not be a clearly correct answer which will be given to the students by the tutors).

The literature (eg Pancer *et al.*,2000) suggests that the more complex the expectations of students, the less likely it is that there will be cognitive dissonance affecting the smoothness of their transition into higher education. This suggests that a further area for investigation is the extent to which potential students are confident in their expectations. If they are less confident, they may be apprehensive and still find the transition uncomfortable but may be better prepared for the difficulties than those who are confident in their expectations but likely to find them unmet.

The third theme relates to the extent to which there appears to be a link between what they recall of the information on the website, particularly the KIS data about class hours, and their expectations. This line of enquiry changed somewhat during the development of the research tools, as explained in the next Chapter, but was finally represented by the following two questions:

5. Is there a link between their expectations about class hours and the existence of the KIS data?
6. What sort of information about learning and teaching are they taking from university websites?

My research also differs from any of the earlier research discussed in this Chapter in that my interest in student expectations was at least partly prompted by the introduction of the KIS data and my interest as to whether it would have any impact on pre-entry expectations of studying at university, either as a result of the KIS information directly or, possibly, indirectly through elaboration on the information by universities within their websites. I knew from my professional practice perspective that there was concern within the universities about the

impact of the information on class hours, particularly given the public discourse discussed in Chapter 1 above and the experience of parental questioning about class hours at open days; I was aware of discussion as to whether there should be greater emphasis on the course webpages on the benefits of studying independently as a counter-balance to this.

The findings of Scutter *et al.* (2011) on the impact of information on the website about time to be spent in class suggested, however, that information on the websites, KIS or otherwise, might not have much impact on student expectations of amount of time to be spent in class (and this research has been reinforced by Diamond *et al.* (2014)).

Finally, a single question about the difference in the findings between students from different sub-groups:

> 7. Is there any difference in the findings between students from different demographic and educational backgrounds?

This question links to the suggestions in the literature, and in the retention data discussed in Chapter 1, that some groups of students face greater challenges in making the transition to higher education. For example, Roberts (2011, p193) assumes as "an obvious fact" that the lack of understanding of the independent study which would be expected of them was the result of "the possession of a differing stock of cultural and social capital" to that which higher education expects of students. Walker (2004) found an association between non-completion and coming from a school with low rates of participation in higher education, regardless of academic qualification. Thomas (2011, p243) comments, however, that "it is not always clear from the research whether the challenges of transition into higher education are common for all students" and Yorke and Longden (2008) note with some surprise that their survey of first year students found that the responses of students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds did not differ greatly from those of other students.

There are many other questions potentially raised by this literature review, in particular further questions about why students have the expectations which they have. The purpose of the research questions is, however, to keep the boundaries of the research project within manageable proportions and the seven identified questions are those which most clearly focus on the

overarching aim of investigating what expectations are held by pre-entry students and how those might link with the new web-based public information requirements.

Chapter 3   The research process

3.1   Introduction

Figure 3.1 below sets out the research process by which I addressed the research questions identified at the end of Chapter 2. The rest of this Chapter explains my choice of research tools and the development and implementation of this research design.
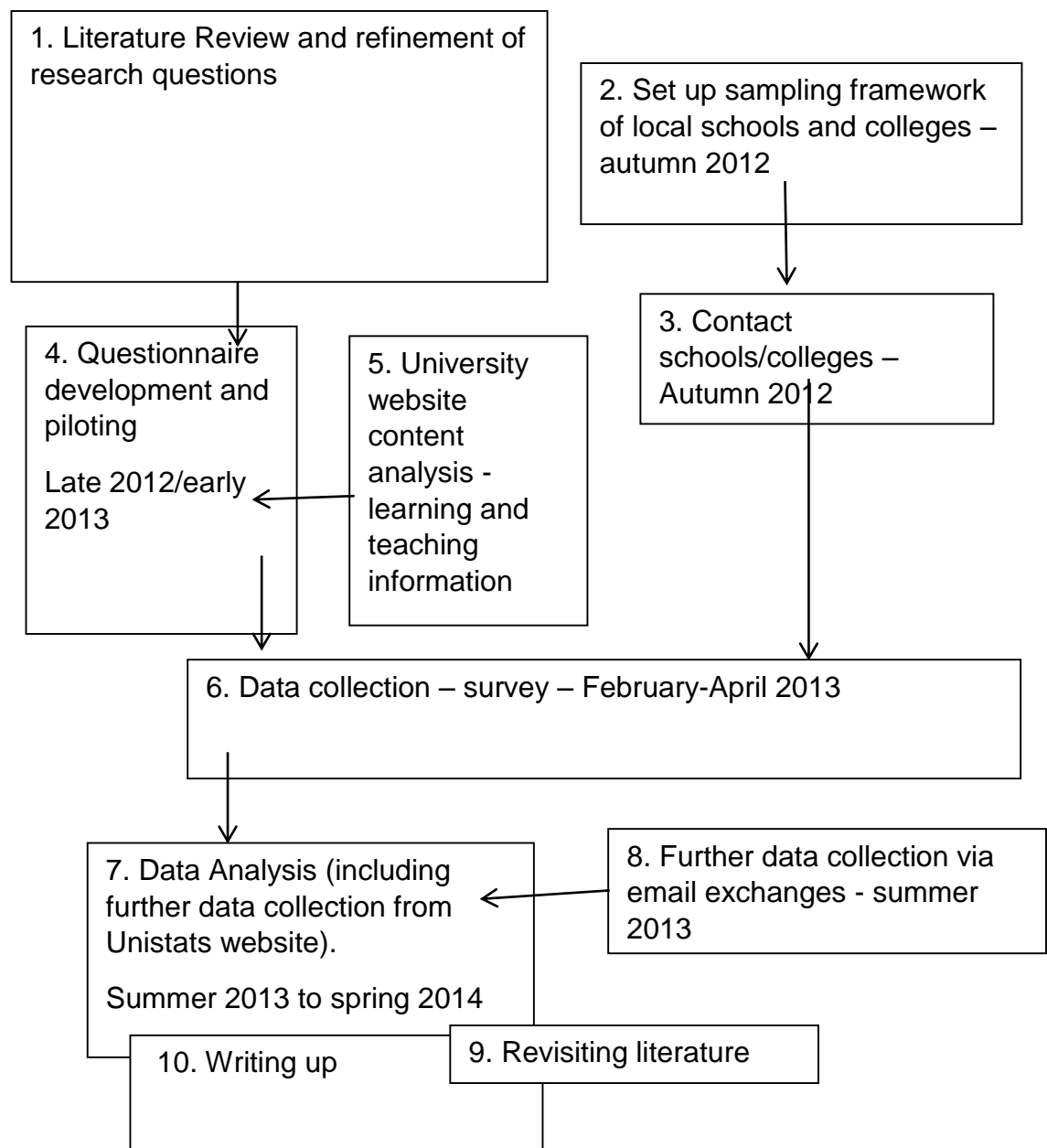
Figure 3-1 Research Outline

3.2   Planning the research

The need to identify what is possible within the constraints on the research (and there almost inevitably will be constraints) is acknowledged by the four-stage model for research planning, suggested by Cohen *et al.* (2011, p136), as set out in Figure 3.2 below, which prioritises this need to recognise the limitations. Gorard (2010, p240) suggests that the practicalities are lesser considerations but this is from an after–the-event perspective since where the constraints weigh too heavily, the research project in that form will have been abandoned. At the stage of choosing between acceptable methods, practical considerations will play a major role.

Stage 1: Identify the purposes of the research.
Stage 2: Identify and give priority to the constraints under which the research will take place.
Stage 3: Plan the possibilities for the research within these constraints.
Stage 4: Decide the research design

Figure 3-2 Four-stage model of research planning (Cohen et al. 2011)

The research questions set out in the final section of the previous Chapter provide stage one of this model. The model suggests that these research questions create a solid foundation for the planning but in the same way that, as pointed out by Brown and Dowling (1998, p154), there is "no unambiguous point of completion", equally determining the research questions themselves is an iterative process. This is the "messy" nature of research in which the precise research questions may not be completely clear until some way into the project.

 As Gorard (2010, p240) notes, research design requires characterisation of the type of claims to be made as a result of the research. The claims I wanted to be able to make were largely descriptive, relating to a particular moment in time and geographical region, of what the respondents' expectations were, although with elements of both possible causality (had the KIS data had any impact in relation to knowledge of class hours?) and of comparison (between groups of respondents with different characteristics).

The data which I wanted to collect required asking questions of prospective students since it would not be possible to discover their expectations in any other way. The fundamental issue in choosing the research tool with which to collect the required data was the decision as to how those students should be asked about their understanding of what studying at university was going to be like. The comparative element of the research required that the questioning be at least partly in standard form to enable measurement and comparison to take place. A broader purpose of the research was to support that part of my practice which involves outreach work with local post-16 institutions and the research design needed not to put at risk relationships with those institutions and, ideally, to build on existing relationships.

The main potential constraints in this case from amongst those suggested by Cohen *et al.* (2011) would be those of ethics, time and the powers of the researcher (which in this case included issues of access to the respondents and skills of analysis). The ethical issues are considered separately in the next section of this Chapter.

The time constraints related both to the period in which the required data would be available and the amount of my time which (as a practitioner researcher with a full-time job) could be devoted to the data collection during that period. The data needed to be collected during a relatively compressed period (this was also a problem encountered by Hockings *et al.* (2007) and is always likely to be an issue with research amongst students who are at the stage of having applied to university) since there would be no point in carrying out the research before the respondents had identified a university and course which they hoped to attend; this meant that the research could not be carried out before the January deadline for the submission of UCAS applications. There would then only be four months at most whilst the students were still at school or college and a portion of that time would be lost to the Easter holiday. During this period the schools and colleges, who would clearly be the gatekeepers to access to the potential participants in the research, would be unlikely to facilitate students losing much time from teaching sessions for focus group activity.

The possible main methods of asking prospective university students about their expectations were interviews or questionnaires (Robson, 2002, p224). Whilst semi-structured qualitative interviews (Robson, 2002, p278) would

produce richer data in terms of giving meaning to the respondents' answers whilst retaining a degree of standardisation, I was aware (particularly from my previous experience in undertaking group interviews with students in their final year at school and college) that this would be much more problematic to arrange and administer than a standardised questionnaire. The risk of failing to be able to organise a sufficient number of sessions and of last minute withdrawal from arranged sessions were both high. As an individual very part-time researcher, I would be much more likely to be able to collect adequate data through a self-administered questionnaire, preferably completed by whole groups of students in a school scheduled session at which I could be present. From the point of view of being able to use the research process to further my relationships with the schools and colleges, it was also preferable for me to spend a short period in each of a range of schools than a more extended period with fewer institutions.

The nature of at least some of the information which I sought (had students seen the website, how many hours a week did they think they would spend in class) was relatively straight-forward and as readily collected by questionnaire as by interview. This research was in some respects a continuation of an earlier piece of research which had involved qualitative group interviews on which I would be able to draw in terms of formulating the questions. Closed-question questionnaires and face-to-face interviews may be at either end of the qualitative/quantitative spectrum of methods of seeking answers from respondents but, as pointed out by Gorard (2010, p243): "there may be a continuum through structured interview schedules to open-ended survey items delivered face to face"; it is possible to structure a questionnaire so that it consists largely of closed questions but to include at least one general open-ended question.

All these factors suggested that a questionnaire, consisting largely of closed questions, would be the most appropriate method of data collection. This would need to be a short questionnaire both in terms of the likelihood of schools agreeing to allow me time to administer it and in students feeling prepared to answer it. I also envisaged using the questionnaire as a way of getting access subsequently to some of the respondents and being able to ask further questions by email (Bryman, 2012, p668).

Whilst a questionnaire was the main data collection strategy to be used, I also identified at the research planning stage various other methods of collecting data and research tools which would be involved. In particular, a content analysis of university websites would identify the material about learning and teaching likely to be available to prospective students on university websites and therefore to be addressed in the questionnaire. Assessing the accuracy of respondents' expectations of volume of class hours would require collecting data from the Unistats site.

Cohen's model suggests that the final stage of the planning process is to decide on the design. As Gorard (2003, p11) notes, however, "The apparently separate phases of reading, formulating research questions, design, collection of data, analysis and reporting are really concurrent and iterative". For example, looking at the representation of my research design in Figure 3.1 above, carrying out items 2 and 3 was part of establishing the extent of the constraints (Cohen stage 2) since if an insufficient number of schools and colleges had responded positively in response to item 3, the research design would have had to be amended or even abandoned. Indeed, the precise identification of the research questions which are the starting point for the planning process is also an iterative matter; it may well be (and this research project exemplifies this to some extent) that it will only be at the end of the process that it becomes possible to describe the research "design" precisely and identify the questions to which answers have been found. The literature review, whilst playing a major role in identifying the research questions, continues to be a research tool throughout the process in that engagement with the collected data leads to further engagement with the literature. The precise research questions and design and the boundaries of the relevant theoretical context are constantly redefined through the process of carrying out the research (eg Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010, p 10).

The remainder of this Chapter, after a discussion of the ethical issues, considers each of the items 2 to 8 from Figure 3.1 above in more detail.

The flexible nature of this sort of research (as compared, for example, with a fixed experimental design) means that, whilst some constraints and limitations can be recognised from the beginning and taken into account in the original design, a full appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the research method

can only be undertaken at the end of the project. Chapter 6.2 contains a discussion of the strength and generalisability of the findings which is based on a consideration of the limitations of the research method.

3.3   Ethical considerations

I have considered whether there are any ethical issues raised by this research under the main headings of the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association, 2011).

The possible issues raised are those of voluntary informed consent and privacy. The research does not involve incentives or young children or otherwise vulnerable participants. There are also no issues of potential detriment to participants. The participants clearly included the students who were invited to complete the questionnaire but those participants were accessed via their schools and colleges, members of whose staff were invited to put themselves to some trouble to make that access possible and who should therefore also be considered as participants.

RCU has close links with many of the schools and colleges in its area and I expected to be able to use those links to obtain my respondents; this could potentially raise issues of the extent to which participation by the schools was truly voluntary, particularly amongst any of the respondents who were applying to it. I acknowledged this as an issue by making it very clear that there was no pressure on any college or school to participate and a number of schools did, in fact, refuse (generally apologetically) to participate on the grounds that they could not spare the time.

Similarly, the students might possibly feel compelled to complete the questionnaire by the school or college or, in the case of a student seeking a place at RCU, by my presence. The questionnaire was anonymous and also stated that all answers would be treated as confidential (which would be relevant in the instances where respondents chose to give a name). In the cases in which I was present, I reiterated the anonymity and confidentiality and that giving a name was completely voluntary; the completed questionnaires were to be passed along the rows and then down to the front of the room. It was also possible for a student required to be present in a questionnaire-answering

session to hand in a partially or totally blank questionnaire and quite a number of students did so. In order to further protect the confidentiality of the information, institutions and geographical locations have only been identified pseudonymously in the writing up of the research and any data containing personal and identifiable information will be destroyed on the completion of the work.

There were no research sponsors. I can observe my responsibility to the community of educational researchers by following good academic and research practice in the planning and writing up of the research and to educational professionals and others by disseminating the findings, particularly to those schools who participated in the research.

Accordingly, ethical issues did not pose any substantial constraints in the planning of the research.

3.4   The sampling strategy

As Cohen *et al.* (2011, p163) note, the first stage in planning a sampling strategy is to decide whether a sample is needed or whether it is possible to have the whole population and the second stage is to identify the population, its important features and size. My research questions related to the expectations of prospective university students in their final year of school/college in the city region of my university. These students would, therefore, be the research population and their schools and colleges would be the gatekeepers through which access to them could be gained. Practitioner experience of undertaking surveys with university students made me aware that the best response rates would be obtained if I were able to administer the questionnaire in person to a group of students as part of their class schedule so the schools and colleges would not just be gatekeepers to the students but also likely to be extremely influential with regard to the response rates.

I searched the Department for Education performance table website (http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/) to identify a population of schools and colleges. The website contained several possible search filters and I opted to search by city name since this identified all the schools and FE colleges with 16-18 provision within the city local authority together with some of

those from each of the three adjacent local authorities, thus including both rural and inner city settings. The resultant list, once those without Key Stage 5 provision had been excluded, contained 36 schools (28 state and 8 independent) and three colleges.

Table 3.1 below sets out the categories of information which I then collected for these schools and colleges, using information from the Department for Education Key Stage 5 2010-11 performance tables (this exercise was carried out during late summer 2012 when the 2010-11 data was the most recent available), the Edubase 2 site for 2010-11, Ofsted reports, the POLAR 2 (Participation of Local Area) data published by HEFCE in 2007 and the Sutton Trust data published in July 2011 to accompany its report "Degrees of Success, University Chances by Individual School" (data accessed at http://www.suttontrust.com/our-work/research/item/degrees-of-success-he-destinations-tables). It has been possible since the data was collected to update this information from the more recently published performance tables and Edubase site. More recent POLAR data has also become available but the Sutton Trust data was more helpful in determining higher education participation rates for schools.

The information about student numbers and participation rates suggested that there were likely to be in the region of 2,500 possible prospective university students in their final year at the various institutions on the list, split roughly as to 18% at independent schools, 29% at colleges and 53% at state comprehensives. The Futuretrack cohort data (Purcell *et al.*, 2008) and Sutton Trust research (Sutton Trust, 2011), although using slightly different classifications, suggests that the proportions in this estimation are broadly in line with the national picture although Radstowe (which is an area of great extremes of wealth and poverty) does have an above-average concentration of independent schools compared with the national average.

1.	Type of school	Schools were identified by the DfE as independent, FE college, sixth form college or community, foundation, academy or voluntary controlled or aided school. I reduced this to three categories: independent, state school and FE/sixth form college.
2.	Number of students at end of A/AS or equivalent study (Key Stage 5)	DfE data – originally for 2010/11, so approximate - it has since been possible to obtain from the 2013 tables the actual number of students at the end of Key Stage 5 at the time of the research.
3.	Percentage of free school meals	DfE data. This is a standard, albeit less than perfect, proxy for identifying socio-economic deprivation (see Gorard (2012) for discussion).
4.	Average UCAS score per student	DfE data.
5.	Most recent Ofsted description of ethnic mix	This was not always given in the Ofsted reports and, when it was, was in very general terms.
6.	% of students to HE on average in three years 2007-2009	This was from the Sutton Trust data. This gives a more precise measure of participation rates than the POLAR information which I also collected but which does not work well if the students do not live in the immediate catchment of the school.
7.	% of students to selective HE on average in three years 2007-2009	This was from the Sutton Trust data. "Selective HE" maps against the Russell Group universities to a large extent.
8.	Approx. likely number of possible respondents.	I derived this figure for each school/college by applying the percentage in 6 above to the number of students in 2 above. It is obviously only a very rough "guestimate" since either or both of the number and the % might have changed in 2011-12 and, in any event, there would be more students applying for places than would actually succeed in obtaining them.

Table 3.1 Information on the post-16 institutions in the sampling frame

I knew that, in the unlikely event that all the schools and colleges within the population were to respond to my invitation to them to participate in my research and to respond in a way which made a high response rate likely, I would find it difficult to cope with the resultant volume of responses. A sample was, therefore, necessary and, whilst it was possible to identify the members of the population of schools (albeit with the parameters of the population set in a slightly arbitrary way), there was no practicable way of identifying all these pre-

entry students within those schools. At stage 3 of the sampling strategy
planning suggested by Cohen *et al.* (2011), therefore, it was clear that the
sample would have to be a non-probability one rather than one drawn randomly
from a known population.

I wanted to be able to analyse the questionnaire responses by reference to the
demographic variables relating to the respondents set out in Table 3.2 below
and was, therefore, mindful of the need to try to achieve a sample which
included appropriate respondents.

Variable	Availability of population data
Family tradition of higher education	The Futuretrack research (Purcell *et al.*, 2008) suggests that a first-generation rate of between 55% and 60% would be representative. No data available for this specific population. Only possible to speculate in advance of identifying respondents by reference to the participation status of the school's address which, with some wide catchment areas, was unlikely to be very helpful.
Gender	The UCAS end of cycle data for the 2013 entry (available at http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/key-analysis, accessed September 2014) showed that 55% of young (under 20) applicants were female. All the state schools and colleges were mixed but some of the independent schools were single sex.
Ethnicity	2011 census data for Radstowe shows that 84% of the population is white (compared with 86% for the population of England and Wales as a whole) and 16% BME (a change from the figures of 92% and 8% in the 2001 census). There was some indication in the Ofsted reports as to the ethnic mix of the students.
Free school meals	UCAS data released in February 2014 suggests a figure of about 7% of those applying at age 18 would have been in receipt of free school meals aged 15.

Table 3.2 Proposed respondent demographic variables

The timing issues explained in section 3.2 above meant that any sequential or
quota approach to purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012, p203) would not be
possible; there would not be time to analyse the characteristics of the first set of
respondents and then find more respondents with particular characteristics to
achieve quotas of the various characteristics if (as, in fact, transpired) the
original sample turned out to be skewed in favour of some of the variables. I

would therefore need to be aware of which schools were likely to produce respondents within the various categories.

I categorised the institutions as follows:

		Notable proportion of minority ethnic heritage students (from Ofsted reports)	**Mainly white British** (from Ofsted reports)
State	**Above average free school meals, below average UCAS points per student and/or low participation neighbourhood**	1. *3 schools (198 at end of KS5in 2010/11)* *% of total likely to enter HE coming from this group:4%*	2. *12 schools (599 at end of KS5 in 2010/11)* *% of total likely to enter HE coming from this group: 12%*
State	**More than 20% of students (or more than 40% of those who do go to HE) to most selective HEIs (Sutton Trust data), above average UCAS points per student or located in high participation neighbourhood**	3. *3 schools (400 at end of KS5 in 2010/11)* *% of total likely to enter HE coming from this group: 9%*	4. *10 schools (1135 at end of KS5 in 2010/11)* *% of total likely to enter HE coming from this group: 28%*
5. **Independent schools**		*8 schools (655 at the end of KS5 in 2011)* *% of total likely to enter HE coming from this group: 18%*	
6. **FE and sixth form colleges**		*3 institutions (1750 at the end of KS5 in 2011)* *% of total likely to enter HE coming from this group: 30%*	

Table 3.3 Categorisation of schools/colleges within population

Whilst I invited all the schools in the framework to participate, I was able to use this categorisation to guide me in deciding which schools to expend more time and energy trying to involve in the research in order to get representation from each category. I was aware that the extent to which I would be able to claim to

be able to generalise the findings would depend upon how successful this approach was in achieving a representative sample and, similarly, the extent to which statistical comparisons between groups would be possible would depend on the extent to which the groups were represented. The outcomes of this strategy are discussed in Chapters 4 (the findings in relation to the characteristics of the respondents) and 6.2 (the discussion of the limitations of the research).

3.5   Involving the schools

The RCU schools liaison staff introduced me to the institutions with which they were in contact (all the state schools, colleges and one independent school). A number of those contacted, particularly those in category 4 of Table 3.3 above and the independent school, immediately responded positively.

I attempted to get agreement from all the institutions which made contact to allow me into a session with their university applicants at which the questionnaire could be completed. I achieved this easily with a number of schools in Categories 4 and 5 and did not seek any further engagement with other schools in those categories. Only one of the three schools in Category 3 responded favourably; this school was very helpful in providing a group with which I could pilot the questionnaire but did not have any further opportunity for me to go into a larger group of students; this, therefore, was one of institutions at which I had to leave questionnaires for distribution, to be completed by students and then returned subsequently for me to collect.

