Insurmountable Silos?
A Study of School-University Relationships within Progression to Higher Education

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationships between schools and universities regarding progression to higher education. It asks: what are the characteristics of school-university relationships in this sphere and how do they vary? It examines schools with different rates of progression to higher education, as defined by the Department for Education's destinations data (Department for Education, 2019c) to frame a qualitative study.

This study takes a policy sociology approach to examining the discourses surrounding progression to higher education. It considers the influence of the conflicting regulatory environments in schools and universities on policy surrounding progression to higher education, arguing that this creates conflicting demands and understandings of success. It looks particularly at notions of partnership working, suggesting that school-university interactions in progression to higher education do not meet the criteria set out in the partnership literature, and suggests we need a new framing of 'relationships' to understand their interactions. Finally, this thesis considers the ways in which school-university relationships are influenced by the age of the pupils involved in the interactions, and the desirability of the different institutions.

This thesis makes several contributions to the academic literature. Empirically, the involvement of schools in progression to higher education is under-researched, with university-focused studies dominating the literature. Theoretically, the thesis draws upon partnership theory in order to understand the relationship between schools and universities, using policy sociology as an analytical lens. In doing so, it examines theory in a new space. Finally, this thesis focuses on an under-researched geographical area, the North East of England, in order to consider how university progression occurs in a particular physical area outside of London.

This thesis may be of value to practitioners and policymakers, as well as contribute to the debate surrounding the access and participation agenda, and inequality discourses such as 'levelling up' and 'closing the attainment gap'.

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Declaration

I, Sally Ann Burtonshaw, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Copyright

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Impact Statement

This thesis makes several contributions to the existing literature. Empirically, it centres on the voices of school-based practitioners, whose involvement in progression to HE is under-researched. It does this alongside the voices of university-based practitioners to reflect both sides of what is sometimes positioned as a binary divide.

This thesis focuses on an under-researched geographical area, the North East of England, to consider how progression to HE occurs in a particular physical area outside of London. It does so in part to move away from the dominance of London-centric research to examine what are often criticised as London-centric policies. It also seeks to shine a light on the North East as a region with many particularities regarding progression to HE in its own right. It is the region with the lowest numbers of students progressing to HE in England. For those who do progress to HE, they are the most likely to remain within their home region. In the pandemic, the region has suffered particularly acutely in terms of learning loss. These characteristics deserve specific focus in order to make a contribution to knowledge which reflects the uniqueness of the region, its challenges, and how some of these could be addressed.

Theoretically, this thesis draws on policy sociology as providing an analytical toolkit to understand the relationship between schools and universities in the sphere of progression to HE, applying policy sociology in a new space. It uses the concept of policy enactment to understand school-university relationships as nuanced and individualised. It draws upon concepts of partnership to analyse the relationship between schools and universities in the sphere of progression to HE and argues that we need to reconsider these ‘partnerships’ as ‘relationships’ to better understand their interactions. It considers how these interactions – and the power balance between schools and universities – changes over the age and Key Stage of pupils by exploring the theory of ‘possible selves’. In doing so, I argue that the theory of possible selves, despite its limitations, offers an opportunity to move beyond a deficit model, seen in raising aspirations narratives, and towards a model which recognises the role of structural barriers as well as individual agency. Finally, I suggest that school-university interactions should be considered through the lens of ‘desirability’, a new way of understanding the ways in which institutional habitus in institutions across both sectors means that schools with historically high rates of progression to HE are better able to forge and sustain relationships with universities.

In policy terms, this thesis examines a shared policy space, influenced by school and HE policy. It highlights the siloes within which policy surrounding progression to HE is enacted, and the challenges this presents. It makes recommendations for national policymakers, universities and schools.

Finally, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how schools and universities could interact in order to support more equitable progression to HE.

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Abbreviations

A Level	Advanced Level
AP	Average Progression to Higher Education
APP	Access and Participation Plan
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
CEC	Careers and Enterprise Company
CIAG	Careers Information Advice and Guidance
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EIF	Education Inspection Framework
EPI	Education Policy Institute
FAC	Fair Access Coalition
FE	Further Education
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
HP	High Progression to Higher Education
HPD	High Disadvantaged Progression to Higher Education
HPHS	High Progression to Highly Selective Higher Education
HPHSD	High Disadvantaged Progression to Highly Selective Higher Education
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Child
LEO	Longitudinal Educational Outcomes
LP	Low Progression to Higher Education
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
NECOP	North East Collaborative Outreach Programme
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NERAP	North East Raising Aspirations Partnership
NERUPI	Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions
NFF	National Funding Formula
NNCO	National Network of Collaborative Outreach
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OfS	Office for Students
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

POLAR	Participation of Local Areas
SAT	Standard Assessment Tests
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disability
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TAG	Teacher Assessed Grades
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TLR	Teaching and Learning Responsibility
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduction

This thesis examines the relationships between schools and universities regarding progression to higher education (HE). It asks: what are the characteristics of school-university relationships in this sphere and how do these relationships vary? It uses destinations data, a large scale quantitative dataset published by the Department for Education (DfE) (2019b), which records the number of pupils progressing to different types of HE from each school, in order to frame a qualitative study. It adopts perspectives from policy sociology to examine the discourses surrounding progression to HE, such as social mobility and raising aspirations. Throughout, it examines the ways in which power shapes and influences relationships between different institutions.

This thesis makes several contributions to the academic literature. Empirically, the involvement of schools in progression to HE is under-researched, with university-focused studies dominating the literature. This thesis thus contributes to new knowledge in this area. Theoretically, this thesis draws on policy sociology as an analytical toolkit, in order to understand the relationship between schools and universities in the sphere of progression to HE. In doing so, it applies policy sociology in a new space. It uses the concept of policy enactment to understand school-university relationships, viewing them not as one homogenous concept, but nuanced and individualised, which are influenced by the different contexts of the institutions. It draws upon theories of partnership in order to understand the relationship between schools and universities in the sphere of progression to HE. Rather than considering schools or universities as two silos, it explores how they interact in what is inherently a shared space. Finally, this thesis focuses on an under-researched geographical area, the North East of England (hereafter referred to as the North East), in order to consider how university progression occurs in a particular geographical area outside of London.

Progression pathways are multifaceted and complex and the scope of this thesis did not extend to all provision, or to all school-university relationships. Within its scope, it aimed to include some of the voices which are unheard within HE research and policy. In particular, the views of school-based staff; teachers, careers advisors and support staff who are responsible for progression to HE within their school. This research is focused in the North East, with the intention of highlighting a geographic area which is frequently overlooked. My desire to promote the voices of those often unheeded in both education policy and

progression to HE made me acutely aware of those remaining voices which are not included in this study. In Chapter 6, I briefly discuss these omissions in an effort to acknowledge them as part of the landscape of HE progression and - in Chapter 11 – these are highlighted as areas for much needed further research.

This thesis provides a theorised investigation but its roots lie in my personal experiences as a practitioner, and this chapter begins by providing an autobiographical account of the journey which led me to undertake this research. It then broadens out to examine the wider context within which this study is situated, before setting out its focus. I briefly outline the events and environment of the time period during which this study was undertaken, including the Covid-19 pandemic.

As I undertook this study it became apparent that the language used surrounding progression to HE was an important part of how school-university relationships were understood and defined. This chapter introduces the terminology which is used throughout this study, drawing on the concept of emic and etic language in order to establish common terms for this thesis. It explains my decision to use the term 'progression to HE' throughout this thesis.

This chapter concludes by outlining the main research objectives which helped me to frame the thesis and offers an overview of the structure of the chapters overall.

Personal Influences on this Research

My initial motivation for this study stemmed from my work in a school in the North East. My role as 'Raising Aspirations Coordinator' was explicitly designed around an epistemologically positivist paradigm; that progression to HE was objectively beneficial for all pupils and, therefore, that having all pupils progress to university should be the aim and mission of the school. As I embarked upon this research journey, my ontological and epistemological stance was challenged, and developed greater nuance. I found the following quotation from Ball of particular significance for me:

> 'Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience - always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognised something cracked, dully jarring or disfunctioning in things I saw…' (2001, p. 210).

This thesis is a theoretical investigation based on elements of my experience. Working as Raising Aspirations Coordinator, my experiences were consistently 'jarring', leading me to question why and how I carried out my role and the implications for my pupils. I struggled to reconcile the many benefits espoused by HE with the challenges my pupils experienced applying and transitioning to university, and the stories returning pupils shared of their experiences in HE. I sought to develop greater links with universities in order to provide more opportunities for my pupils to 'benefit' from what were termed 'widening participation activities' – activities designed to increase the number pupils from under-represented backgrounds progressing to HE - offered by institutions across the region, and further afield. Here was a second jarring moment; despite what I perceived to be the 'common sense' benefits for universities to engage with schools, the interactions with universities were often highly piecemeal and dysfunctional. They did not appear to meet either my needs as a school-based practitioner, nor the needs of the pupils I sought to support.

When I moved away from the North East to London (a move that itself demonstrated a level of geographic mobility that many of my pupils found alien), I took up a post at The Brilliant Club, a charity with a mission to increase the number of pupils from under-represented backgrounds progressing to highly selective universities.[1] Here I occupied a kind of 'middle space'; neither a school - nor university - based practitioner and able to view the activities of both sectors from one step removed. My role included envisaging 'ideal policies' for access and participation, and lobbying government for changes to HE policy. These experiences increasingly challenged my faith in the efficacy of widening participation policy. It drew my attention to the differences in how policy was conceived and discussed by government, and how I had understood and enacted these policies within the context of the individual school in which I worked. For example, the use of data, (particularly POLAR[2]) to target specific groups of under-represented pupils in HE often excluded pupils that school staff felt would most benefit from such activities. I also experienced frustration in reading some of the policy documents produced by universities, specifically Access and Participation Plans (APPs). These documents often contained descriptions of activities and ways of working which did not reflect my experiences as a practitioner. Rather, they seemed to be examples of institutions performing policy for accountability purposes or as Ball terms it, being 'seen to be done' (2012, p. 56).

[1] The Brilliant Club: https://thebrilliantclub.org/about/ (Accessed 13/03/2022).
[2] Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) is an area-based measure of youth participation in higher education.

Embarking upon this study also challenged my ontological and epistemological stance in terms of the nature and benefits of HE. Through expanding my theoretical understanding, I have reflected on the expediency of bell hooks' assertion that, 'everything we do in life is rooted in theory. Whether we consciously explore the reasons we have a particular perspective or take a particular action there is also an underlying system shaping thought and practice' (2014, p. 19). This thesis has involved a 'conscious exploration', whilst acknowledging the roots of my interest and the personal experiences and perspectives which have informed the whole of this study. This position is further interrogated in Chapter 6 in relation to my reflexivity and the ethical considerations of my own insider positionality, but broader consideration of my role underpins the entirety of this study.

This research stemmed from an exploration of two levels; that of 'policy science' and 'policy scholarship' (Grace, 1995), and throughout this thesis I return to and investigate the issues of school-university relationships on both of these levels, as well as the tension between them.

A Thesis on Two Levels?

In this thesis I make an explicit attempt to reconcile the tensions I have experienced as both a practitioner and a researcher. This thesis considers progression to HE activity within the framework in which it is positioned, arguing that there are inefficiencies, limitations and areas for improvement within the current system. Yet it also critiques that framework as limited and limiting, arguing that such a system cannot achieve its professed aims of a more socially mobile society.

As a practitioner, I frequently found my desire to critique and improve the system and to 'consciously explore' (Ibid., p. 19) was met with puzzlement, and sometimes frustration, by colleagues who felt that operating within the system as it existed was the only possible way, even where they disagreed with it. This is understandable. As Ball and colleagues stress in their work on policy enactment in schools, 'in the mundane, in relation to the pressures of performance, in response to constant change, there is little space or time or opportunity to think differently or 'against'' (2012, pp. 138–139). I have returned to this insight many times throughout my thesis as it has helped me to make sense of this tension between myself and my colleagues. My role was non-teaching and newly created, and I was a new member of

staff in the school, all of which I believe contributed to my occupying a different space to that of many of my colleagues. I had greater space, time and opportunity for such conscious exploration.