The schools in Categories 1 and 2 were more difficult to engage; only three were persuadable to become involved and only one of those was able to agree to me going into tutor time. One other school in Category 2 expressed willingness to get involved but did not respond to my attempts to arrange this and the university contact for a group of four others explained apologetically that all of the schools were engaged in curriculum re-writing and/or problematic Ofsted engagements. It is noteworthy that it was easier to engage those schools with high participation in selective HE in the research and it is possible to speculate that this may be indicative of levels of engagement with the higher education environment in those schools.

The FE colleges and the sixth form college also posed problems. Institutional level staff responded favourably initially but it proved impossible to make arrangements for me to have access to their university applicants in person, partly because (unlike the schools) there were few opportunities in which the students came together collectively apart from teaching sessions which, with the imminence of examinations, staff were reluctant to allow me to encroach upon. In two of the three institutions I was able to persuade a lecturer in a subject taught by my Faculty, with whom the Faculty had had contact, to carry out the survey with some of their students and to persuade a colleague to do the same, but all the potential arrangements with the third college came to nothing. In an attempt to increase the proportion of the sample from FE colleges, I added an FE college just outside the geographical boundaries of the initial population with which the Faculty had contact. These methods of accessing the respondents will have had the effect of skewing the subject representation amongst respondents from the college section of the population towards Social Science and Humanities subjects.

I used a personal contact as a way into a second independent school and that contact provided an introduction to a third independent school; two independent schools would probably have sufficed for a representative sample had it not been for the fact that the second school was a single-sex boys school and the addition of the third (also single-sex) balanced the genders. All the other institutions involved were mixed.

3.6   Questionnaire Development: university website analysis

A preliminary stage in designing the questionnaire was an investigation, by means of a content analysis of a sample of university websites, of the learning and teaching messages which the respondents were likely to have encountered on university websites; this was prompted by research question six (see discussion in 2.4 above). As will be seen, although my expectation had been that this would assist formulation of a question about website descriptions of independent aspects of university study, my findings led to rather wider questions.

I drew a sample of websites from the population of HEFCE funded English higher education institutions; omitting specialist institutions and those which are

largely postgraduate or post-experience, this numbered 87. I stratified the total population into some broad-brush sub-groups using a matrix involving university mission group, "tariff group" and National Student Survey teaching scores as shown in Table 3.4 below. The mission group membership was as at 2012 and has changed considerably in the intervening time. I used the National Student Survey score for satisfaction with learning and teaching and allocated universities into either the top or bottom half of the results.

The tariff group classification is that made by the Futuretrack research which divided higher education institutions into four groups, largely on the basis of the grades which it required of applicants for its courses (Purcell *et al.*, 2009a); although others use similar classifications, the Futuretrack researchers were the only ones to have published the membership of the groups within the classification during the time in which I was carrying out my fieldwork and my initial data analysis. During my analysis phase, Department for Education destination tables (Department for Education, 2013) were published which contained a list of the top third selective institutions for 2010/11 entry by average UCAS tariff score; this did not contain any of the University Alliance institutions labelled as high in the matrix below or Keele from the unaligned group.

Where there were more universities falling within a cell of the matrix than required for proportionate representation, my selection between them was random. This gave the sample of 44 universities which can be seen in Table 3.4 below.

My preliminary analysis involved looking at the messages on the main university pages and also on the course pages for, in the first instance, business or law (chosen as a starting point because of my professional interest in these courses). It became apparent as I carried out this preliminary trawl that many universities were adopting very similar templates across all their course pages and that it was likely that patterns of information would be replicated across courses within any given university so at this stage of gathering information to inform the questionnaire design I decided it was unnecessary to investigate multiple different courses for each university.

Mission Group (number in sample/total in group)	Tariff Group (using the Futuretrack classification)	Higher Teaching Scores (NSS scores taken from Guardian 2012 League Tables – top two quartiles)	Lower Teaching Scores (NSS scores taken from Guardian 2012 League Tables – bottom two quartiles)
Russell Group (10/19)	**Highest**	KCL, Durham, Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds	LSE, Manchester
	High	Exeter, QMUL, Liverpool	
1994 Group (4/9)	**High**	Lancaster, Royal Holloway, East Anglia, Leicester	
University Alliance (10/19)	**High**	Oxford Brookes, Huddersfield, Portsmouth	Northumbria, Bournemouth, Hertfordshire, Bradford
	Medium	Coventry	De Montfort
	Low		Kingston
Million+ (10/19)	**Medium**	Bath Spa	ARU, Birmingham City, Canterbury Christchurch
	Low		Kingston
Unaligned (10/21)	**High/Highest**	Keele, Hull	City, Aston
	Medium	Winchester	Brighton, Westminster
	Low	Worcester	London South Bank, Southampton Solent

Table 3.4 Universities within website content analysis

I used an iterative approach prompted by (although not the same as) Bergman (2010, p391). This involved moving between "top-down" coding and "bottom-up" coding eventually leading to a set of relevant themes. Initially, I started with some "top-down" coding derived from the research question; in the course of coding the websites using these codes, further "bottom-up" codes emerged.

In the initial trawl through the population, I was looking for the following:

- The KIS data on scheduled contact hours (only on the course pages)
- text making comparison with learning and teaching at school;
- text referring to transition to studying at university;
- text giving detailed description of contact time;
- text describing independent study;
- text explaining advantages of independent study.

I undertook two explorations in relation to each university; one starting from the university home page and one starting from a course page (I chose law as the course page to look at in this initial exploratory stage). The initial coding schedule, set up in an excel spreadsheet, for exploration starting at the home page of the university was as follows:

University	Minimum number of clicks to general description of L&T	Does it mention independent study?	Does it explain independent study?	Does it explain the benefits of independent study?	Does it mention transition/ difference from school

Figure 3-3 Initial "top-down" coding schedule starting at university home page

The initial coding schedule, set up in an excel spreadsheet, for exploration starting at the main undergraduate Law course page was as follows:

University	% Scheduled class time (KIS)	Text re L&T referring specifically to KIS widget?	Tab/section on Learning & Teaching?	Does it mention independent study?	Does it explain independent study?

Figure 3-4 Initial "top-down" coding schedule starting at course page

As I began to work through the initial exploration of both university and course pages, in addition to completing the spreadsheet schedules, I kept notes of other things which occurred to me, somewhat akin to the "memos" of the grounded theorists as described in Charmaz (2006). It quickly became clear that it was very unusual for a university to refer specifically in text on their

website to the learning and teaching data within the KIS graphic. It also became clear that it was unusual for the websites to focus on the amount and benefits of independent learning. Although the university pages all had material about "Student Life" or "Student Experience" or some similar label, this frequently did not encompass studying. As I read the websites, I became interested in what was being said about the experience which students would have; this seemed frequently to refer to employability, to facilities, to "student life" but far more infrequently to the quality or nature of the learning experience.

The course pages did all have at least some material on learning and teaching. I realised by the time that I was about a quarter of the way through my initial investigation of the sample that there seemed to be at least four different themes emerging:

- teaching methods as something done to the student,
- academic support as something for the student who needed "help",
- facilities as the physical location and technical support for learning
- material about the student as an active, critical or independent learner.

Some websites leant heavily towards one of these themes (judged by the proportion of the text relating to a particular aspect and the use of headings for sections, links or tabs) whilst most included at least two of them. I also noticed that some websites had some centralised messages about aspects of learning and teaching to which all course pages pointed, whereas others had a more decentralised approach with the material embedded in the course pages.

I amended the coding to take account of these emergent "bottom-up" codes. At university level, I amended the coding to enable me to investigate the extent to which the main "why come here" message included reference to learning and teaching and the extent to which main university level (if relevant) and course page information about learning and teaching included and gave prominence to the four themes which I had identified.
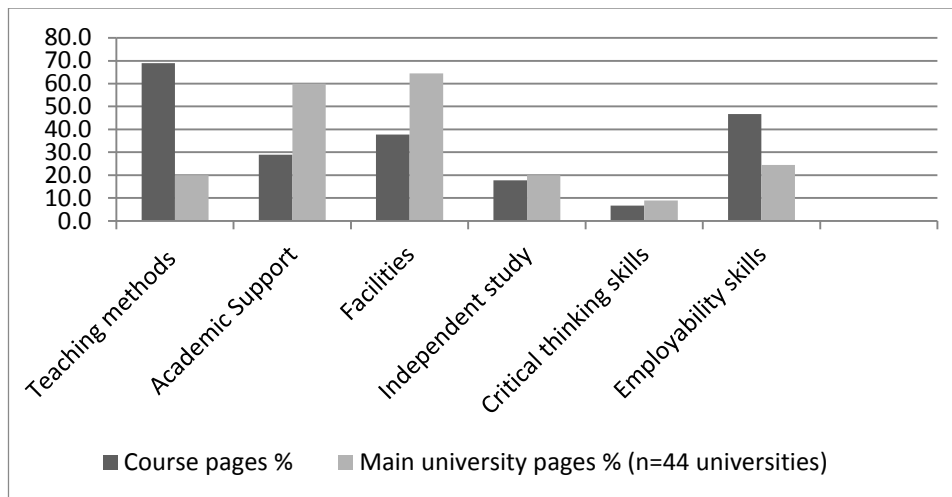
Figure 3-5 Existence of information on main university and course pages

My findings are represented graphically in Figure 3.5 above. Analysis by mission group suggested that Russell Group and 1994 group universities were the most likely to be talking about independent learning and critical thinking skills but the sizes of these sub-sample groups were such that no firm conclusions could be drawn.

These findings led to the formulation of questions 7 and 8 (see below):

7. Underline any of the following which you remember the university web-pages describing:
long library opening hours	help with adjusting to learning at university
online learning support	student placements or internships
innovative technology	student social life
up-to-date teaching rooms	a personal tutor
help with becoming more employable	help with academic writing

8. Underline any of the following which you remember the website describing students doing:
Learning about their subject	Learning to do research
Learning to work in groups	Developing the ability to work independently
Developing communication skills	Developing the ability to analyse information
Developing time management skills	Developing the ability to think critically
Doing assessments (exams or coursework)	Applying subject-knowledge to solve problems

Figure 3-6 Questions 7 and 8 of the questionnaire

In addition to coding each of the items separately into SPSS, I collapsed them down into the following categories:

- Facilities (library, learning support, IT, rooms)
- Employability (help becoming employable, placements)
- Support (online learning support, adjustment, personal tutor, help with academic writing)
- Course information (learning about subject, assessment)

- General skills (groups, communications , time management, working independently)
- Thinking skills (research, analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving)

3.7   Questionnaire design and piloting

The questionnaire needed to be capable of being completed within 20 minutes, the longest time which most of the schools had indicated that they would be able to provide, and to be easy to answer (I did not want to encounter the problems noted by Yorke and Longden (2007) of students running out of time and leaving many of the later questions unanswered).

I decided that the questionnaire should fit onto two sides of one sheet of A4 at most and consist largely of closed questions. Space also had to be left to provide a brief explanation of the purpose of the research and to invite those willing to participate further to give their contact details. I based the design on a Word table so that individual questions could be clearly separated from each other and the eye of the respondent drawn easily to the choice of responses. I used italics for instructions and non-italicised font for the actual wording of questions. I used a horizontal format for the closed answers to make the best use of space. I resisted the temptation to reduce the font and cram in additional questions in a way which would lead to a cramped and unattractive layout.

I used a five point Likert scale (agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, disagree strongly) for those questions which related more to respondent opinions than to factual questions about their knowledge although, in fact, as will be seen, at the stage of analysis these were largely contracted back into three categories of agree, disagree and neither agree nor disagree.

In sequencing the questions, I adopted the approach of asking very straightforward questions at the start and leaving the potentially sensitive demographic questions until the end. The main open-ended question (question 27) asked respondents what they expected to be different about studying at university. Ideally this would have been the question which they answered first to avoid their answers being led by the previous questions (although there would have been no means of ensuring that the questions were actually answered in the order set or of preventing a student from returning to it after answering the other questions). In fact it was positioned close to the end of the

questionnaire to avoid the risk of respondents using up the time on this and running out of time to answer the other questions and needs, therefore, to be understood in reality as being one which enables elaboration on the areas pursued in the earlier questions.

A preliminary draft of the questionnaire was piloted with a group of students from one of the schools which had agreed to participate in the research. This established that students were not necessarily familiar with the notion of the Key Information Sets on the course pages of websites (either because they had not noticed them at all or had not noticed that that was what they were called) and the wording of the questions had to take this into account; the questionnaire was revised to include a question framed in terms of whether there was information about the amount of time to be spent in lectures and classes. The pilot also caused two questions (about the number of hours they expected to spend in class and in independent study), originally drafted in multiple-choice format, to be recast as open questions to avoid the risk of leading the students to an answer.

The final version of the questionnaire, containing 31 questions, can be found in Appendix 1.1 and Appendix 3 maps the individual questions against the research questions.

3.8   Conducting the survey

Table 3.5 below sets out the schools/colleges who agreed to participate and the arrangements which were made for the data collection. Being present whilst a substantial number of the questionnaires were completed enabled me to reassure myself that students generally had little difficulty in completing the questionnaire. It was also a useful reminder of some of the limitations of this method of obtaining data. Although the students were asked to complete the questionnaire without conferring with each other, there was inevitably a certain amount of conversation and it cannot be assumed that the views captured are entirely those of the individual.

	Notable proportion of minority ethnic heritage students	**Mainly white British**
Above average free school meals, below average UCAS points per student and/or low participation neighbourhood	School A - *at which I was able to sit in the common room at break and seek volunteers.* School B - *who agreed to ask for volunteers to do the questionnaire.*	School C - *who allowed me to go into a tutor group session to administer the questionnaire (attendance was sparse at the session chosen).*
More than 20% of students (or more than 40% of those who do go to HE) to most selective HEIs (Sutton Trust data), above average UCAS points per student or located in high participation neighbourhood	School D - *provided me with a pilot group and subsequently distributed the final questionnaire to the remainder of the year on a voluntary basis.*	Schools E, F, G and H *All allowed me into a year assembly to administer questionnaire.* School J *Provided a room for me to sit in and asked volunteers to drop in to complete questionnaire.*
Independent schools	School K – *allowed me into a general studies session to administer questionnaire* School L– *allowed me to sit in common room at lunch time and seek volunteers – a student had been delegated to encourage the others to participate* School M – *distributed the questionnaire on my behalf during tutor time.*	
FE and sixth form colleges	College N – *lecturer asked for volunteers to complete questionnaire in several classes* College P - *lecturer asked for volunteers to complete questionnaire in a class* College Q– *I was able to administer questionnaire to a class of law students and another of design students*	

Table 3.5 Participating schools and colleges

I collected 580 questionnaires, 529 of which proved to be usable. I analyse the characteristics of the respondents in Chapter 4 and discuss the extent to which it is possible to generalise the findings beyond those 529 respondents.

3.9   The follow-on email exchanges

The final piece of data collection is probably more accurately described as a customised questionnaire than an interview in that the emails which I sent all

contained a similar set of questions although I did also add specific questions following up on anything unusual in their initial set of responses, such as being one of the small number of respondents who said that they had not looked at the website or been to an open day. The common set of questions can be found in Appendix 2. As will be seen from Chapter 4.5, although 25% of the respondents expressed a willingness to participate further in the research, the response rate to my follow-up email was disappointingly low so that a quantitative approach to the additional questions asked in the emails was not possible. Instead, the responses were used, where appropriate, to give additional voice to the respondents in considering the findings from the questionnaire itself.

3.10   Data analysis

3.10.1 General

I planned to use SPSS to carry out much of the analysis, largely through the means of descriptive statistical analysis of the questions within the questionnaire; my detailed plan for this analysis can be found in Appendix 3, which includes an explanation of the transformation of the data into further variables within SPSS. In the remainder of this section, I explain how I analysed the free-text responses and also how I derived some additional variables (relating to expectation of taking responsibility for learning and accuracy of expectations) from the direct answers to the questions.

3.10.2   Coding the free-text questions

Questions 9 and 27 were the only free-text questions whose responses needed coding before SPSS could be used in the analysis; question 9 provoked almost no response so this issue was only relevant for question 27 (which asked about expected differences between school and university). The first stage in analysing question 27 was to type up all the responses which enabled me to begin to get a feel for the themes which were emerging. I then merged all the responses into one block of text and did a preliminary word and phrase frequency count using a free online word-counting tool. From this I identified a set of categories into which the responses could be coded in SPSS which enabled frequency counts of the various categories and cross-tabulation with

other aspects of the respondents' answers. Chapter 5.2 discusses the findings from this analysis.

3.10.3 Estimating the accurate class hours figures

The respondents gave an estimate of how much time they expected to spend in class. The KIS data available at https://unistats.direct.gov.uk/ provided information about the actual number of class hours on their expected course. Measuring the accuracy of the respondents' expectations was complicated both because the way in which the scheduled class time information is given in the KIS data makes it impossible to arrive at anything other than a range of possible weekly hours in class and because the respondents also frequently gave an estimated range.

Institutions provide the information on scheduled class times for the KIS as a percentage of 1200 hours, a figure which derives from the notion that an average student takes 10 hours of effort to achieve one credit and that a year of full-time study will equate to 120 credits (QAA, 2008; QAA, 2013). Accurate information about the number of hours each week to be spent in scheduled classes can only be derived from the KIS data if the number of weeks of teaching in the year is known. Since this information is not publicly available, I assumed a range of 22 to 31 teaching weeks for each course, resulting in a range of possible number of hours per week. This range of teaching weeks is derived in the first instance from the 2013 HEPI report which stated that the number of weeks within academic terms over a year varied between 24 and 31 (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2013, p7) adjusted for practitioner knowledge which tells me that some (increasingly few) institutions will have one or two non-teaching "reading weeks" within a teaching period of two 12 week semesters.

Appendix 4 demonstrates the precise mechanics of the calculation which I carried out to estimate how close to reality each respondent's stated expectation of class hours was likely to be. Respondents who were calculated as being likely to be inaccurate by less than five hours a week have been treated as having realistic expectations of class hours. In all cases I took the most conservative approach to estimating the student's level of accuracy which means that the actual extent of inaccuracy is likely to be somewhat greater than set out in the findings and the number of students who have been categorised

as having realistic expectations of class hours is almost certainly an over-estimate.

Respondents applying for courses which the KIS data showed as having placements within the first year were taken out of the comparison exercise since it was not possible to estimate the time to be spent in classes on a weekly basis or to be sure what they had in mind when answering the question. This removed many of the respondents planning to study subjects allied to medicine or education.

3.10.4 Measuring expectation of responsibility for own learning

The phrase "responsibility for your own learning" was not used in the questionnaire, which instead asked more specific questions about four aspects of becoming an autonomous learner. The respondents were asked, in questions 16-19, about their expectations of being told by tutors everything they needed to know and exactly what to read in independent study. They were also asked about their expectations of having coursework drafts read and being given reminders of deadlines.

The responses to these questions were then used to give an "expectation of taking responsibility for managing own learning" score, with 0 being given to those students who were expecting to be told exactly what they needed to know and read and to have drafts read and reminders given and 4 being given to those students who were not expecting any of these behaviours from tutors. These scores were then used to divide the respondents into two groups, labelled the "more independent" (score of 0 or 1) and the "less independent" (score of 2, 3 or 4). Students with a score of 0 were also identified as the "most" independent group to enable further analysis of that particular group. This categorisation of the respondents enabled cross-tabulations of their expectations of taking responsibility for their own learning with other aspects of the findings.

3.10.5 Measuring accuracy in overall expectations

This involved deriving a measure of the extent to which the expectations of the respondents were likely to be realistic from the findings about expectations about workload and the findings (from questions 16-19) about expectations of

taking responsibility for their own learning. The respondents were first categorised according to the criteria set out in Table 3.6 below.

Group 1	expected to take responsibility for their own learning in all four respects, realistic expectations of class hours and expected a total weekly workload of at least 25 hours
Group 2	expected to take responsibility for their own learning other than expecting to have coursework drafts read, had realistic expectations of class hours and expected a total weekly workload of at least 25 hours
Group 3	met two out of three of (i) realistic class hour expectations (ii) expecting to study for at least 25 hours a week (iii) not expecting more than 2 of the q16-19 forms of support
Group 4	met only one of the criteria in group 3
Group 5	met none of the criteria in group 3 or met one of the criteria in relation to class hours/workload but who expected to be supported in relation to all four aspects of questions 16-19

Table 3.6 Classifying the respondents' overall accuracy of expectations

The five groupings were then amalgamated in a group with high accuracy of understanding (groups 1 and 2), a medium group (group 3) and a group with low accuracy of understanding (groups 4 and 5). Those who said they did not know how many hours of classes there would be were counted as not having realistic expectations of class hours or as having any clear expectation of a volume of workload so even if they were at the higher end of the more independent group they were included in the low accuracy group.

Chapter 4   The sample

4.1   Introduction

This Chapter considers what the questionnaire responses reveal about the demographic characteristics and educational context of the respondent group. It also considers the extent to which the sample is likely to be representative of a wider population.

Nearly 600 students returned a questionnaire. Those who did not identify both an intended university and degree-level course were excluded; these were frequently students from schools where the whole year group completed the questionnaire, including those who were not applying, or not yet applying, to university. This eventually left 529 responses which could be used, although not all of these had answered all the questions.

This represents about 56% of the potential respondents within the participating schools and colleges and about 20% of the potential respondents within the complete population of institutions (bearing in mind that the total population of those who had applied to university within those institutions can only be roughly estimated).

4.2   Demographic characteristics

The respondents were asked (in questions 28 to 31) to identify their gender, whether either of their parents had been to university, whether they had ever had free school meals and their ethnicity; the responses can be seen in Table 4.1 below. Respondents who said they did not know whether either of their parents had been to university were combined with the "no" answers since, even if one of the student's parents had in fact attended university, they had clearly not talked about it to the student so, from the point of view of forming expectations, the student would be in the same position as if they were a first generation student. Although the ethnicity question gave a choice of six ethnic groupings (and an opt-out from answering), the numbers in the individual groups were (as can be seen from Appendix 1.2, which contains the

questionnaire annotated with the responses) very small and the groups have been recoded into White/BME.

Characteristic	Number	% of sample
Gender		
Male	253	48
Female	259	49
Not answered	17	3
Ethnicity		
White	425	80
Total of BME groups	75	14
Prefer not to say	17	3
Did not answer	12	2
Free School Meals (FSM)		
Said FSM received at some point	52	10
Said FSM not received	442	84
Said did not know or did not answer question	35	6
Family tradition of going to university?		
Yes	265	50
No or don't know	254	48
Did not answer question	10	2
Total	529	100

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Although there is a marginally greater proportion of females in the sample (51% of those who gave their gender), there is in fact almost certainly an over-preponderance of males for the 529 respondents to be generally representative since the UCAS end of cycle data for the 2013 entry (UCAS Analysis and Research, 2013) showed that 55% of school-leaver applicants were female. The over-representation of males in the whole group is partly due to 57% of the independent school group being male coupled with, as will be seen, an over-representation of independent school students. Looking only at the 97% of the sample who declared their gender, 43% of the independent school students

were female compared with 55% of the college group and 52% of the state comprehensive group.