Once I left a practitioner environment and began my research, I found that my critiquing of the system was no longer seen as radical, but rather limited in its understanding of the opportunity to 'think differently' and specifically 'against'. Whereas my focus until this point had been on refining an existing system, I was now challenged to critique the system itself. As I began to draw upon policy sociology in order to help make sense of my research, work by Ball and colleagues, as well as Ozga, Lingard and Lewis challenged me to be less trusting, less accepting and to question that system. These theoretical tools are explored further in Chapter 5. As a practitioner I was often criticised as too radical, yet as a researcher, not radical enough.

Throughout this thesis I explicitly highlight the tensions as I understand them between what Grace (1995, 1998) describes as policy science (research *for* policy) - the ways in which the system could be improved - and research *of* policy (or policy scholarship) – the ways in which the system is also inherently limited. In outlining this understanding, Grace suggests that:

> 'Policy scholarship resists the tendency of policy science to abstract problems from their relational settings by insisting that the problem can only be understood in the complexity of those relations. In particular, it represents a view that a social-historical approach to research can illuminate the cultural and ideological struggles in which schooling is located…whereas policy science excludes ideological and value conflicts as 'externalities beyond its remit'' (Grace, 1995, p. 3).

I consider the mismatch between policy and practice; what is published, what is understood and what is enacted. Throughout, I consider the differences between schools and universities, and whether these tensions exist in the same or similar ways in these different institutions. Although I have presented these conflicts as binaries here, as this thesis progresses, I also explore the complex and nuanced grey areas that often exist between them.

The Value of Higher Education

The desire both to expand participation in HE and to seek equality of access to it, is strongly linked in English policy discourse to the value of HE and the ability to access the benefits derived from it. Given that access to the highest paid jobs is often and increasingly dependent on having achieved a degree level qualification (Kirby, 2016; Milburn, 2009), HE is frequently portrayed as the golden ticket to upward social mobility or stable social reproduction. In recent years there has been fierce debate over both defining and measuring the value of HE (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2019; Goldthorpe, 2013; Blanden et al., 2012; Blanden & Machin, 2007), with economic, social, cultural and moral imperatives identified for expanding HE and reducing inequalities in access. As the benefits of HE are said to be reaped at both a societal and individual level, the complexities of measuring its value are further nuanced. Finally, HE in England is not a homogenous sector and the differential benefits between different institutions, courses and degree classifications are also contested.

A dominant meaning of 'value' in policy terms has been the economic benefit of HE. As those paying for HE, both the state and graduates are concerned as to whether a degree offers greater labour market success, with its resultant economic benefits for both the individual and the state. From 2016 onwards the publication of graduate earnings in the form of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) suggests that although not all courses and institutions are equally economically valuable, there is a significant financial benefit on average from gaining a degree (Waltmann et al., 2021). This reaffirms earlier research from Walker and Zhu which found that the average lifetime earnings of graduates is considerably higher than non-graduates (2013). There are also significantly different economic benefits derived from different subjects; for example sciences, economics and law derive greater economic benefit than arts subjects (Wyness, 2020).

There is also notable heterogeneity between different socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Male graduates and those who were privately educated command higher average median salaries, however, the returns for women, and some ethnic groups, in comparison to their non-graduate peers is far greater. This is driven by the low average earnings for non-graduates in these groups (Walker & Zhu, 2013; Waltmann et al., 2021). Anderson and Nelson support this assertion, and find that, 'higher levels of education lead to better labour market outcomes, for all sub-groups examined and at all levels of qualification' (2021, p. 6).

Although significant unexplained differences in earnings between those from different socioeconomic and ethnic groups remain, the differences are mostly smaller among graduates than among non-graduates (Waltmann et al., 2021). Policymakers have used such findings to suggest that this creates mandate for the expansion of HE, as it not only improves the net economic outcomes of an individual but acts as a force for social mobility. Whilst this is not untrue, any advancement is still shaped by ingrained patterns of inequalities and unevenness, as outlined above, and the notion of HE as a solution for social mobility is far too simplistic. This is often the case in current policymaking around access to HE, which risks erasing both the nuances between different groups and the partiality of the solution within a neoliberal education system.

The publication of LEO data has increased the focus on the economic value of a degree and government has repeatedly issued warnings of crackdowns on so-called 'low value' (Donelan, 2020a) and 'dead end' courses (Williamson, 2021c). However, critics of this approach point to the difficulty in identifying assumed 'low value courses' (Kernohan, 2020) and to the limitations of the data, in particular its focus on early career earnings and the lack of adjustment for regional differences in earnings (Vignoles, 2020). Incentives for universities to maximise graduate salaries – which usually entails encouraging students to move to London and the South East - does not align with the government's 'levelling up' discourse (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022), which requires highly skilled people to remain in or move to areas of regeneration.

Although economic value has dominated recent policy discourse, there is a significant body of research demonstrating the wider individual and societal benefits of HE, and the 'narrowness' (Vignoles, 2020) of using graduate earnings as the sole indicator of 'value'. Social benefits of HE include greater civic engagement (T. S. Dee, 2004; Ogg, 2006), reduced propensity to commit crime (Machin et al., 2011), improved health and life expectancy (Bynner et al., 2003; Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2010; OECD, 2012) and increased life satisfaction (OECD, 2011). Moreover, many public sector graduate professions such as nursing and teaching offer relatively lower incomes than occupations in the private sector, although they may be highly respected by society. Jobs in the creative sector frequently have low salaries but make a cultural contribution and report high levels of satisfaction (Ball et al., 2010; Waltmann et al., 2021), as well as offering wider 'spill over' effects such as job generation (London Economics, 2018). The difficulty in quantifying and measuring the social

benefits has lessened their use in the discourse surrounding the value of HE (Vignoles, 2020). Nevertheless, the massification and marketisation of HE has led to universities themselves using an increasingly individualistic, economic framing of the benefits of gaining a degree.