The sample was also split almost evenly between first generation students and those with a family tradition of going to university. As noted in Chapter 3.4, the Futuretrack research (Purcell *et al.*, 2008) suggests that a first-generation rate of between 55% and 60% would be representative so this sample is probably slightly more "traditional" than a fully representative sample would be. This over-representation is, again, caused by the over-representation of independent school students, 67% of whom are "traditional" students, and under-representation of college students, 63% of whom are first generation.
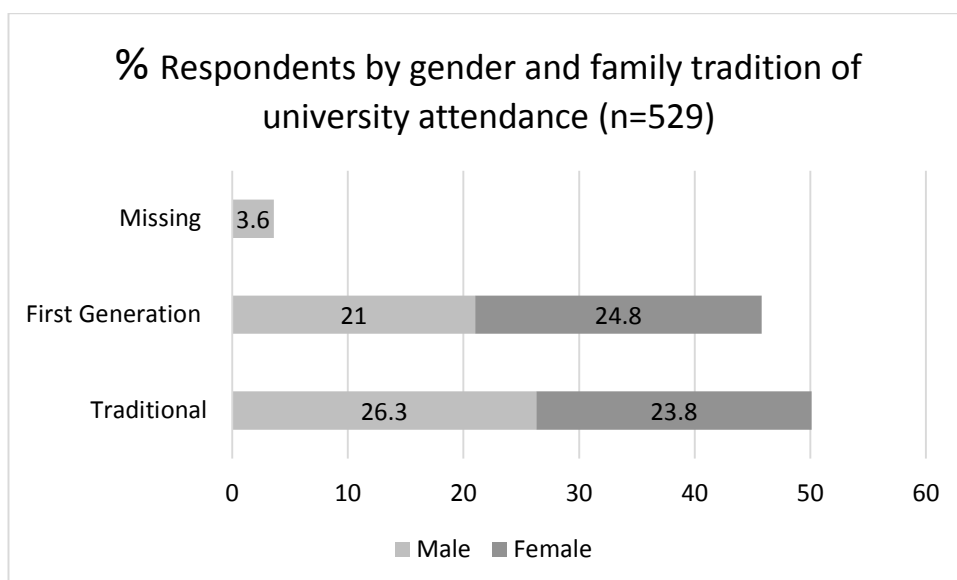
Figure 4-1 Respondents by gender and family tradition

As can be seen from Figure 4.1 above, the sample was divided roughly equally between first generation male, first generation female, traditional male and traditional female with the first generation male group being slightly the smallest and the traditional male group being slightly the largest.

Ten percent of the total group of respondents said that they had received free school meals at some point; since UCAS data for the 2014 cohort showed that just under 7% of the total applicants had been in receipt of free school meals (UCAS Analysis and Research, 2014), this is probably slightly over-representative (particularly given the over-representation of independent school students in the sample).

The proportion of ethnic minority students in the sample appears to be reasonably representative of the Radstowe region as shown by the 2011 census information. The sample was overwhelmingly (80%) white with 14% BME respondents. The proportion of BME respondents was so small that the various non-White respondents were also coded into one group. There was a roughly even ethnic split between the genders with 41% white males, 42% white females, 7% BME males and 8% BME females. 2% of the males and 1% of the females said that they preferred not to give their ethnicity.

4.3   Educational contexts

Each questionnaire was coded to identify the institution attended by the respondent and Table 4.2 also includes other information about the educational context of the respondents.

	Number	% of sample
Type of post-16 institution		
State school sixth form	315	60
FE or Sixth Form College	101	19
Independent School	113	21
HE participation rate of post-16 institution (Sutton Trust figures)		
High (73%+)	253	48
Medium (50-72%)	178	34
Low (less than 50%)	98	18
Key Stage 5 achievement rate of post-16 institution		
Above average for England	328	62
Below average for England	201	38
Total	529	100

Table 4.2 Educational context of the respondents

There is a slight over-representation of students from independent schools compared with the population as estimated in Chapter 3.4 (21% from independent schools compared with 18% in the estimated population), a more considerable over-representation of state comprehensive students (60% of the sample compared with 53% of the estimated population) and a considerable

under-representation of college students (19% of the sample compared with 30% of the estimated population). As noted in Chapter 3, Radstowe has a disproportionate number of independent schools so even a sample representative of the Radstowe population would not be representative of the country as a whole and this sample is skewed even further in the direction of the independently educated.

Figure 4.2 below shows that whilst state school respondents are fairly evenly divided by gender and by whether or not they had a family tradition of higher education, the college and independent school groups had more distinct characteristics. Unsurprisingly, the largest group of independent school respondents are male traditional students followed by traditional females; the most frequent demographic amongst the College group is first generation female, followed by first generation male.
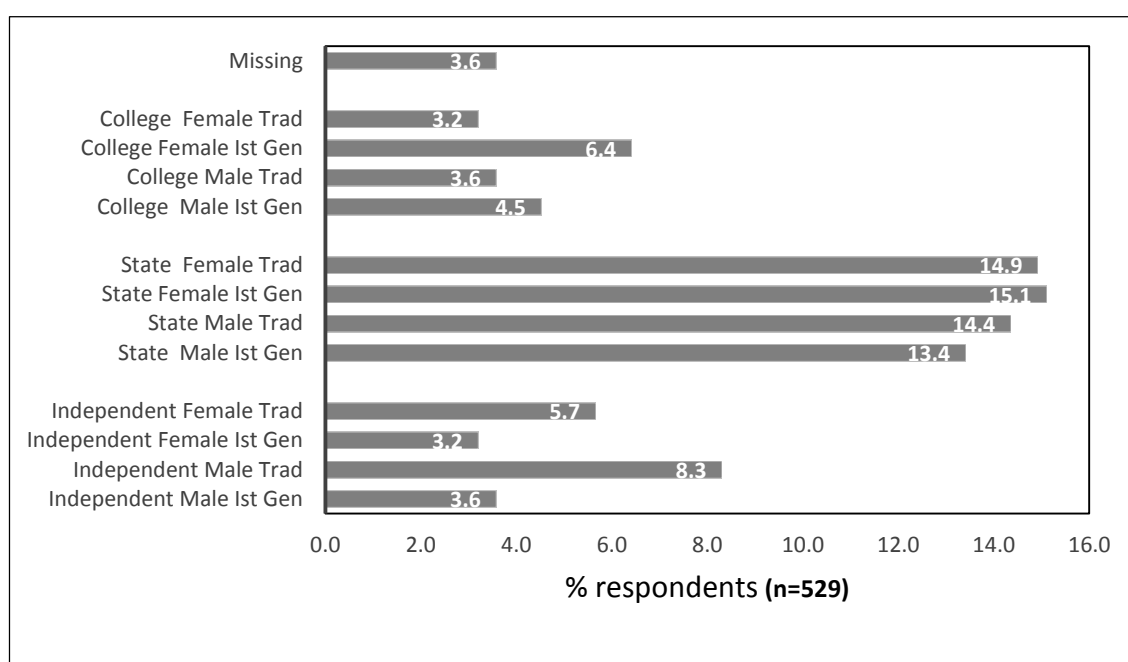
Figure 4-2 Respondents by gender, family tradition and school type

As noted in Chapter 3, there was greater participation in the survey of Radstowe schools with a record of above average pupil attainment at Key Stage 5 and with correspondingly greater participation in higher education. As a result, a large majority (82%) of the respondents were attending institutions with a record of more than 50% participation in higher education and nearly half (48%) were at institutions with a record of above 73% participation.

The institutions with above average attainment at Key Stage 5 all had rates of at least 50% participation in higher education. The below average attainment group included all the colleges and four of the state schools.

4.4   The universities and degree programmes

The respondents were asked in the first question to identify their first choice university and the questionnaire instructed them to "think about the university you are hoping to attend (if you have not yet accepted an offer as your first choice place, choose one of the universities to which you have applied as your first choice for the purposes of this survey)." As noted above, questionnaires were excluded from the sample if they had not answered both this question and the next, asking "what course have you applied to do at this university".

First Choice University by tariff group	Number of respondents	%
High/Highest tariff	543	54
Medium/low tariff	427	43
Other (eg specialist colleges)	16	3
Subject grouping		
Humanities and Social Sciences	246	46
STEM subjects	183	35
Others (mainly allied to medicine, education and creative arts)	100	19
Total	529	100

Table 4.3 Universities and subjects chosen

Table 4.3 above sets out the data about the intended universities and subjects with the universities categorised by reference to the tariff groupings used by the Futuretrack project (Purcell *et al.*, 2009b, p6), explained in Chapter 3.6. As noted in Chapter 3, the Department for Education published in the summer of 2013 a list of the top third universities by UCAS tariff; seven of the Futuretrack high/highest institutions to which my respondents were expecting to go were not in that list and I re-categorised the respondents (17 students or 3% of the

sample) into the medium group. The subjects which they were hoping to study were put into 18 groups by JACS code (the table can be found in Appendix 5) but then collapsed into three major groups shown in Table 4.3: STEM subjects, social sciences and humanities and, thirdly, creative art, education and subjects allied to medicine.

In total the 529 students identified 94 different universities as their first choice institutions. The 27 institutions which at least six respondents were hoping to attend accounted for 78% (416 students) of the total sample, with a clear local regional bias. The 78 respondents applying to RCU were considerably the largest group applying to any single university with the next largest group being the 38 applying to a high/highest tariff university in the wider region of Radstowe. It is likely that this predominance was connected with the way in which the college students within the sample had been accessed but it is also the case that for many of the students in the sample who planned to live at home, RCU might quite well be the most practical choice. The numbers of local students coming to RCU are such that the proportion of this sample expecting to study at RCU is likely to be representative of the wider Radstowe population.

As can be seen in Figure 4.3 below, the medium/low tariff group aspirants were slightly more likely to be female than male, with the reverse in the high/highest tariff group. The proportion of first generation students is much higher in the medium/low tariff group. BME students and recipients of free school meals are also more likely to be found amongst the medium/low group applicants. The proportion of state school respondents in each group is the same but the independent school respondents are more likely to be found in the highest/high group and the college respondents more likely to be found in the medium/low group. Most of the applicants for the highest/high group fell into either the STEM or the social science and humanities groupings whereas nearly a third of the medium/low group were planning to study other subjects (a category encompassing education, subjects allied to medicine and creative arts).
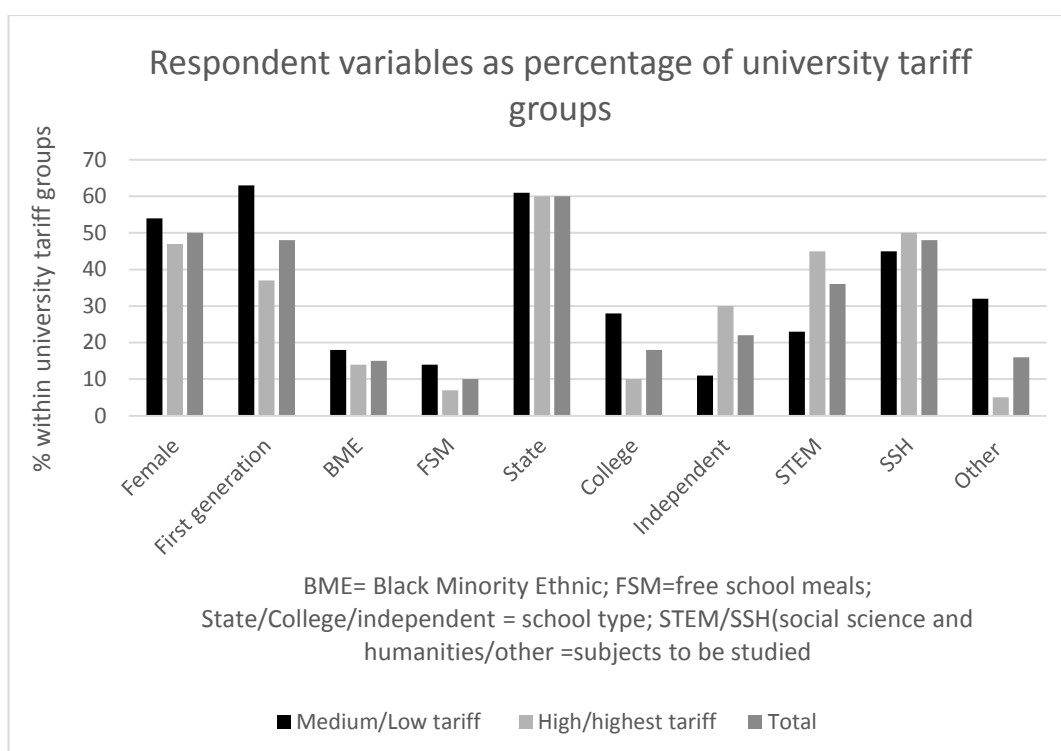
Figure 4-3 Respondent variables as percentage of university tariff groups

It is possible to compare the proportions of the subject groups which the respondents proposed to study with the proportions of applications nationally and there is no reason to think that the Radstowe region proportions would differ from the national proportions. A table by JACs code can be found in Appendix 5 and Table 4.4 below shows that data amalgamated by the broad subject groupings which I have used in the analysis.

The proportions of the respondents applying for most of the subjects within the amalgamated groups only depart from the UCAS proportions by a couple of percentage points at most. The striking exception is the proportion applying for "subjects allied to medicine" which is only 6% amongst the sample compared with 14% amongst UCAS applications in total. The explanation is probably, as noted by the July 2013 UCAS Report, that subjects allied to medicine are more popular amongst older applicants than with 18 year olds. Looking just at the STEM and the Social Science and Humanities groupings, the latter is over-represented in the sample by about 5% which can probably be explained by the way in which the respondents had been accessed via staff in those institutions connected with outreach work carried out by the Law School at RCU.

	Number	%	% UCAS applications January 2013
Amalgamated subject groups			
STEM courses (including medicine)	183	35	30
Social Science and Humanities	246	46	32
Creative Arts, Education and allied to medicine	100	19	27
Other (eg combined)	0	0	11

Table 4.4 Respondents by subject to be studied

4.5   The email exchange group

Almost a quarter (125) of the 529 respondents gave an email address as indicating willingness to participate in follow-up questions. Some of the email addresses were indecipherable or incorrect and the response rate from those which were not was very low, even after sending a reminder email, so that I only succeeded in involving 13 students in this exercise. The characteristics of these 13 students can be seen in Appendix 6. All but two were hoping to go to high/highest tariff universities. All were white. Five were hoping to read STEM subjects and eight were hoping to study social sciences or humanities. They were split evenly between being from families with a tradition of university and first generation families with six respondents in each category and a thirteenth respondent who had said "sort of" in answer to the question whether either of his parents had attended university. They were from a mix of post-16 institution types.

Although a small group, they added some interesting data in relation to which sources of information they had found most significant and their expectations in relation to coursework and class size. Their words, together with the words provided in response to question 27, enable me to allow the respondents their

own voice amongst the rather dry measuring of their responses to the closed questions.

4.6   Summary

Although, as noted in 3.4 above, the size of the population of potential respondents and of the various sub-groups within it can only be estimated, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the nature of the sample. It is clear that the sample is somewhat over-representative of male and traditional students, largely because of the over-representation of male independent school students. Nonetheless, the sample appears to be reasonably representative in terms of ethnicity and receipt of free school meals. The sample is also skewed towards students from schools, both state and independent, with a record of strong academic achievement and high rates of participation in higher education. It is also, as a result, skewed towards students aspiring to high/higher tariff universities. A third of those expecting to go to medium tariff universities came from the colleges and only ten percent from independent schools with the proportions for the higher tariff group being reversed. Sixty percent of each tariff group were from the state schools.

The extent to which the skewed nature of the sample affects the value of the findings will be considered in Chapter 6.2 after discussion of the findings themselves.

Chapter 5 The findings

5.1   Introduction

This Chapter sets out the findings from an analysis of the survey responses (which can be found in the annotated version of the questionnaire in Appendix 1.2) against the four sets of research questions posed in Chapter 2.4 above, whose themes can be summarised as follows:

- Expectation of differences
- Accuracy of and confidence in expectations
- Recall of website information
- Differences between sub-groups

In relation to the final theme, I consider any statistically significant differences in my analysis of the data relating to the other themes and then summarise the position in relation to respondent characteristics in section 5.5 below. Appendix 7 contains a matrix setting out detailed cross-tabulations of respondent variables with responses for which a statistically significant difference (taken as a probability value of less than 0.05) was apparent.

In section 5.6, I look at the responses from those for whom RCU was the first choice university with a view to considering whether there is anything in the findings which is specifically relevant for my own immediate professional context.

Finally I summarise the findings in section 5.7.

5.2   Expectation of differences in studying at university

This section considers the findings relevant to the research question of whether pre-entry students expect that studying at university will be different from school or college and, if so, how. It also considers what can be gleaned from the responses about the respondents' understandings of and attitude towards the concept of independence.

5.2.1 General

 An overwhelming majority of the respondents said that they expected that studying at university was going to be different. Over half the respondents (54%) strongly agreed, and a further 40% agreed, with the statement that "I think that studying at university will be different from studying at school/college". They were then asked in question 27, if they did expect it to be different, "to write a few words here about what you expect the difference(s) to be". Eighty percent of the sample wrote something in response to this; the composition of this group in terms of respondent characteristics was representative of the whole sample.

My approach to the analysis of question 27 is explained in 3.10.2 above and some illustrative detail of the process is included in Appendix 8. In my discussion below I quote from a number of the responses, attributing the quotations by reference to the case identifier of the respondent; the initial letter of identifier maps against the post-16 institution attended by the respondent and more information about the institution can be found in Table 3.5 in Chapter 3 above.

There were, as noted in Chapter 3 above, questions earlier in the survey which were likely to have suggested to the respondents both possible differences and possible features of university study so that this free-text question, coming towards the end of the survey, will have been framed by those earlier questions. In particular, respondents had been asked to think about the differences in time spent in class and on independent study as between school and university and had been asked whether they thought studying independently was a central part of becoming a graduate. It is, therefore, not surprising that, in the free-text question, 59% of the respondents referred to independence or being independent in their answer although many of them did so without further elaboration, as in the three example responses quoted below:

"More independence" (K10)
"A lot more independent learning than before" (C12)
"Independence" (G41)

It is impossible to tell whether these unembellished responses were the result of having no clearer conception of what this "independence" might entail or were simply the result of lack of time or inclination to write any more. There was no significant difference as between the various sub-groups in the likelihood that they would write something elaborating on the idea of independence.

It is quite possible that the notion of independence was only in their minds because of the prompting of the earlier questions. If the respondents (n=89) giving answers of this nature are disregarded, 63% of the respondents provided substantive, albeit brief, answers which should probably be seen mainly as providing an opportunity to elaborate on the other questions rather than an indication of what they would have said if they had been asked the question as a completely separate exercise.

Expected differences in studying at university

Category	%
Studying outside class	6
Treated as an adult/maturely/given more freedom	8
Deadline/time management issues	9
Social/domestic differences	9
Breadth/choice of subject study	11
"Less of" something	16
Mentions volume of work	16
Responsibility/self-motivation	16
Mentions work being harder or more challenging	19
Different teaching/assessment methods	25

% of respondents giving substantive response to question 27 (n=423)

Figure 5-1 Expected differences in studying at university (excluding simple references to "independence")

The largest group of these responses (25% of those giving a substantive response) relate to expectations of differences in pedagogy:

> "Less 'teachy' lessons. Lecturers just say stuff at you and you take notes. Then you revise those notes". (G9)
> "More practical stuff. More independent learning. A neutron tank! Harder maths"(L1)

> *"The lectures – they aren't as interactive as classes at college – you don't put your hand up/have discussions. They're less personal"* (N9)

Other themes referred to by at least 15% of the respondents were those relating to perceived challenge or difficulty or volume of work, the need to take responsibility and to there being "less of ..." something (support, structure, hours, teaching). Smaller numbers are positive about the prospect of freedom, of being treated as an adult and of the work being more interesting or enjoyable:

> *"I expect it will be harder and more enjoyable".* (K3)
> *"You have to attend school classes – at uni not attending won't result in you being in 'trouble'. Not 'spoon-fed' at uni, you really have to work independently and read around the subject"* (K43)
> *"More independent.More interesting but more difficult. More self-motivation and independent study skills required"* (N14)
> *"I expect to have more freedom in how and when and what to study"* (E24)
> *"More independent, down to you, can do more of what you are interested in"* (M1)

Comments about time-management, often with reference to deadlines were made by 9% (30) of the respondents. These were often linked either to notions of responsibility or to ideas of loss of support:

> *"More independent. Expected to set aside time to work. Increased organisation"* (K52)

Although the question specifically referred to differences in studying at university, 9% referred to social or domestic differences. These references were sometimes upbeat references to partying and meeting more people and sometimes worried references to managing day to day life. Some of the references placed the thoughts about studying within the social and domestic context.

"No one pushing you to work. Friends asking you to go out when you should work. Doing dishes when you should be revising".
(K16 - White, male, independent school respondent hoping to do a construction related course at a medium tariff university whose answers to questions 10 and 11 were [about class hours] "No idea – 15 maybe?" and [about amount of independent study] "Too many – 40?")

5.2.2 Understandings of "independence"

Just over a quarter of the respondents (28%) answered question 27 in a way which specifically offered elaboration as to how they understood independence. Four themes emerged from these contributions in the proportions shown in Figure 5.2 below; these are a sub-set of the complete set of responses discussed in 5.2.1 above, being those which were specifically linked with reference to independence. The four themes were:

- Taking responsibility/self-motivation
- That there would be less of something (support, class time, help)
- Greater freedom/being treated as an adult
- Studying outside class
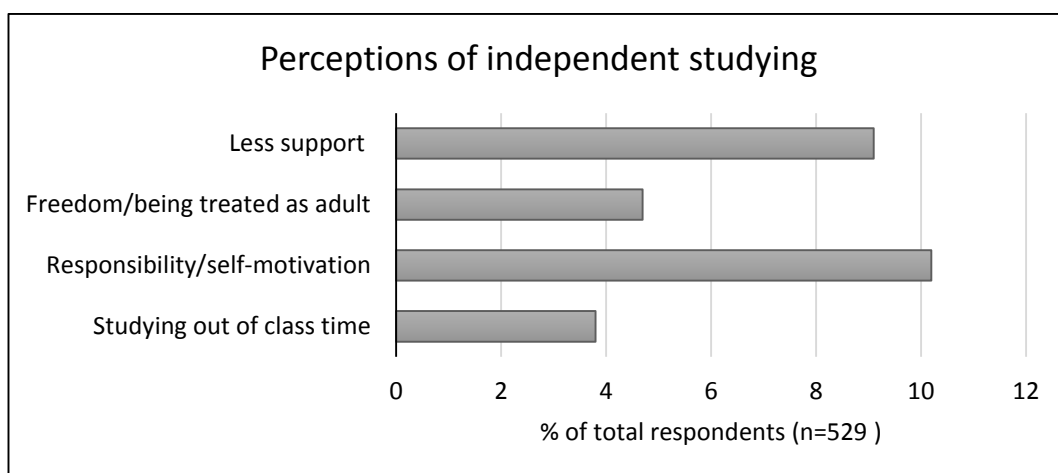
Figure 5-2 Perceptions of independent studying

The largest set of responses are those, over a third of those elaborating on the notion of independence, which couple it with notions of responsibility and self-motivation. For example:

> *"More studying independently at uni and discovering things for yourself. Less deadline reminders – more responsibility". (C9)*
>
> *"More independent learning and emphasis on the individual to sort out what to learn" (L5)*

There were also a set of responses similar to the first group but which specifically mention notions of freedom and of being treated like an adult (often coupled with references to a lack of "nagging" or "spoon-feeding") in which it is very clear that the differences will involve positive personal development:

.

> *"Much more independent and much more expected of you as a person. To be treated as an adult more than just a student. More down to me to undertake study and to carry it out by myself" (D26)*
>
> *"More independence. Less babying" (N1)*

The second largest set of responses amongst those saying more about independence were more negative in tone, giving the impression that independence consisted more of a deficit in something such as support, teaching or structure. It should also be noted that 13% of the respondents had agreed with the statement that "students are required to study independently because there are not enough lecturers available" and another 20% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

> *"More hours of work plus much more independent working with minimal input from the lecturer" (C6)*
>
> *"More independent work. Less reminders. More pressure. Less help." (K26)*
>
> *"Won't have as much support. More independent" (E7)*

A final group of responses appears to conceptualise independent learning simply as studying which happens outside class time

> *"Less hours teaching. Less face to face time. More independent learning." (L20)*
>
> *"More independent work. Learning more outside lessons". (P3)*

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"Independent, living life (on your own).Research on your own.
More time spent at home studying than at the university". (D9)

The numbers within each of these groups of responses are too small for any useful analysis by respondent variable to be possible but more analysis can be undertaken in relation to questions 13, 22 and 23, responses to which cast some light on the respondents' understanding of the place of independent learning in higher education.

In response to question 13, which asked whether they expected learning at university mainly to happen during independent study, 60% said yes, 24% said no and 15% were unsure; they were also asked, in question 12, whether they expected learning mainly to happen in scheduled class hours and 29% said that it would with 13% not being sure. A large majority either strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (53%), in response to question 23, that "students are required to study independently because that is a central part of becoming a graduate" and 64% disagreed with the proposition, in question 23, that "students are required to study independently because there are not enough lecturers available".

Female students were more likely (p=.025) than male students to agree strongly that independent study is central to becoming a graduate with 45% of female students strongly agreeing compared with 36% of male students. There was no significance difference associated with whether or not students came from families with a tradition of higher education.

The educational context of the students appeared to align with different attitudes to independent study. Those intending to study STEM subjects were less strongly convinced of the centrality of independent study than those planning to do social sciences or humanities. There was a difference (p=.002) between those aiming for highest/high tariff universities and those aiming for medium/low tariff universities with 48% of the former and only 32% of the latter agreeing about the centrality of independence. Conversely there was also a strong statistically significant difference (p= <.001) between these two groups in relation to the issue of a link between scarcity of lecturers and the need for independence with 19% of the medium/low group thinking that independent study was required because of lack of lecturers whereas only 9% of the high/highest group were of this view. There was also a statistically significant

association between low attaining post-16 institutions (p= 0.007) and this resource based view with 18.5% of those in below average institutions taking this view compared with 11.2% in the higher achieving schools.

5.3   Accuracy of and confidence in expectations

This section considers the findings which relate to the second group of research questions set out in Chapter 2.4 above, that is those which are concerned with the extent to which pre-entry students are accurate in their expectations of studying at university and the degree to which they are confident about their expectations. I look first at the levels of confidence which the students had in their expectations before proceeding to look at their expectations both of taking responsibility for their own learning and of their workload, including how that is likely to be split between class hours and independent study. I then use these findings as explained in Chapter 3.10.5 above to consider how the levels of confidence of the respondents in their expectations map against their likely accuracy.

5.3.1 Confidence in expectations

Question 25 asked the respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that "I think I understand what it will be like to study at university". The question was answered by 97% of the sample with 68% either agreeing strongly (6.8%) or agreeing (61.2%) with the statement. Only 8.5% disagreed with the statement but 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. These responses establish that over a quarter of the sample at least lacked confidence in their expectations of what it was going to be like to study at university.

A cross-tabulation of the responses to question 25 with the various demographic characteristics and educational contexts, represented in Figure 5.3 below, establishes that there is no statistically significant difference in relation to any of the educational contexts or in relation to gender or ethnicity.

There is a statistically significant difference (p=.029) between those with and without a family tradition of higher education although the actual difference is relatively small with the main difference, as shown by Figure 5.3 below being that the traditional students were more likely to be clear about whether they were or were not confident. The only other statistically significant difference

(p=.010) was that those who said they had been in receipt of free school meals appeared to be more confident than the others that they did understand. The free school meal group were approximately a third traditional and two-thirds first generation but the total numbers are too small to be able draw any conclusions from comparing the responses between the two groups other than to note that the frequency of those expressing confidence in their understanding was higher in both sub-groups within the free school meals group than in the total sample.
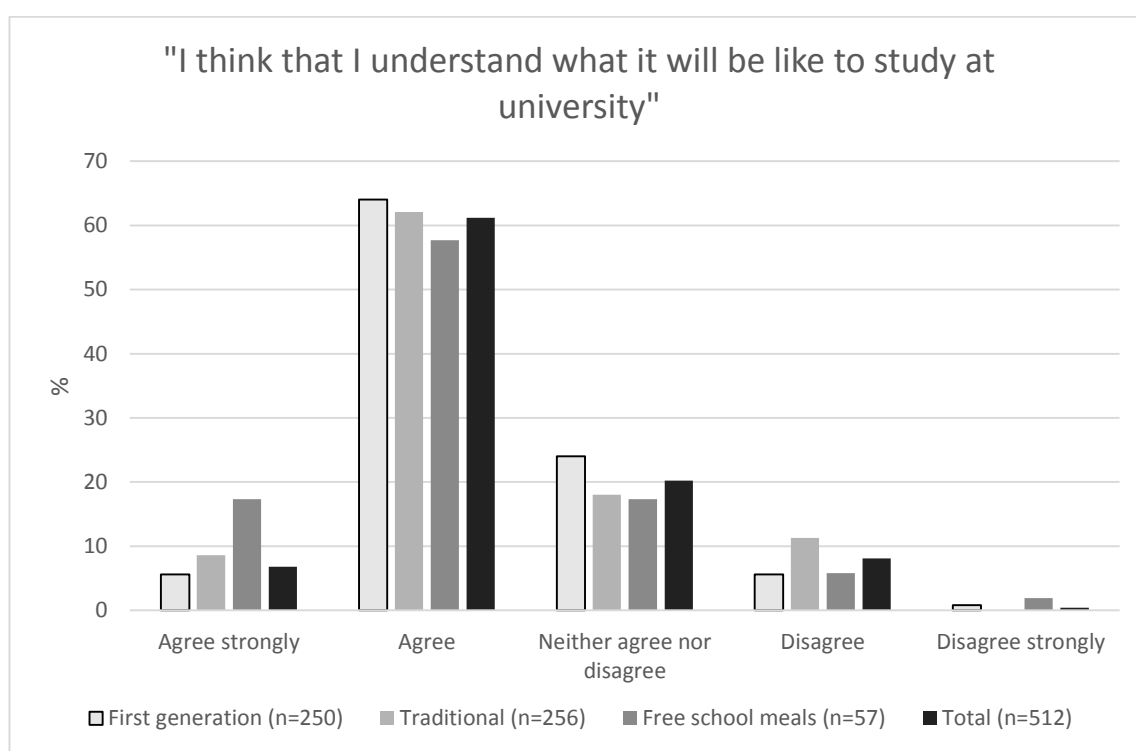
Figure 5-3 Confidence in expectations

5.3.2 Expectations of responsibility for managing their own learning

This section considers the findings relevant to research question 2 set out in Chapter 2.4 above: do pre-entry students expect to take responsibility for their own learning?

The findings are based on an analysis of questions 16 to 19 which asked the respondents whether they expected tutors to tell them everything they need to know to pass their exams, to be told exactly what to read during independent study, to have coursework drafts read by tutors before submission and to be sent reminders of coursework deadlines. Their responses to these questions were then used to create a variable estimating their expectation of having to

take responsibility for their own learning; this then enabled the respondents to be categorised as being either "more independent" or "less independent", as explained in Chapter 3.10.4, above, and in Appendix 3.
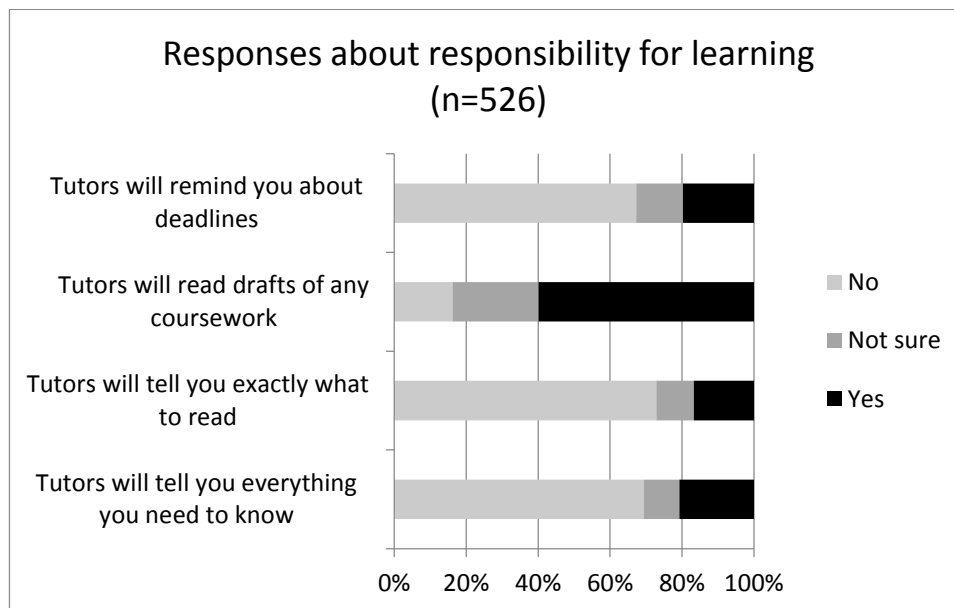
Figure 5-4 Responses about responsibility for learning

Figure 5.4 above demonstrates that a large majority were expecting the same sort of feedback in relation to coursework as they would have been receiving at school. Sixty percent expected that drafts of coursework would be read and another 24% were not sure whether or not this would happen. Twenty percent expected to be reminded of coursework deadlines and another 13% were not sure whether this would happen. Thirty percent either expected that tutors would tell them everything they needed to know to pass their exams or were not sure whether this would be the case. Seventeen percent expected to be told exactly what to read during independent study and another 10% were not sure whether this would happen.

As shown in Figure 5.5 below, 10% of the respondents did not expect any of these forms of support and 10% expected all four forms of help.
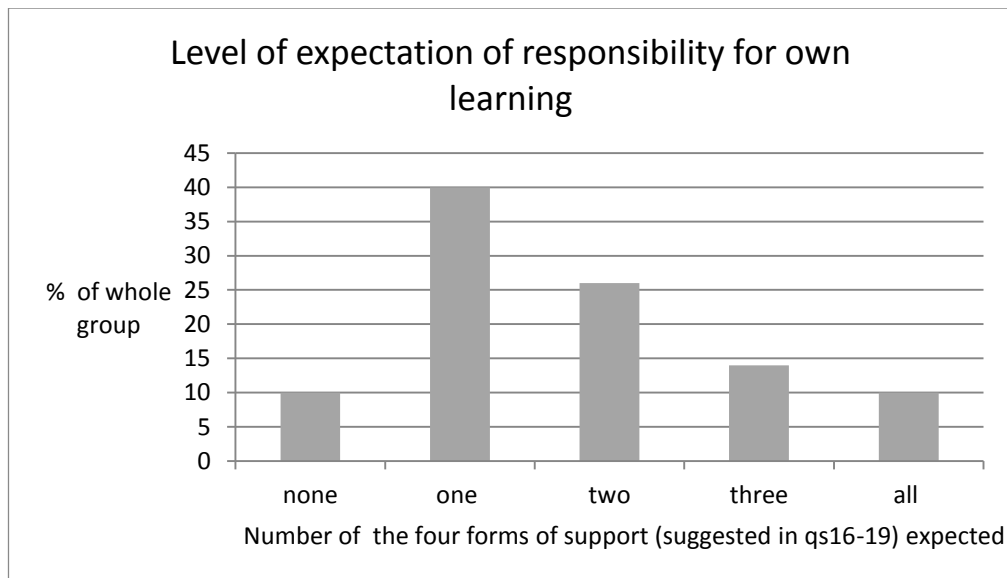
Figure 5-5 Level of expectation of responsibility for own learning

 A large number of students who otherwise demonstrated an expectation of having to take responsibility for their own learning did expect that coursework drafts would be read.

This finding prompted me to ask the small email group, most of whom had said they expected to have drafts read, how many pieces of work they expected to hand in for marking during their first term/semester at university; this provoked the following wide range of responses:

"To be honest I am not really sure but I would say that any number between 10 and 30 would be fair".

"Absolutely no idea".

"Haven't even considered this! Maybe 4/5"

"Not sure but this doesn't really worry me as I'm quite prepared to do all the work necessary in order to get my degree".

"Not sure".

"1-3 pieces of work per week, roughly 20-30 per semester".

"About one a week (10-15 per semester)"

"no idea"

"I think that I would be handing in about 4 large pieces of work in my first term".

"5",

"2"

"20"

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"I am aware of assessment by coursework (labs) and written exams in January and June. I am not aware of there being any work which will be handed in for marking".

The most striking thing about this set of responses was the lack of any idea at all in most cases. It was noticeable that those who said were expecting large amounts of marked work were also shown by the survey data to be expecting that drafts would be read.

Those respondents to the survey who were not expecting any of the four forms of support or only expecting one form (almost invariably to have coursework drafts read) were, as explained in 3.10.4, above, and in Appendix 3, coded as the "more independent" group with those expecting at least two forms of support as the "less independent" group. The total group of 529 split almost evenly between the two groups with 267 (50.5%) respondents in the less independent group and 262 (49.5%) in the more independent group.

Unsurprisingly, there was a strong statistical association between the more independent group and strong agreement with the view that studying independently was central to becoming a graduate (49% of the more independent and 32% of the less independent, p=<.001) and a weak statistically significant association with positive disagreement that independent studying was required because there were not enough lecturers (71% of the more independent disagreed compared with 58% of the less independent, p=.054).

The respondent characteristics which appear to align in a statistically significant way with membership of the "more independent" group are shown in Table 5.1 below (the complete set of cross-tabulations can be seen in Appendix 7). As can be seen, the male respondents showed lower levels of expectation of having to take responsibility for their own learning than the female students; in particular, they were more likely to expect that they would receive deadline reminders. The college students, those aiming for medium/low tariff universities and those from KS5 lower-achieving institutions also showed a lower expectation of the necessity for independence which could not be explained by the gender of the students since in each case a majority of the respondents were female. Multi-layered cross tabulations (the detail of which can be seen in

Appendix 9) established that, whatever the educational context, the male respondents were less likely to expect to have to take responsibility for their own learning.

		% more independent	% less independent	P value
Gender (n=513)	Male (n=253)	44	54	P=.024
	Female (n=260)	56	46	
School type (n=529)	State school (n=316)	52.5	47.5	P=.016
	College (n=101)	37	63	
	Independent school (n=112)	53	47	
University tariff group (n=513)	Medium/low (n=212)	43	57	P=.007
	High/highest (n=301)	55	45	
Post-16 institution by KS5 achievement (n=529)	High-achieving	56	44	P=<.001
	Lower-achieving	39	61	

Table 5.1 Expectations of independence by gender, school type and university tariff group

Those aiming for highest/high tariff universities were 10% more likely to be in the "more independent" group demonstrating stronger expectations of taking responsibility for their own learning. The multi-layered cross-tabulations also established that, for each of the characteristics displaying a statistically significant difference in expectations of independence, the respondents with that characteristic would be less likely to foresee the need for independence if they were aiming for a medium/low tariff university than if they were aiming for a higher tariff university.

The level of achievement at KS5 of the post-16 institutions mapped most strongly against the elements used to measure the expectation of taking this responsibility as it was the only variable to show statistically significantly less independent responses to all four questions. Whilst the respondents within

school types mapped quite closely against this grouping (with the three independent schools all being in the above average achievement group and the three colleges all in the below average group), the difference between the two sets of data suggests that it is the level of academic achievement in the environment which is important in relation to expectation of having to take responsibility for their own learning rather than the socio-economic differences. This aligns with the lack of significant difference in relation to this variable between those with and without a family tradition of higher education.
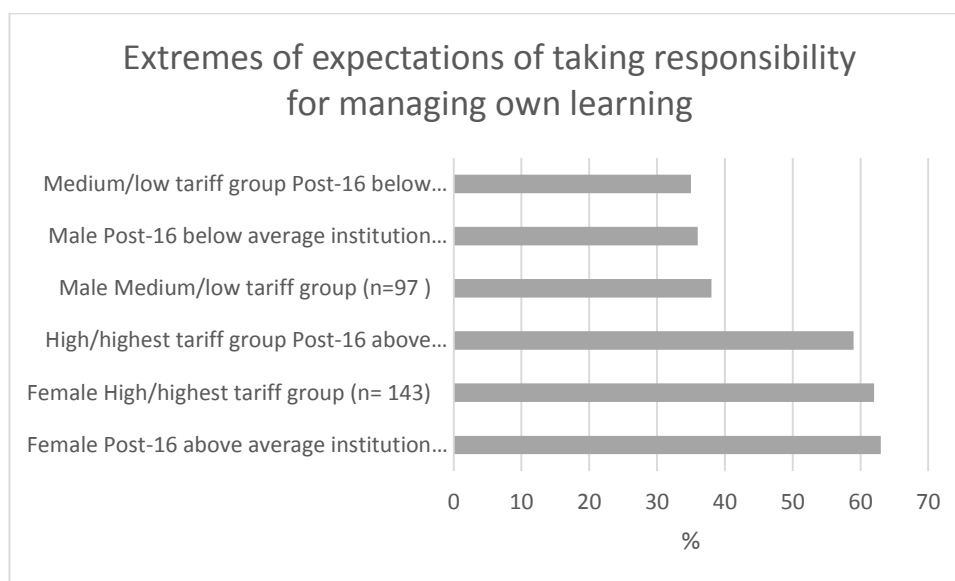
Figure 5-6 Extremes of expectation of taking responsibility for own learning

As Figure 5.6 shows (and as can be seen in more detail in the chart in Appendix 9, which ranks the results of the two-layered cross-tabulation, by order of the proportion of those in the "more independent" group) it appears that well over half of female students from high achieving post-16 institutions hoping to go to higher tariff universities expect to take responsibility for their own learning whereas only just over a third of male students from lower achieving post-16 institutions hoping to go to medium or low tariff universities have the same expectation.

As can be seen from Appendix 9, these findings at either end of the range are statistically significant.

The findings about levels of expectation of having to take responsibility for managing their own learning need to be set against the data from question 27, in response to which 59% (n=313) of the respondents had referred to

independence as being a difference they expected to encounter at university. Nearly half (44%, n=139) of these fell into the "less independent" category in relation to what they actually expected in terms of independent learning. The percentage was higher (52%, p=.002) amongst those from below average performing post-16 institutions and those aiming for medium/low tariff universities (50%, p=.006). There was also a split by gender with 40% of female students who had referred to independence as a difference falling into the less independent group compared with 50% of the male students (only weakly significant for male students at p=.068, but statistically significant for females at p=.013).

5.3.3 Expectations of workload and class and independent study

5.3.3.1 Expectations of time in class

A large majority (97%) of the respondents either gave an estimate of the time they expected to spend in time-tabled classes each week or (in the case of 12%) expressly said they did not know. It was possible to compare the expectations of most of these respondents with the KIS information indicating what proportion of time students on their intended course at their intended university would be spending in class during the following academic year. My method of calculating this was explained in Chapter 3.10.3 above, together with an explanation of why some of the respondents (including many of those planning to study education or subjects allied to medicine) had to be excluded from the comparison and why the levels of inaccuracy in student expectation are likely to be higher than those produced by the calculation. Further illustrative detail of the analysis can be found in Appendix 4.

The expectation of the respondents was of an average of 15 hours a week in class which according to the KIS data would be accurate if there were 31 teaching weeks in the year and an overestimate by four hours in the case of a teaching year of 22 weeks. This average conceals, however, considerable levels of unrealistic expectation with 36% estimating inaccurately by at least two hours a week. Since an inaccuracy of a couple of hours each week in their expectations probably would not cause difficulties in transition as a result of the reality not matching expectations, the more detailed analysis only considers

those who were inaccurate by more than five hours a week (ie an hour a day or around half a day a week) as having unrealistic expectations.

Sixteen percent of the respondents overestimated the hours they would spend in class each week by at least 5 hours and 5% appeared to underestimate by a similar margin (although a number of these may have misread the question as asking about the number of hours in class each day and should feature in the overestimating group instead). Ten percent were inaccurate (generally over-estimating) by at least 8 hours (the equivalent of a full day a week). As shown by Figure 5.7 below, a third of the respondents either said they did not know how many hours they would spend in class each week or provided an unrealistic estimation.
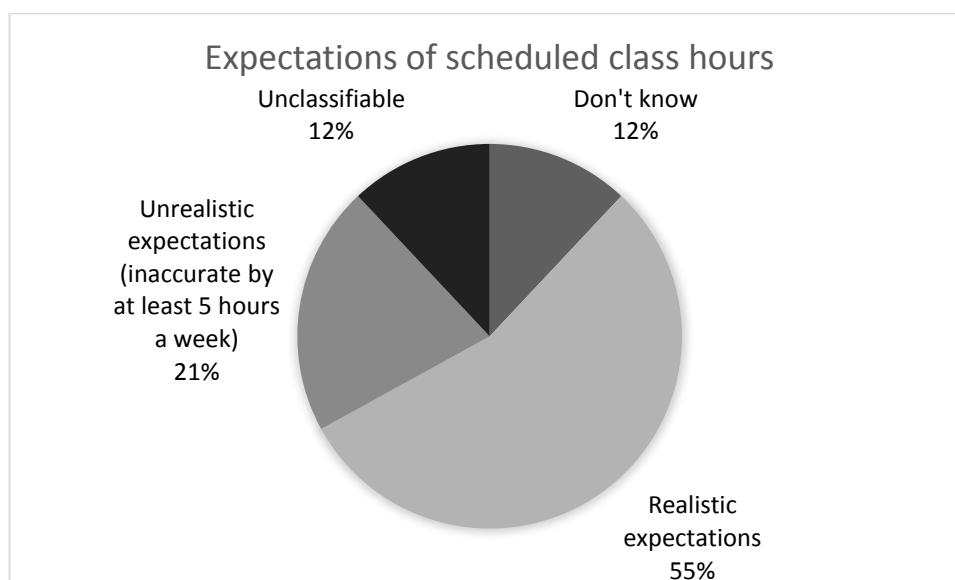
Figure 5-7 Expectations of scheduled class hours

The only statistically significant associations between sub-groups of respondents and realistic expectations about class hours were those associated with university type and with subject. These showed that the STEM students were more likely to have unrealistic expectations than the social science and humanities students (29% compared to 17%) and that, whilst the proportions of those with positively unrealistic expectations was similar between the university groupings, significantly more of the medium/low tariff applicants said they did not know about class hours than did those applying for higher tariff universities.

There was no statistically significant difference between the STEM respondents in the two university groupings but there was a difference (p=.027) between the

social science and humanities students according to university tariff group, as shown in Table 5.2 below:

	Realistic expectations %	Unrealistic expectations %	Said they did not know %
Medium/low tariff universities (n=92)	60	20	20
High/highest tariff universities (n=138)	75	16	9

Table 5.2 Accuracy of class hours expectations amongst those applying for social science and humanities

Those applying for social sciences at high/highest tariff universities appeared to have a clearer idea of the volume of class hours than those applying for any subject at medium/low tariff universities or for STEM subjects at high/highest tariff universities.