Debate over how the value of HE is defined is reflected in the tensions surrounding progression to HE. APPs force all institutions wishing to charge higher tuition fees to engage with the access and participation agenda, however, this manifests itself in very different ways across the sector. For highly selective institutions who are already oversubscribed and have high academic admissions criteria, increasing progression rates for students from under-represented groups does not offer economic benefits. Instead, access and participation work is focused upon identifying and attracting the small number of individuals from under-represented groups who achieve the grade requirements. It seeks to insulate such institutions from the reputational damage of being seen to cater only to a narrow section of society. Institutions which actively recruit students benefit from increased numbers, which allow them to remain economically viable in a marketised system. These institutions derive greater benefit from the net expansion of HE to students who would not have previously progressed to university.

University Progression Situated in Broader Education Policy

Access and Regulation

The issue of inequalities in access to HE is the subject of intense political debate. Despite successive English governments pledging to close the gaps between individuals from under-represented groups and their peers, and the substantial funding directed towards outreach activities, there remains significant differences in progression rates to HE. There are many different and intersecting factors of under-representation, including class, geography, ethnicity, gender and school environment.

In recent years, there has been increasing pressure from government for HE institutions to recruit a more diverse intake of students. This has been particularly focused on highly selective institutions who tend to recruit students with the highest prior attainment and have the least diverse student populations. The creation of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) in 2006 with a remit to ‘safeguard and promote fair access to higher education’ (OFFA, 2018), and its subsequent absorption into the then newly created university regulator, the Office for

Students (OfS) in 2018, has marked a period of increasing regulatory oversight for universities' efforts to improve access to, and success in, HE of under-represented groups. APPs, agreed between universities and the OfS, set out how each institution will meet agreed aims to reduce both institutional level inequalities and contribute to national targets set out by the regulator.

In contrast to universities, there is relatively little focus within school policy on progression to HE. High stakes accountability measures within schools, as set out by the DfE and regulated by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) are concentrated upon GSCE and – to a lesser extent – A Level attainment and progress. Whilst Destinations Measures - which include progression rates to HE - are included within this framework, Chapter 7 sets out how they carry far less significance for schools than other aspects of the accountability framework. This disparity in policy between the two sectors and their regulatory systems has created very different environments in which policy is enacted. However, policy relating to progression to HE has implications for both sectors.

What Do We Mean by 'Progression Activities'?

Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'progression activities' as an umbrella term for the many ways in which schools, universities, and third sector organisations seek to: provide information; deliver related experiences; improve confidence; develop subject-specific knowledge; build HE-related cultural capital; build networks; and offer advice and guidance. These activities are delivered in different ways by each university or third sector organisation, and received differently in every school. Below I include some examples of the activities I have encountered in my research.

Table 1: Progression Activities

Activity	Description
1:1 / Small Group Mentoring	Mentoring between pupils who met particular criteria (for example, living in a low participation postcode, white working-class boys, those who were identified as under-achieving) were paired up with university students. The activities they did with these students varied but could include academic and non-academic elements.
Campus Visits	Pupils visit university campuses for a day and take part in a programme of sessions. These sessions can include subject specific talks and workshops, as well as more general IAG sessions on how to apply to HE

	and usually, a campus tour. These sessions are usually targeted by age group.
HE Information Sessions	Information giving sessions were usually delivered by staff from university Access or Outreach teams and could be delivered in school or as part of a university campus visit. The information covered varied depending on the age of the pupils but included the practical steps they had to take in order to apply to HE in the future.
Residential Campus Events	Pupils are invited to stay at a university for a number of days and take part in a range of sessions, similar to those on campus visits. These residential events are usually targeted at older pupils, although one university held a one night residential for Year 8 pupils.
Subject 'Master Classes'	Lectures, workshops or talks given by members of academic staff at a university. Usually these happen on university campus and a number of schools are invited to bring pupils. Less frequently, these sessions happen in a particular school.
The Scholars Programme	The Scholars Programme[3] was run by The Brilliant Club, a third sector organisation. The programme involved PhD students delivering subject specific courses to pupils in schools and was bookended by a two trips to different universities.

Schools as Conduits of Progression Activity

The vast majority of the activities designed to support progression to HE are funded and delivered by universities to pupils within school settings. Although there are a very small number of examples of university outreach which exist outside of schools, such as at youth centres, sports clubs and public events (Blower, 2021), schools offer systematised and theoretically universal – at least mass – contact with pupils throughout the course of their education. Despite schools being the main site of outreach activity, there is relatively little research into the ways in which schools and universities interact with each other in order to deliver this work. Although quantitative data shows that pupils from some schools progress to HE in far higher numbers than others (Department for Education, 2019b) and both the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) collect demographic and admissions data in HE, the reasons for differences in participation remain contested. Chapters 7 to 10 of this thesis explore some of the reasons for these differences.

[3] The Scholars Programme: https://thebrilliantclub.org/the-scholars-programme/for-schools/the-programme/ (Accessed 19/03/2022).

Schools are frequently called upon to provide the ‘solution’ to many of society’s problems; from knife crime (Allen-Kinross, 2019) to financial literacy (Jeffreys, 2018), to obesity (Wheeler, 2017) to organ donation (Rodger, 2017) and most recently, Covid-19 recovery (Henshaw, 2021). The result is that there is huge pressure on the school curriculum, the – relatively short – school day and the capacity and knowledge of school staff. Despite school leaders’ attempt to push back on this barrage, stating for example, that ‘schools are not the silver bullet to fix all of society's problems’ (Barton, 2018), there remains a focus on schools as the site of many suggested interventions. As regulatory pressure surrounding access to HE grows, there is increasing demand from universities to run activities in schools in order to fulfil the requirements of their APPs, yet the capacity of schools to provide the time, funding and staffing for such outreach activity is limited.

School Funding

Despite these increasing demands, schools have suffered real term funding cuts from 2010 onwards (Britton et al., 2019). Whilst school spending per pupil was frozen between 2011 and 2015, cuts to Local Authority (LA) services, reductions in sixth form funding and increases in public sector pay all contributed to increased financial pressure on schools. Funding cuts after 2015 saw a further reduction in real term school spending (Britton et al., 2019, p. 29). The government has allocated an additional £7.1 billion for school funding between 2019 and 2023. Although this will increase spending per pupil by 9% in real terms, this does not fully reverse past cuts and school spending per pupil in 2023 will be no higher than in 2009 (Sibieta, 2020, p. 7).