The respondents were asked (in question 24) whether they thought "that the more scheduled classes there are, the better a course will be".
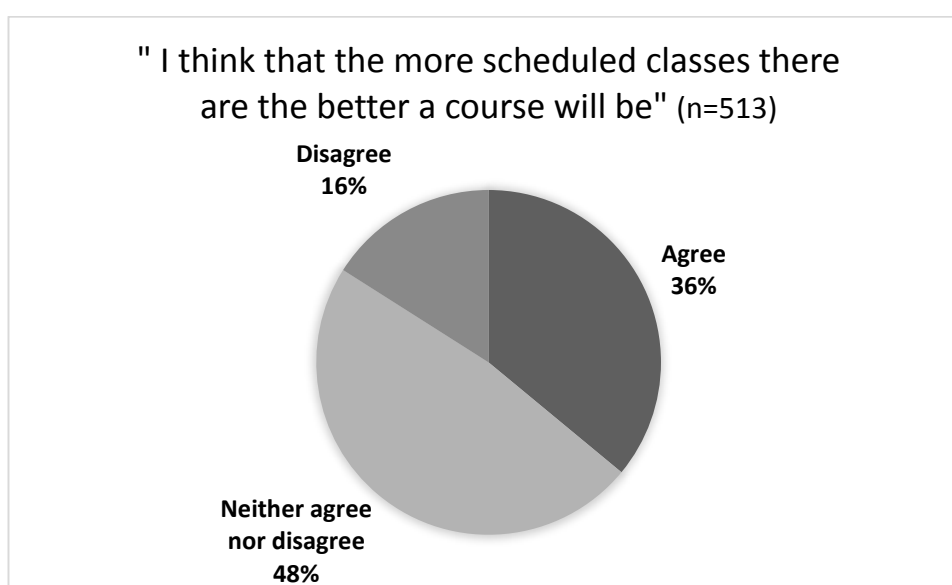
Figure 5-8 Attitudes to volume of class hours as indicator of quality

There was no statistically significant association between views as to the importance of quantity of class hours and accuracy of expectations about class hours. There was also no strong significant difference between groups of

respondents with different characteristics in relation to the issue of whether quantity of class time was a quality issue and the only weakly significant difference (p=.054) being between those aiming for high/highest tariff universities and those aiming for medium/low tariff universities with 32% of the former and 41% of the latter agreeing that more classes meant the course was better.

The questionnaire did not attempt to establish how important a quality the volume of the class hours was and it may be that, although, when asked, they thought it would be better to have more classes, it was not so important as to affect how they researched their university choices. This would be consistent with the 2013 HEPI report which found that only 17% of those surveyed said that class hours had been a factor in their decision. It seems less likely that this would be the case for the very small percentage (amounting to 18 students from a range of subjects, schools and target universities) who strongly agreed that more scheduled classes would make a course better; the proportion with realistic expectations was, however, no different for this small group.

5.3.3.2   *Expectations of time in independent study*

Question 11 asked how many hours the respondents expected to spend in independent study each week. This produced, from 78% of the sample, a considerable range of answers as can be seen in Table 5.3. Twenty-two percent of the respondents expressed no calculable opinion which was 10% more than expressed no calculable opinion about the volume of scheduled class hours. The greater "no response" rate is partly because there was a greater range of responses to the question which did not give a calculable answer; in addition to the "not sure" and "?" answers there were also answers such as "the rest of the time" and "however long it takes".

	% (n=428)
1-12 hours a week independent study	24%
13-22 hours a week independent study	33%
22-50 hours a week independent study	22%
No response/don't know	22%

Table 5.3 Estimations of weekly hours of independent study

Unlike the expressed expectations of scheduled class hours, it is not possible to gauge the accuracy of any given respondent's expectation of independent study. It is, however, possible to look for patterns in the expectations as between the various groups of respondents. As with expectations of class hours (see 5.3.3.1 above), there were statistically significant associations with university tariff group (p=.003) and with subject (p= <.001).

There was also a statistically significant association with gender (p=.014) with the main difference being that the female respondents were less likely than the male respondents to provide an estimate. There was also a statistically significant difference as between the white students and the BME students with 58% of the former expecting to do more than 13 hours a week of independent study compared with only 43% of the latter.

The BME group was relatively small (only 75 students) so this result needs to be treated with caution; these students were split evenly between those aiming for high/highest tariff universities and those for medium/low tariff universities. It is notable 45% of the latter group expected to do less than 13 hours study a week (compared with 25% of the white group intending to go to medium low tariff universities, which was a statistically significant difference with a p value of 0.048) whereas of the group going to high/highest tariff universities only 25% of the BME and 17% of the white students expected this low level of private study.

This difference between the expectations of those aiming for high/highest tariff universities and those aiming for medium/low tariff institutions was the most striking feature to emerge from the analysis. The high/highest tariff group respondents clearly expected to do more independent study than the medium/low group (60% expecting to do more than 13 hours a week compared with 49% of the medium/low tariff group). Thirty per cent of the medium/low tariff group respondents estimated that they would do between 1 and 12 hours of independent study a week compared with 21% of the high/highest tariff group.

5.3.3.3   Expectations of total workload

This difference in expectations of independent study carries through into comparisons of expected total workload which was calculated, using the responses to questions 10 and 11, for each respondent who gave an estimate

in response to both questions. Where the respondent gave a range, the bottom of the range was taken, thus calculating the minimum expected total workload.

The average total workload expectation of the respondents fell into the 35 to 41 hours a week range which is a reasonable match to the theoretical volume of 1200 hours of student effort a year to obtain 120 credits; it would take 29 to 34 weeks of working at that volume to achieve the 1200 hours. On the evidence of the 2014 HEPI Survey, however, the theory frequently bears no relation to the reality with actual workloads varying from under 25 hours a week to well over 40 hours a week (Soilemetzidis *et al.*, 2014). This range can also be found in the expectations of these respondents. As can be seen from Figure 5.9 below, 21% of the respondents were expecting that they might spend less than 25 hours a week studying whilst 11% thought they would have a total workload of more than 45 hours a week.
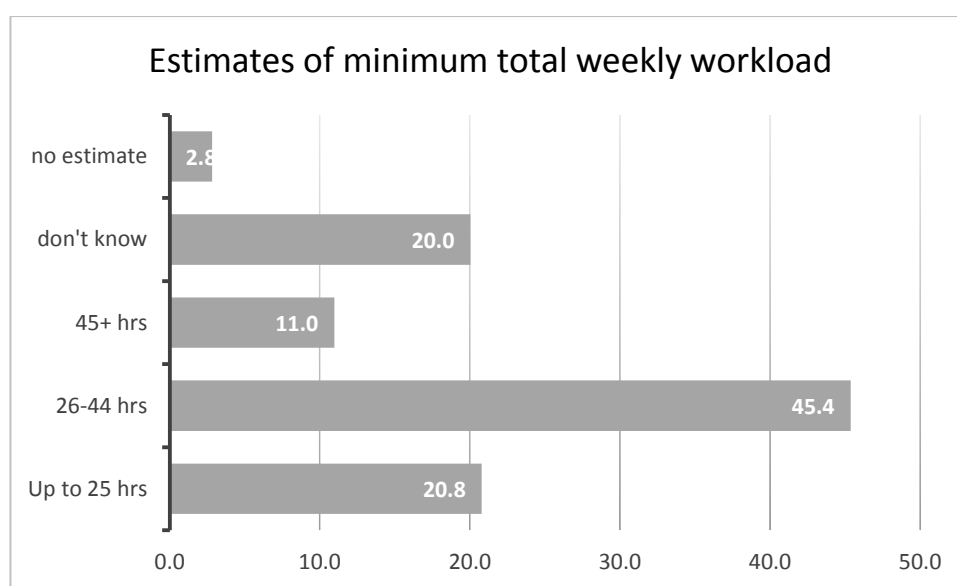
Figure 5-9 Estimates of minimum total weekly workload

The most striking finding in relation to total expected workload was the lower workloads on average expected by those applying for medium/low tariff universities compared with those applying for high/highest tariff universities, regardless of the subject area. Twenty-six percent of the medium/low tariff group and 17% of the high/highest group fell within the less than 25 hours a week group (statistically significant, p=.002).
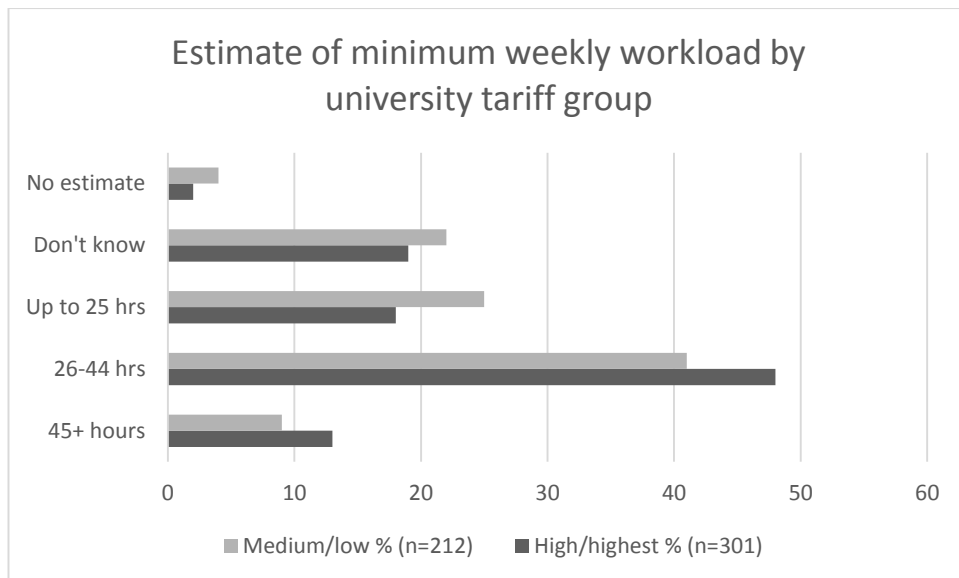
Figure 5-10 Estimate of minimum weekly workload by university tariff group

Unsurprisingly, there was an association between subject to be studied and expectations of the split between class and independent study. Twenty percent did think that they would spend more time in class at university than they had at school (26% of those applying for STEM subjects but only 10% of those applying for humanities and social science) and 12% were not sure whether they would; 29% thought that their learning would take place mainly in scheduled classes. 34% of those applying for STEM subjects expected their learning to take place mainly in class compared with 20% of those applying for social science and humanities subjects (p=.002).

5.3.4 Accuracy of expectations

The respondents' levels of confidence in the accuracy of their expectations were cross-tabulated with the findings about the accuracy of their expectations, derived (as explained in 3.10.5 above and Appendix 3) from the more detailed investigation of what they were actually expecting about taking responsibility for their own learning coupled with their expectations about quantity of time to be spent in scheduled classes and overall workload.

The 529 respondents fell into the categories set out in Table 5.4 and represented graphically in Figure 5.11 below.

	Number	% (out of 529)
Said that they thought that they understood what it would be like to study at university		
High accuracy	57	11
Medium accuracy	157	30
Low accuracy	116	22
Comparison could not be made	30	6
Did not say that they that thought they understood what university would be like		
Did not answer the question	17	3
Said they did not think they understood	45	8
Were uncertain about whether they understood	107	20
Total	529	100

Table 5.4 Estimated accuracy of expectations about studying at university

As Figure 5.11 shows graphically, nearly half the respondents either lacked confidence that they knew what to expect or had confident expectations which were likely to be incorrect.
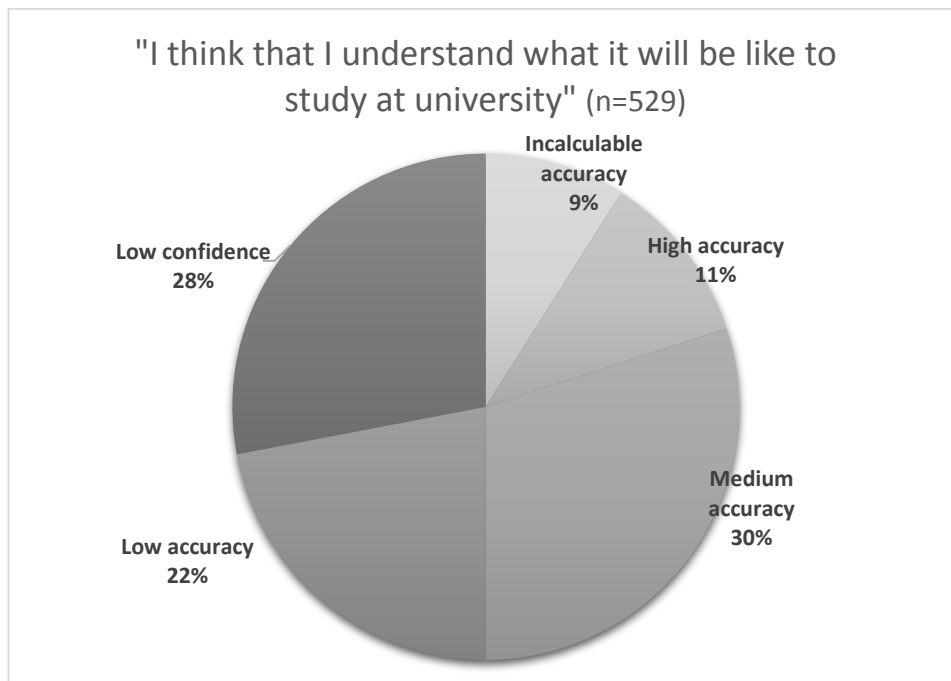
Figure 5-11 "I think I understand what it will be like to study at university"

These levels of accuracy map against the findings of the HEPI 2014 Survey that only 9% of respondents said that the experience had been exactly as they expected (Soilemetzidis *et al*., 2014).

Figure 5.11 above shows that 22% of those who said they thought they understood what it would be like to study at university had expectations which had a low level of accuracy. There was no statistically significant difference between the accuracy of the expectations of those who were confident that they did understand what it was going to be like and those who felt unsure. In so far as there was an observed difference, the less confident students were actually slightly more accurate. Whilst there was a statistically significant difference in levels of confidence in their expectations according to family tradition of higher education, demographic differences appeared to make no difference in actual levels of accuracy.
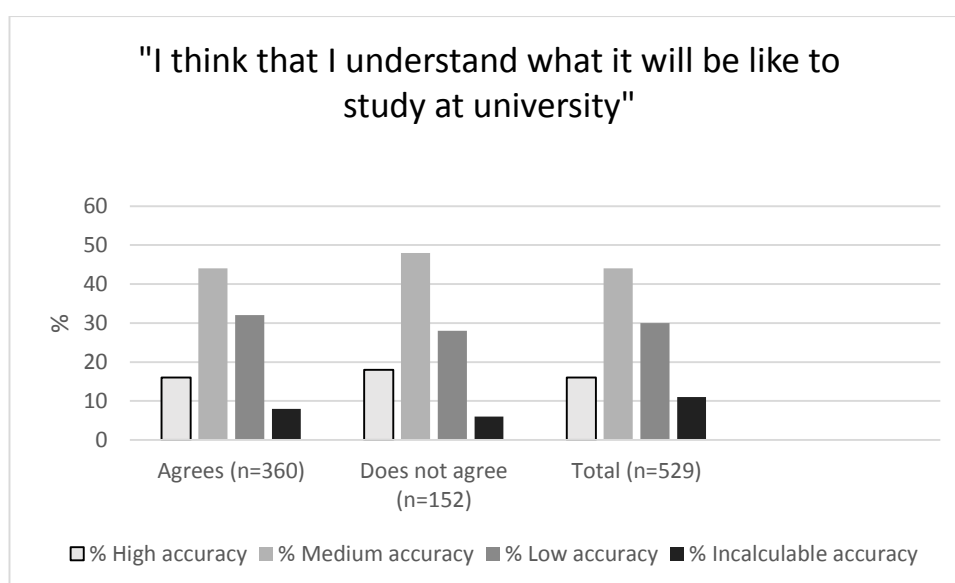
Figure 5-12 Accuracy of and confidence in expectations

The differences in levels of accuracy were, however, clearly associated with the different educational contexts; there were statistically significant differences (p=.028) between college and school (whether independent or state) students, between the different university tariff groups and between higher and lower achieving schools (regardless of the university tariff group).
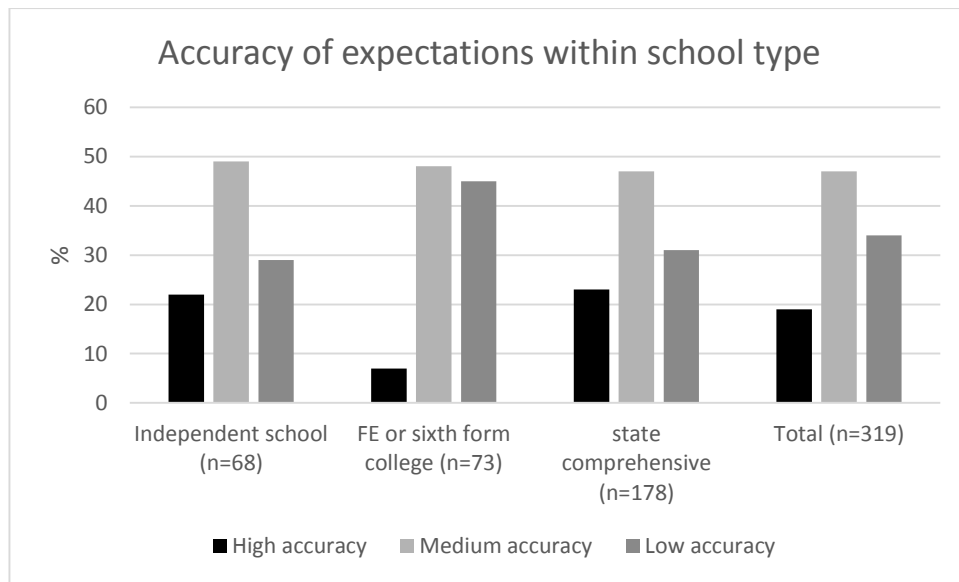
Figure 5-13 Accuracy of expectations within school type

It can be seen that levels of accuracy were lower amongst those respondents from colleges than from either independent or state schools.

	Number in group	% high accuracy	% medium accuracy	% low accuracy
High/highest tariff Above average post-16 institution	130	27	44	29
State school Above average post-16 institution	123	25	50	25
State school High/highest tariff	98	22	47	31
State school Below average post-16 institution	55	18	38	44
State school Medium/low tariff	77	16	58	26
Medium/low tariff Above average post-16 institution	58	15	64	21
High/highest tariff Below average post-16 institution	48	15	37	48
Medium/low tariff Below average post-16 institution	73	10	48	42

Table 5.5 Accuracy of expectation by educational context

Table 5.5 above sets out the levels of accuracy of expectations for all those educational context groupings for which there was a statistically significant difference ranked in order of levels of high accuracy. It can be seen that a ranking by low levels of low accuracy would give a slightly different order of ranking.

It can be seen that those in post-16 institutions with above average achievement records and who were hoping to attend high tariff universities had higher levels of accuracy in their expectations. The high levels of low accuracy map against the groups in below average post-16 institutions.

5.4 Findings relating to website information

This section considers the findings in relation to research questions 5 and 6 set out in Chapter 2.4 above. The questions, which arose from the context of the new public information requirements, asked, firstly, whether there is a link between expectations about class hours and the existence of the KIS data and, secondly, what other information about the learning and teaching environment are pre-entry students taking from university websites.

5.4.1 Attitude to website information

The vast majority (93%) of the respondents said that they had looked at the website for the university and course on which they were hoping to enrol; only 6% said that they did not look at the website. The remaining 1% were either not sure or did not answer the question. The websites were a more widely used source of information than open days, which had been attended by 81% of the sample. It was notable that not attending an open day was more prevalent amongst the college respondents (34% of whom said they had not attended an open day, compared with 18% of the independent school respondents and 11% of the state comprehensive respondents). Twenty-three percent of those hoping to go to a medium or low tariff university had not attended an open day, compared with only 12% of those hoping to enrol at high or highest tariff universities. BME students also appeared to be less likely to attend open days, with 30% of the BME students not having attended one compared with 15% of the white students.

Seventy-eight percent of the total group of respondents said that their expectations had been influenced by looking at the website and 77% agreed or agreed strongly that attending an open day had explained the experience of studying on the course. 10 students (2% of the total) said that they had neither looked at the website nor attended an open day.

A college student amongst the email exchange group who was aiming for Radstowe University (a highest tariff university) and who had looked at the website but not attended an open day explained that

> *"I did not feel the need to [attend the open day]. [Radstowe] University is open to the public so I could go and get the feel of it, I had excellent word of mouth from people and the university's position and reputation is excellent. I have got all the information I needed to on the website. However, I am going on an open day to the university this summer as I feel I have more time then".*

This student had a very accurate understanding of the need to take responsibility for her own learning and about contact hours and workload. She explained that her expectations came to a large extent from her sister's experience at university (a high tariff university some distance away).

Another email exchange with a student, aiming for RCU, from a different college was as follows:

> *"You said that you did not look at the webpages for this course which is slightly unusual – can you explain why?"*

> *"Because I have been dead set on doing the course from the get go to be honest and I know a few people who have studied law at university and from they have said and what had been said at the open days it only confirmed what my original intentions were".*

5.4.2   Information about the amount of time in scheduled classes

Question 5 asked "Did the website tell you how much time you would spend in lectures and other classes?" and Question 6 asked "Did you notice the Key Information Set (KIS)/Unistats data on the website?"

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Just over a third (34%) of the total group said, in answer to question 5, that the website site contained information about the time in lectures and classes. A different 34% also said that they had noticed the KIS data of whom slightly more than half thought the website did not tell them about contact hours or were not sure whether it did.

As can be seen in Figure 5.14 below, those who thought the website told them about the amount of time spent in scheduled classes were no more likely to have an accurate perception of class hours than the other respondents.
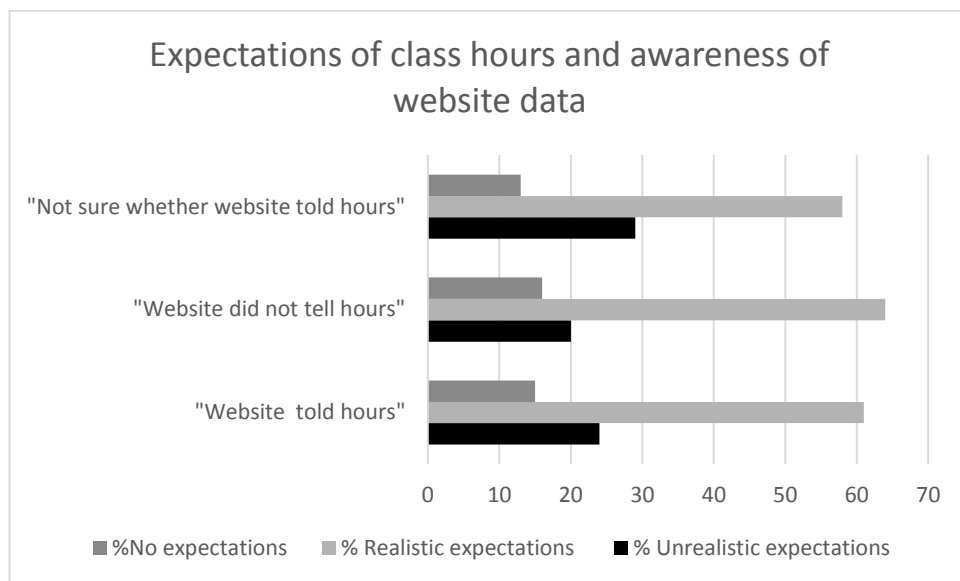
Figure 5-14 Expectations of class hours and awareness of website data

This suggests that the information about contact hours on the websites has little impact. This might well be because of the difficulty (demonstrated in Chapter 3.10.3) of converting the information in the KIS dataset into a meaningful weekly figure or it might indicate the lack of significance which the issue has for applicants. As noted above, only 37% of the respondents appeared (in answer to question 24) to feel that the quantity of scheduled class time was an issue for the quality of the course they were considering. This might explain why they did not notice, or did not recall noticing, the information on the website. Looking, however, at the 171 respondents who did feel that the more classes there were the better the course would be, 39% said that the website did not contain information about class hours and 26% were not sure whether it did. Only 36% (n=61) of them said that the website did tell them how much time they would spend in class and of those over a third (n=22) either said they did not know how much time they would spend in class or had unrealistic expectations.

The majority of the email exchange group, when asked on what they had based their answer to the question about scheduled class hours, said that it was from open days although a variety of other sources (not including either Unistats or KIS) were mentioned, for example:

> *"It was just a guess to be honest because that is roughly what I am attending in college at the moment with a lot of out of college work"*
>
> *"It was an estimated guess after reading sources in the past"*
>
> *"Students in the year above me, currently attending university, media reports on universities"*
>
> *"Knowledge from friends and people who went to university"*
>
> *"That's about how many hours my brother does, plus I'm sure that it was mentioned on an open day"*
>
> *"Just guesstimated based on info about the number of lectures and tutorials which I got from uni website and open days"*

5.4.3   Other website information about learning and teaching

As shown in Table 5.6 below, the findings suggest that the respondents will, on the basis of their recollections of the website information, have formed a picture of university life which mainly relates to social life, employability and course content and assessment.

Over 70% of those who said that they had looked at the website (n=491) recollected seeing information about social life, help with becoming more employable and learning about their subject with over 50% remembering seeing reference to learning to work independently, availability of placements and doing assessments.

Aspects of student life listed in questions 7 and 8, which asked students to underline those which they remembered the website describing	% of respondents recollecting material on their course website (n= 529)	Themes into which aspects grouped for further analysis
Library opening hours	37	Facilities
Online learning support	32	
Innovative technology	42	
Up to date teaching rooms	38	
Help with becoming more employable	66	Employability
Placements, internships	57	
Help with adjusting	30	Provision of support
Personal tutor	32	
Help with academic writing	14	
Social life	73	Social life
Group work	49	Transferable skills
Communication skills	47	
Time management skills	31	
Learning to research	45	Thinking skills
Developing ability to work independently	55	
Developing ability to analyse information	30	
Developing ability to think critically	34	
Problem-solving	33	
Learning about their subject	71	Course content related
Assessment	61	

Table 5.6 Recollections of material on course websites

A cross-tabulation of the responses about recollection of website information and the demographic variables, which can be seen in Appendix 10, showed few statistically significant differences. There was a clear gender difference in relation to the Facilities theme, particularly in relation to up to date rooms and innovative technology: 54% of males and 37% females recalled descriptions of innovative technology and 49% of males and 32% of females recalled description of up to date rooms. That this difference was gender related rather than subject related was established by adding the STEM and social sciences/humanities variables as an additional layer in the cross-tabulation; 60% of the male STEM students and 40% of the female STEM students had noticed descriptions of innovative technology. Whilst the STEM students were 27% more likely to have noticed descriptions of up to date teaching rooms than the social science/humanities students, within each subject grouping the male students were 12% more likely than the female students to recollect material about rooms.

There were some statistically significant differences in relation to both the BME group and the free school meals group but both these groups are too small to seek to generalise these findings beyond the sample. The only difference between traditional and first generation students was that first generation students were less likely ($p=.031$) to recall seeing any description of personal tutors; 39% of traditional students underlined this item compared with only 30% of the first generation students. Whilst statistically significant, this finding seems of far less note than the failure to find any other statistically significant differences.

A cross-tabulation of the responses with the educational variables, which can also be seen in Appendix 10, produced rather more statistically significant findings. The main findings in relation to post-16 institutional context were that those at the below average achieving institutions seemed less likely to recall noticing information on a range of aspects and that the independent school group were less likely to recall having seen information about online or other forms of support. Within the group of independent school respondents, those who showed a greater expectation of having to take responsibility for managing their own learning were also more likely to have noticed information on the websites about provision of support.

There are some predictable differences between the STEM and social sciences/humanities group in that the former are more likely to have notice information about teaching rooms, innovative technology, research and problem-solving.

The high/highest tariff group was more likely to say that they had noticed information about a personal tutor (40% compared with 26% of the medium/low group, $p=.001$) and about material about help with academic writing (17% compared with 10%, $p=.021$.

There were also statistically significant differences in the frequency with which the two tariff groups reported noticing material about three of the thinking skills group, as shown in Table 5.7 below.

	Medium/low tariff (n=209)	High/highest tariff (n=271)	P value
Learning to do research	39%	56%	<.001
Developing ability to analyse information	22%	41%	<.001
Developing ability to think critically	29%	41%	.005
Problem-solving	30%	42%	.011

Table 5.7 Tariff group differences in recalling "thinking skills" information

These findings do not, of course, say anything definitive about what was actually on the websites; the respondents' recollection of the aspects of university life about which they had noticed information on the website are likely to reflect both what was actually on the websites and what they think it likely that they will or should have seen on the website. The extent to which students recall material from the websites will also be associated with their own information gathering tendencies and what interests them. These recollections (or lack of them) may have informed the expectations of these pre-entry students but it is not possible to say that the students will not have expectations about these aspects of university life just because they do not recall seeing them described on the websites.

5.5   Summary of differences between respondent variables

This section summarises the findings, most of which have already been discussed above, in relation to the last of the research questions set out in Chapter 2.5: is there any difference in the findings between students from different demographic and educational backgrounds?

As has been noted in each of the three previous sections, there is little statistically significant difference to be noted between the respondents according to their demographic characteristics particularly given the difficulty of generalising from the relatively small numbers of BME students and students who had been in receipt of free school meals. The only difference (and it was not large) in relation to family tradition of higher education was (as discussed in 5.3.1) that first generation students had lower levels of confidence that they knew what to expect although no difference in the levels of accuracy of their expectations than the traditional students.

Female students, as discussed in 5.2.2 and 5.3.2, showed a greater expectation of independence and the male students, as noted in 5.4.3, were more likely to recall noticing descriptions of innovative technology and up to date teaching rooms on the websites.

The differences in educational context seem to be much more significant than the demographic differences. There are some largely unsurprising differences in expectations about how they will spend their time between those planning to study STEM subjects and those planning to study social science or humanities. There are some significant differences between the types of post-16 institution, most notably that the college respondents were considerably less likely both to display an understanding of the need to take responsibility for their own learning and to have accurate expectations and that independent school respondents were least likely either to think they would spend more time in class than at school or to recollect material about any form of study support on the university websites.

The achievement level at Key Stage 5 of the respondents' post-16 institutions and the tariff group of the universities which the respondents hoped to attend appear to be the most significant variables with expectation of taking responsibility mapping particularly against post-16 institutional achievement and expectations of how they would spend their time and recollection of "thinking skills" on websites mapping particularly against the university tariff groups. Those in post-16 institutions with below average achievement at Key Stage 5 seem particularly likely to have low levels of accuracy in their expectations of what it will be like to study at university whereas as those in high achieving institutions heading for high tariff universities are seen to be more likely to have a good understanding of what it will be like.

5.6   Radstowe City University

I carried out a separate analysis of the responses from the 78 students (15% of the whole sample) who said that they hoped to enrol at Radstowe City University in order to see if there were any specific findings which should inform

my practice, either directly within my own faculty or as messages for the wider university.

Characteristic	% RCU	% of main sample	Statistically significant difference?
Male	46	49	
Female	55	50	
White	81	80	
Said Free School meals received at some point	20	10	P=.003
Family tradition of going to university?			
Yes	30	50	
No or don't know	71	48	P=<.001
State school sixth form	54	60	P=<.001
FE or Sixth Form College	40	19	
Independent School	6	21	
Post-16 institution above average KS5 results	41	66	P=<.001
Post-16 institution below average KS5 results	59	34	
Humanities and Social Sciences	45	49	P=<.001
STEM subjects	27	35	
Others (allied to medicine, education and creative arts)	28	19	
Percentage of total sample	15	100	

Table 5.8 Characteristics of the RCU respondents

Looking firstly at the characteristics of the group, it can be seen from Table 5.8 above that the RCU group contained significantly higher percentages of first generation students, those who had received free school meals at some point and those from lower achieving post-16 institutions. The ethnic mix was much the same as for the whole sample and I recognise it as mirroring the ethnic mix within RCU. Compared with the whole sample, a higher percentage of the RCU respondents came from the colleges and a smaller percentage from independent schools which is also representative. The proportions of STEM and humanities/social science students are much the same as for the whole group

but are smaller in total because of the greater numbers of allied to medicine, creative arts and education students; this greater presence of respondents aiming to do courses with a placement element in the first year means that it is not possible to estimate accuracy of expectations for 15% of the group (compared with 9% of the total sample).

Those aiming to enrol at RCU followed the pattern of the whole group in that nearly a quarter of the group said that they thought they understood what it was going to be like to study at university but were found to have inaccurate expectations. Their expectations were in many respects not significantly different (as can be seen in Appendix 11) but they were significantly less likely to be in the "more independent" group (36% compared with 52%, p=.009). This is mirrored in the fact that they were significantly more likely to think that the need for independent study resulted from a lack of lecturing staff (19% compared with 13%, p=.014) and to associate the quality of the course with the volume of scheduled class hours (50% compared with 33%, p=.022). In terms of comparison with respondents expecting to go to other medium/low tariff universities they were less likely to expect to take responsibility for their own learning (although expecting to spend more time in independent study than in their post-16 institution) and more likely to think that the quantity of class hours mattered.

In terms of where the RCU group got their information, it was notable that only 58% of the respondents said that they had attended an open day compared with 87% of the rest, (regardless of tariff group). There was also a slightly lower use of the website, again regardless of tariff group, (90% compared with 94%, p=.043). The recollections of the RCU respondents of what they had seen on the website (which are set out in detail in Appendix 11) map to a considerable extent against the total sample but there was significantly less recollection of material on employability and related skills and on of most of the "thinking skills".

It is possible to speculate that students planning to stay at home and go to their local university are more likely to expect the university environment to be the same as that of their post-16 institution. It is also possible that if they feel that they have little choice about which university to go to that they will be less likely to engage with open days or the website.

5.7   Summary of findings

In this section, I summarise the main findings from the research. In the next Chapter I consider the strength of these findings and what they add to the theoretical domain discussed in Chapter 2 above as well as their implications for the empirical domain. The findings are set out below in the order of the research questions identified in Chapter 2.4 above:

1.   The respondents did expect that studying at university would be different from studying in a post-16 institution; a majority of the respondents thought that "independence" was a hallmark of studying at university but conceptualised this in rather different ways, some of which suggested rather limited ideas about independence.

2.   About a third of the respondents displayed a lack of expectation of having to take responsibility for managing their own learning although, of these, just over half had mentioned independence as a difference they expected to encounter at university. It was particularly notable that a large majority of the respondents appeared to expect the same sort of feedback in relation to preparation of coursework as they were likely to have been receiving at school or college.

3.   At least a third of the respondents had either no clear expectations or inaccurate expectations (by at least five hours a week) of the amount of scheduled class time. Nearly a quarter of the respondents were expecting that they might spend less than 25 hours a week in total on study.

4.   Nearly half the respondents either had low confidence in their understanding of what it would be like to study at university or thought they understood but were likely to find out that they did not. Twenty percent of the respondents said that they felt that they understood what it would be like to study at university but, in fact, appeared to have a low level of accuracy in their expectations.

5.   Information about contact hours on university websites appeared to have little impact on respondent knowledge.

6.   Respondents were most likely to say that they had seen website material about course content, social life and help with becoming more employable and least likely to think that they had seen material about academic support and the development of thinking skills. It is not possible to know from the questionnaire what information was actually on the websites at which they had looked.

7.   There were relatively few apparent associations between the different demographic groups and the various findings; in was particularly notable, and possibly counter-intuitive, that there appeared to be almost no difference between the groups with and without a family tradition of higher education. Educational context, particularly the level of achievement of their post-16 institution and the tariff group of the university to which they were hoping to go, appeared to have far more significance for the expectations of the respondents.

There were some interesting differences, as outlined in section 5.6 above, between the findings in relation to those planning to enrol at my own institution and those planning to go elsewhere. It is obviously not possible to draw any conclusions about whether these are associated with something about RCU which differs from other universities or whether the information-seeking behaviour, expectations and understanding of students planning to study at their local institution may differ from that of others.

Chapter 6 Discussion of the findings

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter contains:

- a consideration of the strength and generalisability of the findings set out in the previous Chapter
- a discussion of what those findings add to the theoretical domain (to revert back to the terminology of Brown and Dowling, 1998 used in Chapter 2.1)
- recommendations for the empirical domain to address the issues revealed by the findings.

Finally I consider the implications of the findings for my own professional practice and, in conclusion, return to consider the extent to which the thesis has met the aims and objectives set out in Chapter 1.4.

6.2 Strength and generalisability of the findings

The two main potential limitations on the claims which can be made for these research findings are, firstly, the nature of the sample (in particular, how representative it is of the population from which it is drawn) and, secondly, aspects of the questionnaire design.

In terms of size, the total sample of just over 500 respondents, whilst not large, is larger than other published studies of UK pre-entry students. The size of the sample varied in relation to the questions answered or the number of respondents for whom derived variables could be calculated; the smallest sample (at just over 300) was that for which accuracy of class hours expectations could be measured but this, whilst small in absolute terms, is still larger than other studies. The main weakness in terms of size rests in the inability to draw firm conclusions about the least frequently encountered characteristics (free school meals and non-White ethnicity). Only one of my seven research questions, however, required comparison between sub-groups with different characteristics and the relevant issue for the other questions is that of the representativeness of the entire sample.

This was a non-probability sample and was acknowledged in Chapter 4 to be over-representative of male and traditional students although broadly representative in terms of other demographic characteristics. It is also skewed towards students from schools with a record of strong academic achievement and, in consequence, towards students hoping to go to high tariff universities. The subject spread is over-representative of social science and humanities students with this over-representation largely found amongst the college respondents. It is a regionally specific sample and it cannot be known whether the same findings would be made elsewhere. The impossibility of determining accurately the size of the population, noted in 4.6 above, also means that it is not possible to weight the responses in order to improve the representativeness of the sample.

The issue of the extent to which the lack of representativeness undermines the findings depends on the extent to which the findings differ between the sub-groups. As noted in Chapter 5, the main statistically significant differences relate to gender and educational contexts and the findings which are particularly affected by these differences are those relating to overall accuracy of expectations and, particularly, to expectations of taking responsibility for managing their own learning. The over-representation of male students suggests that the sample contains a disproportionate number of "less independent" students but, on the other hand, the greater over-representation of students aiming for high tariff universities and from high-achieving post-16 institutions will tend to skew the sample more strongly in the opposite direction.

In relation to some of the respondent variables, the groups are too small to draw conclusions beyond the sample; this is particularly true of the free school meal and the BME groups. The college sample also suffers not just from its relatively small size but also from the poor subject spread because of the way the data was obtained (although it is the group with the most representative gender balance); as the college students form half the group from post-16 institutions with below average achievement at Key Stage 5, the claims in relation to this group are less robust than those which can be made about the above average group.

In conclusion, in relation to the nature of the sample, it is clear that the findings have a stronger claim to be generalisable to students from high-achieving backgrounds than to the whole population of students.

The main limitations of the research design itself were considered in Chapter 3, above; these largely consist of the usual limitations of closed question surveys with regard to gaining insights into the reasons for the findings. It is also possible that the methodology provides scope for erroneous interpretation of the data in that several of the main variables (for example, "accuracy of expectations", "expectation of having to take responsibility for their own learning") are an interpretative use of the responses to the more clearly factual questions (for example, "do you expect to get coursework reminders?").

The need to keep the questionnaire short meant that choices had to be made in the information obtained and different choices could have been made. In particular, it would have been useful to have more information about the GCSE results of the respondents and the subjects they were currently studying as well as their current amount of class contact.

It should be noted that it is not known where the students in the sample will actually enrol, merely where they were hoping to go at the time of the survey. Only the highest, high and medium tariff groups are well-represented and it is likely that, after receiving their examination results, a proportion of those hoping to go to universities within the high and highest tariff group would have taken up places at universities in the medium/low tariff group. It seems probable that their perceptions of university learning and teaching will have been greatly influenced by the information about the university they were hoping to attend even if they end up enrolling at a different university.

6.3   The findings and the theoretical domain

In this section I relate my findings back to the review of the literature, consider the extent to which they support, extend or differ from what has previously been published and suggest where the next areas are for research to develop further the theoretical domain (that is, the literature on expectations of pre-entry students within the broader domain of the transition literature).

The first finding was that pre-entry students do expect university to be different. The level of response to question 27 indicates that Davies and Cook (2009, p114) are overstating the case when they suggest that many students may have no expectations rather than "mis-expectations". Furthermore, those who did not respond cannot be assumed to have no expectations as 14% of the sample did not respond to question 27 but nonetheless claimed, in response to question 25 (discussed below), to be confident in their expectations. This suggests that a maximum of 6% were likely to have no expectations at all. Other findings in the research, however, are consistent with the suggestion of JISC (2007) that pre-entry students find it difficult to picture university as being different from their current experience and those expectations which the respondents did articulate support the suggestion by McKendry and Boyd (2012) that the word "independent" in the context of university study is an ambiguous one capable of being understood in a range of ways.

My second finding related to the proportion of students who lacked an understanding of the need to take responsibility for the management of their own learning. These findings are similar to those of the Australian research carried out by Scutter *et al.* (2011) although there are higher levels of expected independence in my sample than in Scutter's research. This may well be due to the skewed nature of my sample whereas the Australian sample, which was very much larger than mine, was said to be representative of the population from which it was drawn; it appears to support my suggestion above that if my sample had been more representative of less high achieving post-16 institutions and students the percentage of "less independent" respondents would probably have been higher.

The set of questions used to divide the respondents into "less independent" and "more independent" included, in addition to the questions about the self-organisation of learning, a question about whether the students expected tutors to tell them everything they needed to know; 30% of the respondents either thought they would or were not sure about this which suggests that this group were likely to encounter the epistemological difficulties referred to by Green (2007), Kember (2001), Brownlee *et al.* (2009) and others as discussed in 2.3.3. In particular this aligns with the views expressed by Hocking *et al.* (2007) and

Brownlee *et al.* (2009) that students view knowledge as being certain and as being held by authorities.

The third finding related to levels of inaccurate expectations of time in class and of workload generally; these findings were in line with a number of studies amongst first year students referred to in 2.3.3 above. The proportions of my sample who were making significantly inaccurate estimates of the amount of time they would be spending in class (between 10% and 21% depending on which measure of significantly inaccurate is taken), taken together with the finding that 38% of those with unrealistic expectations considered the quantity of class hours to be a measure of quality, aligns with the findings of the 2014 HEPI-HEA research in which 15% of the respondents said that their experience was worse than expected at least partly because they were getting fewer class hours than expected.

The expectations of total workload are statistically significantly associated with university tariff with 62% of those aiming for high/highest tariff universities expecting a total workload of more than 25 hours a week compared with 50% of those aiming for medium/low tariff universities; those aiming for high/highest tariff universities expected to be working harder than the medium/low tariff students regardless of subject. This is an interesting finding (and not one previously found in the literature) given the HEPI findings in their 2013 Report and in Soilemetzidis *et al.* (2014) that it appeared that students in Russell Group universities were working harder than those in other universities. In the 2013 report (HEPI, 2013 p13) there is a suggestion that there must be institutional factors playing some role in this (the implicit suggestion being that that the courses at high/higher tariff institutions are more demanding) but these findings would suggest that the link may be with the expectations with which the students arrive. It is not obvious why their expectations should differ in this way and this is an issue which needs further research.

The fourth finding related to a mismatch between confidence in understanding and actual understanding and suggested that nearly a quarter of the respondents were likely to find a mismatch between their expectations and reality. This is consistent with the findings of Gibney *et al.* (2011) that 20% of the respondents in their study said that their expectations had been inaccurate. These findings cannot tell us anything directly about the consequences for the

students of either their levels of uncertainty or their inaccurate expectations. This requires longitudinal research of the Futuretrack kind which will face difficulties in terms of being sure that involvement in the earlier stages of the research does not "contaminate" the findings; it is likely, for example, that as a consequence of being involved in answering my questionnaire at least some students will have thought more widely about these issues than might otherwise have been the case.

The responses to the fifth and sixth research questions relate to the KIS data on class hours and the recollection of information on the websites. The findings in relation to impact of the KIS data match the finding of Scutter *et al.* (2011) about the lack of effect of providing information on the website about time spent in class. The recollections of the respondents of what they had seen on university websites align with the comments by Stevenson *et al.* (2014) about marketization practices resulting in "discursive silences around pedagogic issues", the privileging of information relating to facilities and resources and the consequent risk of a lack of meaningful information being made available for prospective students. My analysis of university websites described in 3.6 above, whilst directed at aiding the design of the questionnaire, rather than in pursuit of the answer to a research question, provides additional support for the findings of Stevenson *et al.* (2014) from their analysis of the websites of eleven institutions.

The final set of findings related to differences between the various sub-groups of respondents. This included the finding that, although the confidence levels are lower amongst the first generation students, they seem to be equally as well prepared as the traditional students in terms of the accuracy of their expectations. This is not something which I was expecting to find given the prevalence of the discussion in the literature about the greater difficulties which first generation students have in adjusting to university.

The respondent variables which did demonstrate statistically significant differences in expectations were associated with institutional educational context. This aligns with findings of both McCulloch (2014) and Crawford (2014); McCulloch suggests that it was educational attainment rather than demographic characteristics which correlated with student withdrawal and

Crawford (2014) finds an association between type of school attended at age 16, and the overall performance of that school, with outcomes at university.

It is possible that differences in understanding associated with different post-16 institution participation levels (something which was also found by Walker *et al.*, 2004) might be explained by higher levels of collective knowledge, derived from more contact with older students already at university, being possessed by those with higher participation rates. It is possible that the schools with higher participation rates bring their students more into contact with outreach activity from universities, something certainly suggested by the response to my request for involvement in this research.

This would not, however, explain the difference in the understanding levels between those expecting to attend the different tariff group universities regardless of the nature of their post-16 institution. These students are very likely to possess different levels of educational achievement and it is possible that the higher achievers, in whatever environment, have more effective information-gathering attributes. Renfrew *et al.* (2010) noted that levels of information seeking appeared to be associated with higher achievement and it may also be the case that the higher achievers are more likely to absorb information from the environment even where they have not actively sought it. It is also possible that the differences (particularly those relating to workload expectations) may be something to do with the attitude to study of those who are achieving the lower grades; this would clearly be a focus for continuing research. In a future questionnaire, I would include questions both about their work-load within their post-16 institution and about their levels of achievement at GCSE.

Finally, the RCU-specific findings noted in section 5.6 suggest that there is scope for research as to whether the expectations and attitudes of students intending to attend a local university have particular characteristics when compared with students who plan to move away from home and therefore have more reason to engage with the information in the process of deciding where to apply. Clearly, it is not possible to claim any finding in this respect since it may be that there is something specific to RCU or to Radstowe which would not be replicated elsewhere.