The recent government Spending Review in October 2021 saw a further 1.6 billion pounds allocated to post pandemic catch-up funding, which brings the total budget to 4.9 billion. This is significantly less than the £15 billion plan proposed by Sir Kevan Collins, the former Schools Recovery Adviser. It also falls significantly short of the £10-15 billion the Education Policy Institute (EPI) recommended was needed in order to adequately support recovery from the pandemic (Andrews et al., 2021). The EPI reports also suggest that England lags significantly behind many other countries, such as the Netherlands and the USA, in terms of its investment in education recovery (2021; Crenna-Jennings et al., 2021). This has significant implications for school funding, activities and pupil outcomes over the coming years as school budgets must stretch to cover the shortfall in Covid-19 recovery funding for pupils. It is expected to have a more significant impact on schools with high numbers of

disadvantaged pupils and in regions where learning loss has been most acutely affected, notably the North East, Yorkshire and the South West (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 15).

There has been significant and increasing variation in spending per pupil across schools and LAs (Sibieta, 2015), including additional funding of up to 40% for London schools (Sibieta & Belfield, 2016, p. 3). Despite the introduction of Pupil Premium funding in 2010 (Department for Education, 2010), which targeted higher levels of funding at more deprived schools (Sibieta, 2015), wider cuts across school spending have impacted upon the most deprived schools most acutely (Sibieta, 2020, p. 19). In April 2018 the government introduced a new National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools in England in order to try and address funding imbalances between similar schools in different LAs. Whilst this has been billed as a way of 'levelling up' for schools, Andrews shows that the NFF benefits those more affluent schools with historically lower levels of funding (2020).

From 2013 the participation age – the age when young people were allowed to leave education or training – was raised from 16 to 18. By 2015 around 75% of young people aged 16 to 18 continued in full or part time education (Sibieta & Belfield, 2016, p. 19). Although the raising of the participation age to 18 has doubled the number of pupils remaining in education after the age of 16, and increased the total spending on post-16 education, real term spending per pupil within the 16 to 18 sector has fallen by around 12% on average between 2011 and 2018 (Britton et al., 2019). Cuts to school sixth forms have been particularly acute, with spending per student falling by around 18% between 2010 and 2016, compared with 7% in Further Education (FE) (Sibieta & Belfield, 2016, p. 21). As a result, schools have dwindling, rather than expanding, capacity across all age groups to provide additional resource outside of the curriculum. Such constraints leave schools dependent on universities to provide the resources necessary for HE progression activities, including staffing costs and transport. The challenges presented by the lack of material resources are discussed further in Chapter 8.

The Role of Schools and Universities in Progression Activities

The focus on universities as being responsible for the delivery of progression activities means there is little knowledge of how policies which encourage progression to HE have been received or enacted in schools. In their 2015 review of evidence about access to HE in England, Whitty and colleagues identify this gap in the research and suggest that,

‘research into higher education participation requires the involvement of researchers who are interested in schools as well as higher education’ (2015, p. 57). Earlier qualitative research by Whitty and others explores the motivations for, and characteristics of, links between schools and universities from the perspective of schools which have self-identified as having successful ‘school-university partnerships’ (2008). Another study from the same year highlights and explores ‘links with universities’ as a positive characteristic in research into state schools who sent relatively high numbers of students to ‘prestigious universities’ (Curtis et al., 2008). Both studies offer a useful foundation to this research, but predate many of the recent significant changes within progression to HE, including the National Strategy for Access and Student Success (HEFCE & OFFA, 2014) and the 2017 *Higher Education and Research Act.*

Work by Donnelly and others has attempted to understand the effects of school actions on HE participation (Ball et al., 2002; Donnelly, 2014, 2015b; Pugsley, 2004). In particular, Donnelly (2015a) draws upon Bernstein’s (1976) theorising of power and control to consider the ‘hidden messages’ sent out by different schools regarding different universities. He sets out the ways in which the framing of HE in different schools appears to exert some influence over progression choices of young people, suggesting that although Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) in schools is supposed to be impartial, that there is significant variation in how strongly HE is portrayed as the ‘best’ or ‘only’ progression route. Pugsley’s work tracks students from different schools as they select universities, documenting how they engaged with these options and how schools mediated that process (1998, 2004). Both studies are focused upon individual pupil choices at Post-16, rather than the wider provision of information and activities related to HE across schools.

Focus of this Study

This study contributes towards the gap in the research highlighted by Whitty and colleagues (2015), by examining HE progression from a school perspective. It first uses large scale quantitative data in the form of the DfE’s destinations data and Key Stage 4 (KS4) and Key Stage 5 (KS5) attainment data in order to identify schools with differing rates of progression to HE (2019b, 2019a). It then uses semi-structured interviews with school-based staff (twenty-four interviews), university-based staff (fourteen interviews) and policy makers (three interviews), and document analysis to examine how school-based staff and those who work with them have enacted policy related to HE progression within schools.

This study draws on policy sociology to explore how policy related to progression to HE is enacted in schools. It examines the regulatory environment in which schools and universities enact policies relating to progression to HE, and how this differs between the two types of institution. It interrogates the characteristics of school-university partnerships across the literature and considers this in the context of progression to HE. It then looks specifically at how schools and universities interact in order to deliver activities which aim to support progression to HE, and how this interaction varies between different schools and universities. There is a particular focus on the influence of the perceived desirability of the university and the characteristics of the school on shaping interactions, and how the age of the pupils involved affects these relationships.