In summary, most of my findings confirm the suggestions within the existing literature about the expectations likely to be held by pre-entry students and the contribution to knowledge which my thesis makes is by extending the empirical context of the research. The work done in the course of the questionnaire design also extends the work of Stevenson *et al* (2014) relating to the relative lack of focus on pedagogic issues in university marketing material. More specific contributions to the knowledge in the field are those relating to the mismatch between the respondents' use of the language of independence and their actual understanding of what this means and the differences in the overall workloads envisaged by the students depending on university tariff group.

Whilst claims of "law-like generalisations" (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p7) cannot be made in relation to this research, because of the issues discussed in the previous section, it can robustly claim to have added in broad terms to knowledge about the expectations of pre-entry students.

6.4   Recommendations for the empirical domain

The empirical domain, as explained in Chapter 1, is the transition of students into the learning and teaching environment of higher education and, in particular, the levels of understanding of that environment amongst prospective undergraduates.

The issue of understanding "how to be a university student" (Hale 1964, p32) is at the heart of this thesis. Whilst prospective students are provided with large amounts of marketing and other information about many aspects of being at university and, in particular, about the benefits of getting a degree, there is far less material about what it is "to be a university student". My findings confirm the need for pre-entry students to be better educated in this respect.

There are two main areas of recommendation: the provision of better information and the encouragement of prospective students to engage with that information in a way enables genuine understanding. Since general public discourse will provide an information backdrop for both prospective students and those with whom they discuss the prospect of university, it would also be desirable to have a clearer portrayal in the media of how university study

develops students to be more employable (amongst other things) through developing them as independent learners and critical thinkers.

There is a role for policy makers here in clarifying the role of university education but university marketing and public communication departments, and university mission group press offices, would be ill-advised to ignore the need to address this not just through their primary marketing material but also through their public relations work more generally with the media.

I would suggest that there is a need for the information available to be improved and for the focus of information provision to shift from being solely concerned with choice-making, although improved understanding by prospective students of the nature of learning and teaching at university would be likely to lead to a demand from them for more holistic information about how that learning is supported to enable comparison between the various institutions being considered by a potential student.

The 2010 National Student Forum Annual Report contains (p38) a list of items of information which they suggest should be provided to students so that they know what to expect before they arrive, including

- *what will be expected of me, and to what extent study will be structured or independent*
- *if learning is mostly independent, the key skills I will need to develop – and the opportunities that will be available to support me in developing these*

At a detailed level, there is a need to recast the KIS data on class hours and independent study in a way that enables it to assist understanding of how much time students will be spending in various types of work rather than just provide a basis for quantitative comparison. My research clearly demonstrates how almost impossible it is to extract any real meaning from the current data either in terms of time spent in class or in relation to total workload.

Davies and Cook (2009, p122) note that, aside from subject content, "the most crucial piece of information to impart is that higher education is about independence in learning, and that this means the development of a range of new skills, particularly time management" but that "conveying this in a realistic but not off-putting manner is no easy task". Indeed, when I was talking to the questionnaire pilot group about the notion that university websites might explain

more clearly what studying at university meant, one student observed that if we did that no-one would want to apply.

Arguably, the QAA, which currently focuses more on the accuracy of public information than on whether it supports an effective transition to higher education, needs to re-interpret Section C of the Quality Code so that it has a greater focus on support for a better understanding of nature of study, both in terms of the self-management of study and in epistemological terms. A QAA steer might help to redress the balance of power in universities between the marketing and educational drivers behind website content which, at the moment, would appear to be tilted in favour of marketing. It is clear from the literature that potential students are more interested in the facilities and so on and that the websites tend to focus on giving this information with the resultant "discursive silences around pedagogic issues" (Stevenson *et al.* 2014) on learning and teaching.

Making the information available will not by itself be sufficient since, as Diamond *et al.* (2014, p9) note, students may be overwhelmed by any requirement to process large quantities of information. As Diamond *et al.* (2014) observe (p59), "whether a piece of information is salient to that person is specific to their personal outcomes, preferred goals and life-experiences". There needs to be more done in the post-16 institutions to engage prospective students with the information in a way which ensures understanding of potentially ambiguous language such as "independent study". This may be particularly important in institutions where many of the students go on to study locally and may feel that they have little choice and therefore no need to absorb any information provided. The use of school and college alumni in student ambassador and mentoring work is likely to be of particular importance. There is a need to provide better incentives to post-16 institutions to devote time to this work; the introduction of the destination measures noted in 1.3.1 above is likely to help with this.

Briggs (2009) noted a consistent request from schools and colleges that universities should feed back to them information about the success of their students. Creating such channels of communication would also help universities and post-16 institutions to "work across the divide in relation to transition"

(Green 2007 p83). The universities themselves need to recognise the need for outreach work to support transition as well as the work on awareness and aspiration raising.

Whilst this research was not specifically directed at the issue of what changes should be made within universities to ease transition, the findings do reinforce the need to take account of the likelihood that at least a proportion of a new cohort will lack a real understanding of the learning environment. The finding about the prevalence of expectations that coursework drafts will be read suggests that specific support for all students in moving to greater independence in the production of coursework should be a standard part of the first year experience. Universities need to put in place pedagogic interventions supporting student development of what Green (2014) refers to as the "trajectory of expectations" (p4), including, as the HEA (2014) note in their teaching resource on independent learning, ensuring that students understand what is meant by "independent learning".

6.5   Enhancement of my own practice

The scope for enhancing my own practice rests in the application within my own areas of responsibility at RCU of the recommendations outlined in section 6.4. An aspect of this will involve the sharing of these findings with colleagues both within RCU and in the post-16 institutions, particularly those involved in this research, in the city region.

I will also be looking again at the content of our induction programme, the first semester curriculum and the support provided by personal tutors to ensure that we deal adequately with both the transition of students to taking responsibility for the management of their own learning, including ensuring that they understand that scheduled classes are not a measure of the amount of time to be spent studying, and with their development of an appropriate understanding of the nature of knowledge and the processes by which it is acquired. The current research being undertaken by the Higher Education Academy to identify effective practice in independent learning should be helpful in identifying appropriate interventions (https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/project/350, last accessed January 2015).

In addition to talking to colleagues about the desirability outlined in the previous section for material on the website which is more informative about the nature of study at university, there is also a need to encourage local students, in particular, to engage better with the information. I have alerted my colleagues to the danger that early outreach work designed to familiarise students generally with the university may actually prevent students from attending more detailed information sessions on their intended course. We need to find ways of persuading them that there is a point to attending open days and of encouraging them to talk to university students currently taking the courses which they will be joining. My faculty has set up a pilot "buddying" scheme with one of the local colleges; my findings reinforce the need to pursue this initiative although the inability, through conflicting priorities, of the college to deliver on an agreement to participate in my survey is indicative of the difficulties which post-16 and higher education institutions frequently encounter in trying to work together.

6.6 Conclusion

I conclude this thesis by returning to the initial motivations for my research and to my aims and objectives.

The findings support the impression, referred to in Chapter 1, which I gained from my earlier research that pre-entry students were largely unclear about the nature of learning and teaching at university; the issue seems, however, to be less one of being unaware of independent study as a concept and more to do with a failure to understand what that might entail.

I was also interested in what part the introduction of the KIS data might play in helping potential students to understand the nature of university study and whether universities would be prompted to give more prominence on their websites to information about the nature of studying at university. It would appear that the KIS data on how they will spend their time had little impact on my respondents. It also seems that universities do not generally highlight information on the critically analytical nature of learning at university in their website material.

I have also identified in this Chapter several areas which present interesting opportunities for further research. I have also suggested a number of measures to engage prospective students in understanding the nature of studying at university at the pre-entry stage with a view to improving both retention and student success.

Appendices

Appendix 1.1: Questionnaire

(layout as received by respondents with font reduced to fit within margins)

Expectations about learning at University

I am interested in what you think it will be like to learn at university and whether information about this on university websites has influenced your expectations of university. Your answers will be treated as confidential

As you answer these questions, I would like you to think about the university you are hoping to attend (if you have not yet accepted an offer as your first choice place, choose one of the universities to which you have applied as your first choice for the purposes of this survey).

1. Please write the name of this first choice university here:			
2. What course have you applied to do at this university?			
Please read the following questions and (thinking about the university named), circle the appropriate responses:			
3. Did you look at information about this course on the website of this university?	Yes	No (go to Q10)	Not sure (go to Q10)
4. Has the website information helped you to form your expectations about how you would be taught at university?	Yes	No	Not sure
5. Did the website tell you how much time you would spend in lectures and other classes?	Yes	No	Not sure
6. Did you notice the Key Information Set (KIS)/Unistats data on the website?	Yes	No	Not sure

7. Underline any of the following which you remember the university web-pages describing:

long library opening hours	help with adjusting to learning at university
online learning support	student placements or internships
innovative technology	student social life
up-to-date teaching rooms	a personal tutor
help with becoming more employable	help with academic writing

8. *Underline any of the following which you remember the website describing students doing:*

Learning about their subject	Learning to do research
Learning to work in groups	Developing the ability to work independently
Developing communication skills	Developing the ability to analyse information
Developing time management skills	Developing the ability to think critically
Doing assessments (exams or coursework)	Applying subject-knowledge to solve problems

9. *Write here anything else relating to learning and teaching which you remember the website describing*

10*. How many hours (approx.) do you expect to spend in time-tabled classes each week at university?*

11. *How many hours (approx.) do you expect to spend in independent study each week at university*?

Please read the following questions and circle the appropriate responses:			
12. Do you expect that learning at university will mainly happen in scheduled class hours?	Yes	No	Not sure
13. Do you expect that learning at university will mainly happen during independent study?	Yes	No	Not sure
14. Do you expect to spend more time in class each week at university than you do now at school/college?	Yes	No	Not sure
15. Do you expect to spend more time on independent study each week at university than you do now at school/college?	Yes	No	Not sure

16. Do you expect tutors to tell you everything you need to know to pass your university exams?	Yes	No	Not sure
17. Do you expect to be told exactly what to read during independent study?	Yes	No	Not sure
18. Do you expect that university tutors will read drafts of any coursework before you submit it?	Yes	No	Not sure
19. Do you expect that university tutors will send you a reminder just before a coursework deadline?	Yes	No	Not sure
20. Did you attend an open day for the course you are hoping to do?	Yes	No (go to q22)	

Read the following statements and circle the appropriate responses:

21. The course open day explained the experience of studying on the course	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
22.I think that students are required to study independently because there are not enough lecturers available	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
23. I think that students are required to study independently because that is a central part of becoming a graduate	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
24. I think that the more scheduled classes there are, the better a course will be	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
25. I think that I understand what it will be like to study at university	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
26. I think that studying at university will be different from studying at school/college	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

27. If you expect studying at university to be different from studying at school/college, please write a few words here about what you expect the difference(s) to be:

Some details about you:

28. Did at least one of your parents go to university?	Yes	No	Don't know
29. Have you ever been in receipt of free school meals?	Yes	No	Don't know
30. *Are you (please circle)?* Male Female			
31. *Are you (please circle)?* White Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups Asian/ Asian British Black/African/Caribbean/Black British Chinese Other ethnic group Prefer not to say			

As part of the research, I am carrying out some follow-up email interviews. If you are willing to participate, please provide your name and email address:

Name:

Email address:

Thank you. If you have any queries about this survey, please contact Fiona.Tolmie@uwe.ac.uk

Appendix 1.2: Questionnaire annotated with responses

Expectations about learning at University

I am interested in what you think it will be like to learn at university and whether information about this on university websites has influenced your expectations of university. Your answers will be treated as confidential

As you answer these questions, I would like you to think about the university you are hoping to attend (if you have not yet accepted an offer as your first choice place, choose one of the universities to which you have applied as your first choice for the purposes of this survey).

1. Please write the name of this first choice university here:			
2. What course have you applied to do at this university?			
Please read the following questions and (thinking about the university named), circle the appropriate responses:			
3. Did you look at information about this course on the website of this university? **N=526, 99.4%**	Yes **92.8%**	No **5.5%** (go to Q10)	Not sure **1.1%** (go to Q10)
4. Has the website information helped you to form your expectations about how you would be taught at university? **N=485, 91.7%**	Yes **77.5%**	No **6%**	Not sure **8.1%**
5. Did the website tell you how much time you would spend in lectures and other classes? **N=492, 93%**	Yes **33.8%**	No **35.2%**	Not sure **24%**
6. Did you notice the Key Information Set (KIS)/Unistats data on the website? **N=483, 91.3%**	Yes **33.6%**	No **38%**	Not sure **19.7%**

7. Underline any of the following which you remember the university web-pages describing:

long library opening hours **36.9%**	help with adjusting to learning at university **29.9%**
online learning support **32.1%**	student placements or internships **57.3%**
innovative technology **42.2%**	student social life **72.4%**
up-to-date teaching rooms **37.4%**	a personal tutor **31.9%**
help with becoming more employable **65.2%**	help with academic writing **13.4%**

8. *Underline any of the following which you remember the website describing students doing:*

Learning about their subject **69.9%**	Learning to do research **45.4%**
Learning to work in groups **49.3%**	Developing the ability to work independently **55.4%**
Developing communication skills **46.9%**	Developing the ability to analyse information **30.4%**
Developing time management skills **31%**	Developing the ability to think critically **33.5%**
Doing assessments (exams or coursework) **61.1%**	Applying subject-knowledge to solve problems **33.5%**

9. *Write here anything else relating to learning and teaching which you remember the website describing*: **(space removed)**			
10*. How many hours (approx.) do you expect to spend in time-tabled classes each week at university?*			
11*. How many hours (approx.) do you expect to spend in independent study each week at university*?			
Please read the following questions and circle the appropriate responses:			
12. Do you expect that learning at university will mainly happen in scheduled class hours? **N=523, 98.9%**	Yes **28.9%**	No **56.9%**	Not sure **13%**
13. Do you expect that learning at university will mainly happen during independent study? **N=527, 99.6%**	Yes **60.3%**	No **24%**	Not sure **15.1%**
14. Do you expect to spend more time in class each week at university than you do now at school/college? **N=528, 99.8%**	Yes **20%**	No **68.1%**	Not sure **11.5%**
15. Do you expect to spend more time on independent study each week at university than you do now at school/college? **N=529, 100%**	Yes **89%**	No **4.7%**	Not sure **6.2%**

16. Do you expect tutors to tell you everything you need to know to pass your university exams? N=526, 99.4%	Yes 20.6%	No 69%	Not sure 9.8%
17. Do you expect to be told exactly what to read during independent study? N=526, 99.4%	Yes 16.6%	No 72.4%	Not sure 10.4%
18. Do you expect that university tutors will read drafts of any coursework before you submit it? N=526, 99.4%	Yes 59.5%	No 16.1%	Not sure 23.8%
19. Do you expect that university tutors will send you a reminder just before a coursework deadline? N=527, 99.6%	Yes 19.7%	No 67%	Not sure 12.9%
20. Did you attend an open day for the course you are hoping to do? N=513, 97.7%	Yes 80.7%	No (go to q22) 16.6%	

Read the following statements and circle the appropriate responses:

21. The course open day explained the experience of studying on the course N=426 80.5%	Agree strongly 32.7%	Agree 43.9%	Neither agree nor disagree 3.6%	Disagree 0.2%	Disagree strongly 0.2%
22.I think that students are required to study independently because there are not enough lecturers available N=523 98.9%	Agree strongly 3.8%	Agree 10%	Neither agree nor disagree 20.8%	Disagree 47.8%	Disagree strongly 16.4%
23. I think that students are required to study independently because that is a central part of becoming a graduate N=522 98.7%	Agree strongly 39.9%	Agree 52.6%	Neither agree nor disagree 5.3%	Disagree 0.9%	Disagree strongly 0%
24. I think that the more scheduled classes there are, the better a course will be N=513 97%	Agree strongly 3.8%	Agree 31%	Neither agree nor disagree 46.1%	Disagree 14.2%	Disagree strongly 1.9%
25. I think that I understand what it will be like to study at university N=512, 96.8%	Agree strongly 6.8%	Agree 61.2%	Neither agree nor disagree 20.2%	Disagree 8.1%	Disagree strongly 0.4%
26. I think that studying at university will be different from studying at school/college N=513 97%	Agree strongly 54.4%	Agree 39.7%	Neither agree nor disagree 2.1%	Disagree 0.4%	Disagree strongly 0.4%

27. If you expect studying at university to be different from studying at school/college, please write a few words here about what you expect the difference(s) to be:

Some details about you:

28. Did at least one of your parents go to university? N=519 98.1%	Yes 50.1%	No or Don't know 48%	
29. Have you ever been in receipt of free school meals? N=508 96%	Yes 9.8%	No 83.6%	Don't know 2.6%
30. *Are you (please circle)?* N=516 97% male 47.8% female 49.1%			
31. *Are you (please circle)?* White 80.3% Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups 3.4% Asian/ Asian British 4.9% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British 3.4% Chinese 1.5% Other ethnic group 0.9% Prefer not to say 3.2% [no response 2.3%, n=529]			

Appendix 2: Standard questions to the email exchange group

1. You said in the survey that you thought the difference at university would be "[insert answer to question 27]. It would be helpful to know where you got these and expectations of what it will be like to study at university.

Please could you indicate by putting "yes" in the appropriate cells of the following table the extent to which the following have been important.	Not at all important or significant/not relevant	Quite important or Significant	Very important or Significant	The most important or significant
Things said by parents				
Things said by brothers or sisters				
Things said by other family members				
Things said by friends				
Things said by staff at school/college				
University paper prospectus				
University website				
University open day				
Other contact with university				
UCAS website				
Unistats website				

[Customised question about information on class hours from the website eg

You said that you did not think the website told you how long you will spend in class but you said that you expect to spend about x hours a week in class – where did you get that information?

You said in your response to the questionnaire that you did not read the web pages/did not attend an open day. This was quite an unusual response – can you explain why you did not?]

2. How many other students do you expect to be in lectures or other classes with? (You may want to give different answers for different sorts of class session)

3. Approximately how many pieces of work do you expect to hand in for marking during your first term/semester at university?

4. You said you were hoping to study [subject] at [university]. Is this still the case?

5. Thinking about the web-pages for that university and course* which of these sentences (put yes or no against them and if you have said yes to more than one it would be helpful if you could number them, starting with 1, starting with the most

prominent) describes the impression which the website gives you of what learning will be like there?

- Students learn as a result of teaching which is provided in scheduled classes.
- The university will give students a lot of support to help with any difficulties encountered during studying.
- Students spend a lot of time in active learning, developing thinking skills.
- Students study in well-resourced and attractive facilities.
- Study are provided with good online IT and online support.

*Here's a link to the main pages relevant to the course: link to course page and main university learning and teaching page.

Appendix 3: Data Analysis

Overarching research question: what do prospective university students in their final year at school/college expect studying at university to be like?		
Main questions	**Subsidiary questions**	
1. Do they expect it to be different from school?		Question 26 of questionnaire. SPSS frequency count and cross-tab with respondent characteristics. Qs 14 and 15 comparing hours spent in class and independent study each week.
	If so, how?	What can be discovered from the open question (Q27) about what will be different?
	Do they think independent learning is required as part of becoming a graduate?	Question 23 of questionnaire. SPSS frequency count and cross-tab with respondent characteristics.
	Do they think independent learning is required because there are insufficient lecturers available?	Question 22 of questionnaire. SPSS frequency count and cross-tab with respondent characteristics.
2.Do they expect to take responsibility for their own learning?/epistemological independence	Do they expect to be told everything they need to know?	Questions 16 - 19 of questionnaire SPSS frequency counts and cross-tabs with respondent characteristics.. The answers to the four questions were converted into one measure of expectation of taking responsibility – explained in 3.10.2**.**
	Do they expect to be told what to read?	
	Do they expect to have coursework drafts read?	
	Do they expect to be reminded about deadlines?	
3. Do they have realistic expectations of the workload and of the split between class and independent study?	How much time do they expect to spend in class?	Questions 10-15 of questionnaire address these (Coded into SPSS to produced descriptive statistics). Information from Unistats site about the class hours for the relevant courses. See 3.10.3 and Appendix 4 for explanation of comparison of Unistats data on class hours with answers given to q10.
	Are they likely to be correct?	
	How much time do they expect to spend in independent study?	
	How do they expect this to compare with school/college?	
4. How confident are they about their expectations? Are they likely to be correct?	Do they think they understand what it will be like?	Question 25 of questionnaire (5 point likert scale). SPSS frequency count and cross-tab with respondent characteristics.

	Are they likely to be correct in their understanding?	3.10.5 explains derivation of a measure of likely accuracy of expectations.
5. Is there a link between their expectations about class hours and the existence of the KIS data?	Have they seen the KIS data?	Questions 5 and 6 of questionnaire. SPSS – frequency count and cross-tab with respondent characteristics..
	If so, are they more likely to be correct about class hours.	Cross-tabulation qs 5 and 6 with accuracy of expectations of class hours.
	How concerned are they about the quantity of class hours?	Question 24 of questionnaire (5 point likert scale). SPSS frequency count and cross-tab with respondent characteristics..
6. What sort of information about learning and teaching are they taking from university websites?	What sort of information can be found on the sites?	Content analysis of university websites as explained in 3.7 above
	What sort of information are they taking from the sites?	Questions 7 and 8 of questionnaire. Items coded into SPSS and frequency counts.
	Are they looking at the websites? Are they attending open days?	Questions 3, 4, 20 and 21 of questionnaire. SPSS frequency counts and cross-tab with respondent characteristics..
7. Is there any difference in the findings between the different groups?	Questions about intended university, intended subject, gender, ethnicity, family tradition of higher education, free school meals.	Questions 1,2, 28-31 of questionnaire. Cross-tabulations in SPSS.

question(s)	First level coding	First stage transformation	2nd stage transformation	
Transformation of data in SPSS into further variables				
1	school type			
	School's 3 AL or equivalent rate			
	university	4 tariff groups	2 tariff groups	
	university	RCU or not		
2	course	JACS course group	STEM and other major course groups	STEM or SSH
questions 7 and 8	individual items	Thematic analysis (6 themes)		
q10	scheduled minimum range estimate			Class hours expectations - range + 5 hours
	Scheduled maximum estimate			Class hours expectations - range + 2 hours
q11	Independent Study min estimate			Weekly workload categories
	Independent study max estimate	Total study min estimate range	Weekly workload expectations	
question 27	See 3.10.2 and Appendix 8			
question 31	Ethnicity Major group	BME and White groups		
	Class hours	Don't know		
		Realistic Unrealistic Uncategorisable	Realistic Unrealistic (including don't know)	
	more and less independent			
q25	Says understands 2 groups - says understands, says does not understand			
	Accuracy of understanding	Accuracy of understanding without those who don't understand	Expectations accuracy	
		Accuracy of understanding groups amalgamated		

Appendix 4: Calculation of accuracy of class hours

Columns 1-5	Column 6	Column 7	Column 8	Column 9	Column 10
Respondent's identifier, university and course, respondent's minimum and maximum estimates.	**Key Information Set % time in scheduled classes during 1st year**	**Weekly hours over 22 weeks**	**Weekly hours over 31 weeks**	**Difference between respondent's minimum estimate and Column 7 hours (the total divided by the smallest number, giving the highest possible weekly hours)**	**Difference between respondent's maximum estimate and Column 8 hours (total divided by largest number of weeks so smallest possible weekly hours)**
Taken from the SPSS database	*Collected from the Unistats site*	*1200 hrs x KIS% /22*	*1200 hrs x KIS% /31*	*+ve figure = overestimate by respondent*	*-ve figure= underestimate by respondent*

The parts of the SPSS database dealing with the expected quantity of scheduled class time were transferred to an excel spreadsheet which was set up as above to include, in column 6, information taken from the Key Information Sets (KIS) data via the Unistats site about the percentage of time to be spent in scheduled class hours (the percentage will have been calculated by institutions against a total of 1200 hours). Columns 7 and 8 were coded to turn that percentage into a weekly number of scheduled class hours. Columns 9 and 10 were coded to make possible a comparison between the respondents' expectations and reality.