Situating this Study

This study was conducted between 2018 and 2021, during a period of significant change in HE. The introduction of the 2017 *Higher Education and Research Act* moved oversight of access to HE from OFFA to the newly created OfS. In the period following this transition, substantial changes were made to the way in which access and participation was regulated. This included the replacement of annual Access Agreements with five year APPs, the introduction of national access targets, and a shift from an inputs to an outcomes based criteria for success (Office for Students, 2020b). The inception of the OfS further raised the profile of ensuring fair access to HE, as well as explicitly framing this as part of a wider effort to improve the life outcomes of students from under-represented groups by tackling inequalities relating to success in HE and progression into employment. At the same time, the three year wait for the publication of the government's response to the Post-18 Review of Education and Funding (commonly known as the Augar Review), commissioned in February 2018 (Augar, 2019), has led to uncertainty as to the future funding of access and participation activity (Dale-Harris, 2019). The publication of the government's response in March 2022 was accompanied by two consultations; one on the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) (Department for Education, 2022b), and a second on a raft of HE reforms (Department for Education, 2022a). The latter included proposals for the reintroduction of minimum entry requirements and student number controls, as well as significant changes to the funding of HE. The consultation and response to these proposals is ongoing.

After a period of little regulatory oversight of CIAG, the umbrella term under which progression to HE sits, the government launched a new Careers Strategy for schools in December 2017 (Department for Education, 2017c). This introduced the Gatsby Benchmarks as the 'gold standard' of CIAG in schools (Holman, 2014). The Benchmarks make reference to HE, although it is not a significant part of their focus. In September 2019, Ofsted introduced a new Education Inspection Framework (EIF), which cited the Gatsby Benchmarks as evidence of good practice and elevated the status of CIAG, and specifically the Benchmarks, in schools (Ofsted, 2019, p. 63). Chapter 2 situates this period of flux in the context of the wider historical context of progression to HE policy in both universities and schools. In doing so, it demonstrates the timeliness of this study, taking place in a window where policies conceived within different spheres and with different criteria nonetheless have significant impact on each other.

A Global Pandemic and the Disruption of Progression Activities

The sense of flux surrounding policy on progression to HE predated Covid-19, however, the global pandemic has had a significant short-term impact upon the activities of both schools and universities in relation to progression to HE. Traditional approaches to widening participation activities had to be changed and adapted. Campus visits and summer schools have been replaced by virtual versions and school-based activities have been mostly suspended in order to deliver remote learning (Canning, 2020). The OfS suspended much of their regulatory requirements for both individual APPs (Office for Students, 2020a) and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) (Millward, 2020) for the duration of the pandemic. Ofsted inspections in schools were deferred until May 2021, with the full programme of inspections recommencing in September 2021 (Ofsted, 2021).

A further impact of Covid-19 was the cancellation of exams and their replacement with an algorithm to determine grades for the cohorts completing GCSE and A Level / BTEC courses in summer 2020. The outcome was fraught with controversy and led to criticism that the new system perpetuated educational inequalities, with high achieving pupils from historically lower performing schools awarded lower grades (BBC, 2020; A. Dee, 2020). This led to a government U-turn and the reissuing of exam grades based on school predications rather than algorithmically generated grades. The ensuing confusion resulted in higher numbers of pupils being awarded the grades required to progress to their choice of university. This appeared to have had a positive impact on progression to HE rates from under-represented

groups, with an 8% increase in participation from pupils from the lowest participation areas (UCAS, 2020a).

The ongoing disruption of Covid-19 throughout the 2020-21 academic year led to the cancellation of exams for a second year in summer 2021. Despite reassurance from the then Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson, that the chaos of the 2020 exam season would be avoided with the introduction of Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) to replace the previous year's algorithm (Williamson, 2021a), the model faced significant criticism (D. James, 2021; Stewart, 2021). Concerns were raised over the implicit bias of TAGs, with research suggesting that those from ethnic minority backgrounds (Burgess et al., 2020; Burgess & Greaves, 2013), poorer backgrounds and pupils in state schools (Murphy & Wyness, 2020) were significantly more likely to receive pessimistic grade predictions. Other issues, including the varied learning loss experienced by different pupils during the pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020; Education Endowment Foundation, 2020; Eyles & Elliott Major, 2021), the impact of TAGs on teacher workload (Whittaker & Booth, 2021), and the complexities of admissions to HE in this environment (Anders et al., 2021) were also raised. TAGs led to another significant rise in both GCSE and A Level / BTEC grades. Such increases were uneven, with the pupils in private schools seeing a disproportionate rise in the proportion of top grades in comparison to state schools, and the attainment gap between pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their peers widening (Hunt et al., 2022; Joint Council for Qualifications, 2021).

There have been many reflections on how widening participation work can continue most effectively amidst disruption to GCSE and A Level / BTEC, months of missed education and challenges around pupils accessing school support (Andrews et al., 2021; Atherton, 2020; Canning, 2020; Rainford, 2021a). There is also significant concern that these issues will disproportionately impact on under-represented groups (J. Simons, 2020). Emerging evidence suggests that pupils in the north of England suffered particularly acutely during the pandemic, with greater lost learning and social impact than their peers in other regions (N8 Research Partnership & Northern Health Science Alliance, 2021). The medium- and long-term implications of Covid-19 were only beginning to emerge at the time of writing, although a wealth of studies are underway (Anders, 2021).

This study is relevant to understanding the relationships between schools and universities within the sphere of progression to HE. Pupils continue to progress to university in ever higher numbers (UCAS, 2020b), suggesting the relationship between the school and university sector is of growing rather than diminishing importance. Although access to HE improved in 2020, there remain significant gaps in progression rates between different groups (UCAS, 2020a). The concern that Covid-19 has disproportionately impacted upon already disadvantaged groups means that fair access remains an important and ongoing challenge into the future.

Terminology – Understanding Emic and Etic Approaches

Throughout the course of this study, I was struck by the plethora of terms used to describe activity to support students to progress to HE, and the differences between the terms used by those working in policy, universities and schools. 'Widening participation', 'fair access', 'destinations', 'outreach', 'student success', 'access and participation', 'raising aspirations' and 'expectations' were all terms used to describe activity surrounding progression to HE. Less commonly used terms also included references to student recruitment and civic engagement. The issues with the abundance of terminology used were twofold; different terminology being used to describe similar work, and the same terminology used to describe very different activities. Additionally, for some participants in some schools, it appeared that there was no particular terminology to describe university progression work; such activity was not identified in a defined or prescribed way.

This lack of commonality of language between actors within different sectors illustrated some of the challenges reflected by participants within this study. It is in part attributable to what Jones and Thomas describe as an 'insufficiently clear conceptualisation of widening participation' which has led to such an 'ambiguity of terms' (2005, pp. 614–615), whereby confusion as to the purpose of 'widening participation' has led to activity spanning a broad spectrum to be identified in many different ways. This section examines some of the different terminology used by participants, drawing on Ball's theorising of policy as discourse (1994) which is explored in greater depth in Chapter 5. In doing so, I heed Giroux's warning that, 'experience never simply speaks for itself – the language we bring to it determines its meaning' (1988, p. 99) .

The use of terminology in policy discourse has changed over time and this is reflected in regulatory publications over the last twenty years. Most notably in the shift from a focus solely on ‘access’ or ‘fair access’ to HE, towards a ‘whole student lifecycle approach’, which includes a focus on access, success and progression (HEFCE & OFFA, 2014). This has been reinforced under the OfS, where APPs require institutions to meet targets and set out their work under these three headings. Changes in language can also be seen in the challenging of the notion of ‘raising aspirations’, discussed further in Chapter 4. ‘Raising aspirations’ was embedded into university progression work by the Dearing Report’s suggestion that, ‘higher education is responsive to the aspirations and distinctive abilities of individuals’ (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997, p. 101). There has been significant critique from academics that such political discourse creates a deficit narrative, whereby individuals are responsible for their own potential to succeed, without acknowledging the structural limitations some young people experience (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Archer et al., 2014). This has led to a shift towards replacement of ‘aspirations’ with the more nuanced term ‘expectations’ in some areas (Wharton, 2021). That said, the terminology of raising aspirations continues to permeate present political rhetoric, such as in a recent speech from Universities Minister Michelle Donelan, which called upon universities to, ‘[go] the extra mile to raise standards and aspirations in schools’ (2020b).

The terminology used by the university-based participants in my study mostly reflected that used in current policy discourse. This is unsurprising, as it was apparent throughout my interviews that university-based staff were far more immersed in, and better versed in, the policy language surrounding progression to HE than school-based staff. This could also be a result of universities’ greater engagement with, and ability to influence, policy discourse (Ball, 1994). Many university-based participants reflected in their own usage the recent terminology used within policy documents and in particular, the language of the new regulatory requirements under the OfS such as ‘access and success’. Some university-based participants used terms such as ‘fair access’ and several referred to ‘raising aspirations’. In his work examining the relationship between raising aspirations and widening participation, Rainford (2021b) suggests that there is considerable variation in how the term ‘raising aspirations’ is both conceptualised and operationalised by widening participation practitioners. He finds that this means that ‘what is being delivered in practice is often divorced from that espoused in policy’ (Ibid., p.13). This mismatch between terminology and

definition is a further challenge when interpreting the language used by both school-based and university-based participants throughout this study.

School-based participants used far fewer of the terms employed by university-based participants or found within policies regarding progression to HE. Instead, they used terms reflected in the terminology found in CIAG policy discourse, such as ‘careers’, ‘destinations’, ‘information, advice and guidance’, and ‘university applications’. This terminology often referred to a broader swathe of activity, of which progression to HE was one part. Some school-based participants did not use formal terminology and instead spoke about ‘the kids going to uni’ or ‘UCAS’ as a shorthand. They did not always differentiate between whether students leaving the school in Year 13 were progressing to employment, HE or training. There was little overlap between the terminology used by schools and universities. This lack of shared terminology provides fertile ground for misunderstandings and divergent aims when schools and universities interact.

Whilst this study did not explicitly examine the conceptualising of the terms surrounding progression to HE, it became apparent that the use of terminology influenced how staff in both schools and universities articulated their ideas. In order to interrogate this further, I have found the notion of etic and emic perspectives useful. First coined in the study of linguistics (Pike, 1967) and subsequently applied to anthropological theory (Harris, 1964), and then to educational research (Headland, 1990), emic and etic perspectives express the ways in which language is used by those within a particular culture and those external to it. The scope of a culture can be broadly defined e.g. a school system, one specific school, a particular classroom or a group of individuals with shared characteristics (Olive, 2014). Emic perspectives represent the internal language and meanings commonly found within a ‘culture’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), or as Yin describes it ‘participants' indigenous meanings of real-world events’ (2010, p. 11). When applied to this study, emic language within university culture includes ‘widening participation’, ‘raising aspirations’, ‘access’, ‘outreach’ and ‘access and participation’. When considering schools as a culture, emic language included ‘destinations’, ‘UCAS’ and ‘CIAG’. It should be noted here that each individual school and university could also be considered as a culture, each with its own more specific emic and etic terminology. By categorising the cultures of schools and universities into two groups I do not want to give the impression of two homogenous, binary camps, but rather to make some brief, hopefully productive, observations.

Etic perspectives represent the same ‘real-world events’, but positions them ‘from an external perspective’ (Ibid,. p. 11), such as the researcher’s. Lett defines etic constructs as, ‘accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers’ (1990, p. 130). They are the words, phrases and conceptual ideas of the researcher, applied to the data that is collected from participants. In this case, I have decided to use ‘progression to HE’ throughout this thesis as a way of describing this study’s focus. In adopting such an approach within this study, I seek to explicitly highlight not only the ways in which ‘participants perspectives may diverge dramatically from those held by outsiders’ (Yin, 2010, p. 13) but also that the concept of an ‘outsider’ is fluid. Within the field of progression to HE, schools are often seen as the ‘outsiders’. However, when universities attempt to build relationships with schools, they are then positioned from within the school culture as outsiders. Finally, as the researcher, I understand myself to be explicitly an outsider, although occasionally my own positionality, as explored earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 6, means individual participants framed me as an ‘insider’ in particular circumstances.