In the case of students who were overestimating the number of hours, I compared the figure at the lower end of their range with the highest possible number of weekly hours (the calculation using the 22 teaching week assumption) to put a figure on the extent of their over-estimation; doing it in this way means that the level of over-estimation is the lowest possible interpretation of the data and, in reality, the level is probably rather greater. In the less usual case of a student underestimating the amount of time to be spent in class, I compared the respondent's maximum estimate with the smallest possible number of weekly hours; again, this gives the most conservative estimate of the inaccuracy of the expectation.

The percentage of time to be spent in scheduled classes in the first year of the course was taken from the Unistats website. Separate percentage figures are given in the KIS for each year of study as well as an aggregated figure but the first year experience is the one which will impact on the transition of students to university and which was therefore used for this exercise.

Column 9 was coded to calculate the difference between the respondent's minimum estimate and the KIS maximum (ie the 22 week figure); those cases in which the former exceeded the latter representing a case of overestimation of contact hours by the respondent. Column 10 was coded to calculate the difference between the respondent's maximum estimate and the KIS minimum (ie the 31 week figure); where the former was less than the latter this indicated an underestimate by the respondent.

Respondents who were planning to take courses shown by the KIS data to involve placements in the first year were taken out of the spreadsheet since it was not possible to estimate the time to be spent in classes on a weekly basis or to be sure what they had in mind when answering the question. This removed many of the respondents planning to study subjects allied to medicine or education.

The accuracy of the respondents' expectations was then coded into the SPSS database. The first analysis identified respondents as accurate in their expectation if their stated expectation was not more than two hours either side of the range indicated by the KIS data and then coded those who had inaccurate expectations into groups which were either between two and eight hours inaccurate or more than eight hours inaccurate. Since this categorisation gave a very large group with inaccurate expectations, a second coding was carried out in which the respondents were also coded into groups overestimating or underestimating the time they would spend in class by between five and seven hours a week.

The table below gives some examples of this exercise in relation to the accuracy of the expectations of some example respondents:

Examples of coding for accuracy of expectations about class hours				
	Respondent G32	Respondent W2	Respondent C42	Respondent M3
University	E	B	U	S
Course	Engineering	Physics	Tourism Management	English
Minimum estimate of weekly hours	4	20	20	7
Maximum estimate of weekly hours	4	20	20	10
KIS 1st year %	36	40	24	16
Weekly hours over 22 weeks	19.6	21.8	13.1	8.7
Weekly hours over 31 weeks	13.9	15.5	9.3	6.2
Overestimate	-15.6	**-1.8**	**6.9**	**-1.7**
Underestimate	**- 9.9**	**4.5**	10.7	**3.8**
Coding group	Underestimate by 8 hours + ?question misread as per day)	Within range +/- 5 hours	Overestimate by 5 -7 hours	Within range

Appendix 5: JACS code subjects:

	Number	%	% UCAS applications January 2013
Subject by JACS code			
Biological sciences	61	11.5	9
Business and Administrative Subjects	61	11.5	11
Social Studies	55	10.4	8
Creative Arts and Design	45	8.5	10
Engineering and technology	35	6.6	5
Subjects allied to medicine	33	6.2	14
Historical and philosophical studies	31	5.9	3
Maths and Computer Science	30	5.7	6
Law	30	5.7	4
Physical sciences	24	4.5	4
Medicine	23	4.3	4
Education	22	4.2	3
Linguistics, classics etc	21	4.0	3
Mass Communication and Documentation	18	3.4	2
Languages	16	3.0	1
Other - combined	14	2.6	7
Architecture Building and Planning	8	1.5	1
Vet science and agriculture	2	.4	1
Total	529	99.9	100
Amalgamated subject groups			
STEM courses (including medicine)	183	35	30
Social Science and Humanities	246	46	32
Creative Arts, Education and allied to medicine	102	19	27
Other (eg combined)			11

Appendix 6: The email exchange group

The profile of this group is as follows:

	Gender	WP/Trad	Ethnicity	FSM?	School type	Subject	Univ tariff
AA	M	WP?	White	No	State	Chemistry	H/H
BB	F	Trad	White	No	State	Biology	H/H
CC	F	WP	white	No	State	Geography	H/H
DD	F	WP	White	No	College	Sociology	H/H
EE	M	WP	White	No	State	Economics	H/H
FF	F	Trad	White	No	State	Sociology	H/H
GG	F	WP	White	No	State	Languages	H/H
HH	M	Trad	White	No	College	History	H/H
JJ	M	Trad	White	Yes?	Ind.	Physics	H/H
KK	M	Trad	White	No	Ind	Business	H/H
LL	M	WP	White	Yes	College	Law	M/L
MM	F	WP	White		College	Law	M/L
NN	M	Trad	White	No	State	Physics	H/H

Appendix 7: Statistically significant differences between groups

Chart shows the probability value for all those cross-tabulations for which value is .05 or less. Emboldened p values indicate where the percentage difference according to variable was at least 10%; italicised p values indicate percentage differences of less than 10%.

	Gender	Ethnicity	Family tradition	FSM	School type	Intended subject	University tariff group	Above /Below Average post-16 institution
1. "Learning will mainly happen in scheduled classes" (Q12)	**.002**	**.009**	x	x	x	**.002**	x	x
2. "Learning will mainly happen in independent study" (Q13)	x	x	x	x	x	**<.001**	x	**x**
3.Q14 – more time at class at university	x	x	x	x	**.029**	x	x	**.024**
4. Q23. Centrality of independent study to graduateness	*.025*	x	x	x	x	**.015**	**.002**	x
5. Q22 – ind study because not enough lecturers	x	x	x	x	x	x	**<.001**	**.007**
6. Feel they understand (q25)	x	x	*.029*	**.010**	x	x	x	x
7.Q16 (tutors tell)	x	x	x	x	**<.001**	x	**<.001**	**.001**
8.Q17 (tell what to read)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	**.004**
9.Q18 (drafts read)	x	x	x	x	**.038**	x	**.004**	**.036**
10. Q19 (deadlines)	**<.001**	x	x	x	x	x	x	**<.001**
11. "More" or "Less" independent (Qs16-19)	**.027**	**.016**	x	x	**.016**	x	**.009**	**<.001**
Realistic expectations about class time (q10)	*x*	x	x	x	x	**.026**	**.034**	x

Total workload hours (more or less than 25 hrs a week) (Qs10, 11)	x	**.006**	x	x	x	x	**.015**	x
Accuracy of expectations (319 out of the 529)	x	x	x	x	**.028**	x	**.018**	**.001**
Recall material about innovative technology on website (Q7)	**<.001**	x	x	x	**.025**	**<.001**	x	**.012**
Recall material about up to date teaching rooms on website (Q7)	. **<.001**	x	x	x	**.041**	**.001**	x	x
Recall employability material on website (Q7)	x	x	x	**.010**	x	**.022**	x	**.009**
Recall support material on website (Q7)	x	**.007**	x	x	**.035**	x	x	x
Recall thinking skills material on website (Q8)	x	*.019*	x	x	x	**.003**	**<.001**	x
Attended open day (q20)	x	**.003**	x	x	**<.001**	x	**.001**	**.001**

Statistically significant data (excluding cases where difference less than 10%, shown in italics in chart above)

	% of Male (n=234-253)	% of Female (n=247-260)
"Learning will mainly happen in scheduled classes"	36	23
Q19 - deadline reminders will be given	26	13
Qs16-19 "more independent"	45	55
Recall material about innovative technology on website (Q7)	54	37
Recall material about up to date teaching rooms on website (Q7)	49	32

	%White (n= 415-424)	% BME (n=73-75)
"Learning will mainly happen in scheduled classes"	31	19
Qs16-19 "more independent"	52	37
Total workload hours more than 25 hrs a week) (Qs10, 11)	59	41
Recall support material on website (Q7)	69	56
Attended open day (q20)	85	69

	%Free school meals (n=48-52)	%No free school meals (n=411-438)
Feel they understand (q25)	75	70
Recall employability material on website (Q7)	65	84

	% Independent school (n=68-112)	% College (n=73-101)	% State school (n=178-316)
Q14: will spend more time at class at university	13	20	23
Q16: tutors will tell you everything you need to know	8	34	21
Q18 tutors will read draft coursework	58	71	57
Qs16-19 "more independent"	52	37	53
Highly accurate expectations	22	7	23
Low accuracy of expectations	29	45	31
Recall material about innovative technology on website (Q7)	52	33	47
Recall material about up to date teaching rooms on website (Q7)	49	31	40
Recall support material on website (Q7)	53	62	71
Attended open day (q20)	81	66	88

	% STEM (n=167-181)	% Social science or humanities (n=232=241)
"Learning will mainly happen in scheduled classes" (Q12)	34	20
"Learning will mainly happen in independent study" (Q13)	48	72

Q23 Independent study central to becoming graduate	34	48
Realistic expectations about class time (q10)	58	68
Recall material about innovative technology on website (Q7)	56	35
Recall material about up to date teaching rooms on website (Q7)	50	33
Recall employability material on website (Q7)	77	86
Recall thinking skills material on website (Q8)	81	68

	% High/highest tariff group (n=285-301)	% Medium/low tariff group (n=193-212)
Q23 Independent study central to becoming graduate	48	32
Q22 Independent study required because not enough lecturers	9	19
Q16: tutors will tell you everything you need to know	15	27
Q18 tutors will read draft coursework	54	67
Qs16-19 "more independent"	55	43
Realistic expectations about class time (q10)	66	56
Total workload hours more than 25 hrs a week) (Qs10, 11	62	50
Highly accurate expectations	24	12
Low accuracy of expectations	35	32
Attended open day (q20)	88	77
Thinking skills noticed	78	66

	% Post-16 institution above average KS5 achievement (n=309-328)	% Post-16 institution below average KS5 achievement (n=185-201)
Q14: will spend more time at class at university	17	24
Q22 Independent study required because not enough lecturers	11	19
Q16: tutors will tell you everything you need to know	13	34
Q17: tutors will tell you what to read	13	24
Q18 tutors will read draft coursework	56	67

Q19 tutors will remind you about deadlines	15	28
Qs16-19 "more independent"	56	40
Highly accurate expectations	24	12
Low accuracy of expectations	27	45
Recall material about innovative technology on website (Q7)	50	38
Recall employability material on website (Q7)	86	75
Attended open day (q20)	88	75

The responses to question 27 were typed up into a table, with the first column identifying the respondent, as follows (representative section):

G37	More work but it will focus more.
G38	Less guided. More independent.
G39	More independent. Less face to face time. Less support
G4	-
G40	More independent. Different way of applying knowledge. New skills like presenting, seminars.
G41	Different responsibilities. More independent.
G42	Not reminded about deadlines and chased for work. More independent study.
G43	-
G44	More independent. Less hand-holding.
G45	More independent. Greater freedoms. More contextual reading.
G46	More independent, not reliant on teachers.
G47	More independence. More difficult work. More focussed work.
G48	More independent.

In the process of the typing up, certain themes started to become apparent. The responses were then all amalgamated into one block of text which was put into a free online word and phrase counter.

A count of the frequency of the words was undertaken. The following words were removed from the list: to, and, be, will, a, I, the, of, in, on, it, have, than, as, at, from, for, one, do, with, is. This left the following list of words which occurred at least 15 times (listed in order of frequency):

492 more
266 independent
109 less
101 work
83 study
59 learning
51 independence
50 you
47 time
35 much
29 lot
25 studying
25 lectures
24 harder
23 help

22 subject
22 reading
22 different
21 one
21 expect
21 do
18 lecturers
17 research
16 depth
16 deadlines
16 classes
15 teachers
15 own
15 hours

317 answers contained the word independent, independence or independently (often with incorrect spelling which I corrected in the process of transcription in order to facilitate a helpful word count). As can be seen, there was also a preponderance of use of the words "more" and "less", indicating a comparison of quantity of something rather than that the difference would rest in something completely different. A phrase frequency count produced the following results:

More	independent	225
	independence	29
	work	18
	responsibility	10
	reading	9
	freedom	7
	studying	5
	research	5
	interesting	5
	focussed	5
	difficult	5
	enjoyable	4
	detailed	4
less	help	18
	support	6
	Structured/structure	10
	pressure	3
	direction	2
	spoonfeeding	2

Eleven variables were coded into SPSS as follows:

Variable identifier	Description	Possible codes
57	Did the respondent answer q27?	Yes/No
58	Does response include independence/independent(ly)?	Yes/No

59	Does the response elaborate on independence?	Coded as one* of: No Talks in terms of "less" of something Mentions freedom Talks in terms of responsibility Talks in terms of studying out of class
60	Mentions there being "less" of something	Yes/no
61	Reference to managing time or deadlines	Yes/no
62	Talks about a difference in teaching or assessment methods	Yes/no
63	Mentions volume of work	Yes/no
64	Mentions breadth of study or ability to choose where to focus	Yes/no
65	Mentions work being harder or more challenging	Yes/no
66	Talks about being treated as an adult/maturely/given more freedom	Yes/no
67	Social/domestic differences	Yes/no

*sometimes involved a judgement as to whether the response was taking a deficit view or a responsibility as a positive thing eg (C33) "less help from teachers and tutors it is more independent work and have more responsibility as carry out your own research". Generally, recognition of the need to take responsibility trumped the word "less".

Frequencies were:

Variable	Number	% (of total respondents)
Respondent answered q27	423	80
Responses relating to independence		
Response included reference to independence/ independent(ly)	313	59.2
Response did not elaborate on meaning of independence	166	31.3
Response elaborated on independence in terms of "less of" something	48	9.1
Response elaborated on independence in terms of freedom	25	4.7
Response elaborated on independence in terms of responsibility/self-motivation	54	10.2
Response elaborated on independence in terms of studying outside class	20	3.8
Mentions there being "less" of something (including those who did not mention independence)	53	10
Reference to managing time or deadlines	30	5.7

Talks about a difference in teaching or assessment methods	85	16.1
Mentions volume of work	54	10.2
Mentions breadth of study or ability to choose where to focus	37	7
Mentions work being harder or more challenging	62	11.7
Talks about being treated as an adult/maturely/given more freedom	28	5.3
Social/domestic differences	31	5.9

Appendix 9: Expectations of responsibility for managing own learning

First variable	Second variable	Number in group	% "more independent"
Female	Post-16 above average institution	158	63
Female	High/highest tariff group	143	62
Female	State comprehensive	159	59
High/highest tariff group	Post-16 above average institution	220	59
High/highest tariff group	State comprehensive	181	58
Post-16 above average institution	State comprehensive	216	57
Female	Independent school	48	56
High/highest tariff group	Independent school	88	56
Post-16 above average institution	Independent school	112	53
Male	Independent school	63	51
Male	Post-16 above average institution	162	50
Male	High/highest tariff group	149	50
Medium/low tariff group	Post-16 above average institution	104	49
High/highest tariff group	Male	149	48
Male	State comprehensive	147	47
Female	Medium/low tariff group	108	47
High/highest tariff group	Post-16 below average institution	81	46
Medium/low tariff group	State comprehensive	128	45
Medium/low tariff group	Independent school	23	44
Female	College	53	43
Female	Post-16 below average institution	102	43
Post-16 below average institution	State comprehensive	100	42
High/highest tariff group	College	32	41
Male	Medium/low tariff group	97	38
Post-16 below average institution	College	101	37
Male	Post-16 below average institution	91	36
Medium/low tariff group	College	61	36
Medium/low tariff group	Post-16 below average institution	108	35
Male	College	43	30
Post-16 below average institution	Independent school	0	-
Post-16 above average institution	College	0	-

The chart below cross-tabulates the P values of less than .005 in relation to proportions of students with more or less expectations of having to take responsibility for their own learning within each of the groupings by row.

	School type	Post-16 achievement	Tariff group	Gender
School type	P=.016 N=529	P=.008 for state schools N=316 No statistically significant difference in others.	P=.016 for state schools N=309 No statistically significant difference in others.	P=.028 for state schools N=306 No statistically significant difference in others.
Post-16 achievement	No statistically significant difference	P=<.001 N=529	No statistically significant difference	Above average p=.015 N=320 No statistically significant difference for below average
Tariff group	No statistically significant difference	Medium/low p=019 N=227 High/highest p=.031 N=286	P=.007 N=513	High/highest p=.018 N=277 No statistically significant difference in medium/low
Gender	No statistically significant difference	Male p=.024 N=253 Female p=.002 N=260	Female p=.016 N=251 Male p=.071 (weakly significant) N=246	P=.024 N=513

Appendix 10: Questions 7 and 8 cross-tabulation

Aspects of student life listed in questions 7 and 8, which asked students to underline those which they remembered the website describing	% of respondents recollecting material on their course website (n= 529)	Male (n=246)	Female (n=251)	1st Gen (n=239)	Trad (n=246)
Library opening hours	37	37	43	44	36
Online learning support	32	35	34	38	31
Innovative technology	42	54	37	46	46
Up to date teaching rooms	38	49	32	38	43
Help with becoming more employable	66	68	72	68	72
Placements, internships	57	62	60	61	61
Help with adjusting	30	31	33	34	28
Personal tutor	32	31	38	28	39
Help with academic writing	14	14	15	15	15
Social life	73	75	81	79	76
Group work	49	57	50	54	53
Communication skills	47	47	54	48	53
Time management skills	31	34	34	35	33
Learning to research	45	47	51	44	52
Developing ability to work independently	55	56	62	64	56
Developing ability to analyse information	30	34	33	31	35
Developing ability to think critically	34	39	33	34	37
Problem-solving	33	39	33	34	38
Learning about their subject	71	77	75	73	78
Assessment	61	62	70	67	65

Aspects of student life listed in questions 7 and 8, which asked students to underline those which they remembered the website describing	% of respondents recollecting material on their course website (n= 529)	FSM (n=48)	No FSM (n=413	White (n=399)	BME (n=66)
Library opening hours	37	40	41	41	38
Online learning support	32	38	35	37	27
Innovative technology	42	38	48	46	44
Up to date teaching rooms	38	27	41	40	47

Help with becoming more employable	66	52	72	72	62
Placements, internships	57	48	64	62	55
Help with adjusting	30	38	32	34	27
Personal tutor	32	23	36	36	29
Help with academic writing	14	19	15	16	8
Social life	73	77	78	79	79
Group work	49	38	54	55	46
Communication skills	47	44	52	52	49
Time management skills	31	27	34	35	29
Learning to research	45	46	49	50	46
Developing ability to work independently	55	52	61	60	61
Developing ability to analyse information	30	21	35	34	30
Developing ability to think critically	34	29	37	36	42
Problem-solving	33	33	36	36	38
Learning about their subject	71	69	76	76	76
Assessment	61	50	68	69	50

Aspects of student life listed in questions 7 and 8, which asked students to underline those which they remembered the website describing	% of respondents recollecting material on their course website (n= 529)	STEM (n=)	SSH (n=)	Ind (n=)	Coll (n=)	State (n=)
Library opening hours	37	42	39	39	45	38
Online learning support	32	36	37	19	29	41
Innovative technology	42	57	35	52	33	46
Up to date teaching rooms	38	50	33	49	31	40
Help with becoming more employable	66	63	76	72	61	72
Placements, internships	57	57	63	63	53	64
Help with adjusting	30	30	35	20	39	32
Personal tutor	32	37	32	32	25	38
Help with academic writing	14	13	14	15	14	14
Social life	73	75	81	73	75	80
Group work	49	52	48	58	43	54
Communication skills	47	45	50	50	47	51

Time management skills	31	35	30	37	26	34
Learning to research	45	62	44	47	39	52
Developing ability to work independently	55	58	61	68	55	58
Developing ability to analyse information	30	41	32	34	29	33
Developing ability to think critically	34	38	38	44	34	34
Problem-solving	33	49	29	41	29	36
Learning about their subject	71	81	74	74	71	76
Assessment	61	67	66	68	54	68

Aspects of student life listed in questions 7 and 8, which asked students to underline those which they remembered the website describing	% of respondents recollecting material on their course website (n= 529)	H/H (n=)	M/L (n=)	Above AV (n=)	Below Av (n=)
Library opening hours	37	42	37	40	40
Online learning support	32	33	36	35	34
Innovative technology	42	48	41	50	38
Up to date teaching rooms	38	44	36	46	30
Help with becoming more employable	66	72	68	75	61
Placements, internships	57	61	64	64	56
Help with adjusting	30	30	35	30	35
Personal tutor	32	41	25	37	29
Help with academic writing	14	17	9	15	14
Social life	73	77	78	78	77
Group work	49	55	51	55	48
Communication skills	47	53	45	48	55
Time management skills	31	33	35	35	31
Learning to research	45	56	39	52	44
Developing ability to work independently	55	63	55	61	57
Developing ability to analyse information	30	40	22	34	30
Developing ability to think critically	34	41	28	38	33
Problem-solving	33	41	30	40	29
Learning about their subject	71	77	74	78	69
Assessment	61	68	62	68	61

Appendix 11: RCU data

(Not all respondents answered all the questions).

	% RCU (n=78)	% of rest (n=451)	% other M/L tariff (n=134)	% H/H tariff (n=301)	Statistically significant difference between RCU and rest
Think it will be different	94	98	98	98	
Think they understand	70	70	70	71	
Expect to learn mainly in class	27	30	27	30	
Expect to learn mainly in independent study	60	61	62	62	
Expect to spend more time in class than at school	26	10	22	18	
Expect to spend more time in independent study	94	88	85	91	
Independence central to becoming a graduate	32	42	32	48	
Independence because not enough lecturers	19	13	18	9	.014
The more classes, the better the course	50	33	36	32	.022
More likely to expect to take responsibility for own learning	36	52	47	55	.009
Expect to be told everything	42	17	20	15	<.001
Expect to be told what to read	25	15	18	14	
Expect to have drafts read	64	59	68	54	.011
Expect to be reminded of deadlines	21	20	24	17	
Realistic expectations of class hours	62	63	52	66	
Expect weekly workload of 25 hours+	49	58	50	62	
Inaccurate expectations	37	30	32	30	
Looked at website	90	94	93	95	.043
Attended open day	58	87	86	88	<.001
Website helped form expectations	87	94	80	86	

Website material recollected by RCU respondents			
		% RCU respondents noticed	Statistically significantly different?
Facilities Messages	Library opening hours	41	
	Online learning support	29	
	Innovative technology	27	Total group 42% (p=.001)
	Up to date teaching rooms	34	
Employability message	Help with becoming more employable	47	Total group 66% (p=<.001)
	Placements, internships	46	Total group 57% (p=.004)
Provision of support	Help with adjusting	34	
	Personal tutor	14	Total group 32% (p=<.001)
	Help with academic writing	6	Total group 14% (p=.026)
Social life	Social life	71	
Employability skills	Group work	40	Total group 49% (p=.020)
	Communication skills	39	Total group 47% (p=.036)
	Time management skills	33	
Thinking skills	Learning to research	36	Total group 45% (p=.020)
	Developing ability to work independently	53	
	Developing ability to analyse information	20	Total group 30% (p=.015)
	Developing ability to think critically	23	Total group 34% (p=.015)
	Problem-solving	24	Total group 33% (p=.030)
Course content related	Learning about their subject	71	
	Assessment	60	

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