Olive suggests that ‘the use of an etic perspective or approach to research is beneficial as it enables comparisons to be made across multiple cultures and populations which differ contextually’ (2014, p. 5). This feels a particularly pertinent observation for this study, whereby the relationships between two different cultures are being explicitly examined. This approach is not without tensions. Vidich and Lyman question whose values are being imposed upon the research and language, and whether it is even possible to understand the ‘other’, outside of one’s own culture (2000). However, Yin suggests that the tension between emic and etic interpretations should be viewed as an opportunity, not a constraint (2010). Throughout this study I use the theory of emic and etic perspectives in order to consciously consider the terminology being used and why this is so. In using different terminology within this thesis, I do not seek to impose etic terms upon school and university cultures, nor to pretend that ‘progression to HE’ is a neutral term. Instead I use it as an etic term, rather than adopt terminology used by a particular culture involved in this study. The term ‘progression to HE’ has previously been used in other research, notably by Whitty and colleagues in their review of evidence within this field (2015). Where I have quoted directly from participant interviews explicitly engaging with a particular term, I use emic terms.

I apply emic and etic theory in the context of policy sociology to consider the ways in which emic language and norms within schools and universities are part of understanding how power influences interactions in the field of progression to HE. As a 'thesis on two levels' using emic and etic theory has enabled me to draw out these different levels more clearly. It has also encouraged me to interrogate the differences between myself as a practitioner, where I may have in the past unconsciously used emic terms associated with both schools and universities, and my role as a researcher.

Research Objectives

In undertaking this thesis, I had two key objectives:

1. To investigate the ways in which schools and universities interact within the sphere of progression to HE.
2. To understand the implications of this on progression rates to HE, particularly for those pupils from under-represented groups.

Structure of this Thesis

This thesis is divided into eleven chapters, including this Introduction (Chapter 1). Chapters 2 and 3 ground this study in the literature. Chapter 2 begins by setting out the history of expanding progression to HE, and then turns to providing a history of CIAG provision in schools. In doing so, I highlight the predominantly independent paths taken by these two different sectors and elements of overlap across progression to HE. In Chapter 3 I discuss the different factors which influence progression to HE: attainment, geography, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender and school environment. In particular, I look at the ways in which these factors act as structural barriers to HE. The chapter concludes by considering the different ways in which universities are categorised.

Chapter 4 turns to discuss some of the key themes influencing this thesis, including social mobility as an example of a prevalent policy discourse within HE, setting out its limitations and significance. I then discuss two further discourses which are important within this thesis. The first is that of 'raising aspirations', which has been dominant within progress to HE policy for a number of years. The second is the concept of 'possible selves' which I argue is more helpful for understanding the challenges associated with progress to HE.

Chapter 5 sets out the theoretical resources used in this thesis. It begins by situating the three understandings of P/policy I use in this thesis. I then orientate this thesis within the field of policy sociology, setting out its use as a lens for my subsequent analysis. It considers the idea of policy as text and as discourse (Ball, 1994) and discusses the policy cycle and policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) as tools for analysing my research.

Chapter 6 presents the methodology used in this study. I draw upon the theoretical and conceptual resources set out in the preceding chapters to explain the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research design. I set out how the sampling of schools and universities was undertaken and explain the categories used. I then describe the fieldwork undertaken in both schools and universities, and with policymakers. I then explain the thematic approach taken to data analysis. This chapter finishes with the ethical considerations of the project as well as including a reflexive account of my own positionality as a researcher.

Chapters 7 to 10 focus on the analysis of my data. Chapter 7 considers the influence of regulatory systems on the relationships between schools and universities, looking firstly at schools and then at universities to examine the differences in how regulation operates, and how this influences how policy is enacted.

Chapter 8 examines the notion of school-university partnerships. I argue that the term ‘partnership’, as understood in the literature, is unhelpful and encourages a deficit approach to school-university interactions. Instead I suggest that the term ‘relationship’ provides a more useful and inclusive analytical framework. This chapter highlights the challenges both schools and universities face in their interactions.

Chapter 9 examines the idea that school-university relationships vary depending on the age of the pupils involved in the interaction. I take a chronological approach to analysing the ways in which schools and universities interact from primary school through to Post-16 in order to suggest that school-university relationships are not homogenous and vary by the age and Key Stage (KS) of pupils. I argue that the ways in which schools and universities focus upon different age groups is driven by their (different) regulatory priorities.

Chapter 10 examines how different ideas of desirability in both schools and universities change how school-university relationships manifest. I set out the different factors of desirability and highlight how these appear to change the power balance between the different institutions.

The study concludes with reflections on the implications of the findings of this research in Chapter 11. I return to the main research questions and, based on the discussions in Chapters 7-10, offer responses to each of them. This final chapter also sets out the limitations of this thesis, the areas of learning, and suggestions for further research. It speaks to my first 'level of analysis' by making recommendations for how the findings of this research could influence policy making to improve school-university relationships, in order to improve progression to HE within the current system. I finish by considering the structural implications of this study and call for the disassembling of the silos between schools and universities as part of a wider need to create a more socially just society.

Chapter 2 – A Chronology of Higher Education Progression and CIAG

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to acknowledge the wider context within which progression to HE and, specifically, school-university relationships, are understood. I begin by setting out the history of expanding progression to HE and then the history of CIAG provision within schools. In doing so, I highlight the sometimes overlapping, but mostly independent approach of the two different sectors to this area of shared involvement.

Higher Education – A History of Expansion

Universities' efforts surrounding progression to HE have long been the subject of significant debate. This section sets out a – brief – overview of the major policy changes and events, focusing on the last two decades in particular in order to provide context for this study. Table 2 provides key dates and events to provide context for the discussion.

Table 2: Key Dates and Events – Higher Education

Year	Event
1944	Education Act (Butler Act)
1960	Grants for Students Report (Anderson Report)
1963	Report of the Committee on Higher Education (Robbins Report)
1988	Education Reform Act
1992	Further and Higher Education Act
1997	The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education (Dearing Report)
1998	Teaching and Higher Education Act (£1000 tuition fees introduced)
2001	Introduction of institutional 'widening participation strategies'
2004	Higher Education Act
2004	Inception of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
2004	Fair Admissions to Higher Education Report (Schwartz Report)
2006	Tuition fees increased to £3000 per year
2010	Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Review (Browne Report)
2011	Students at the Heart of the System White Paper
2012	Tuition fees increased to (maximum) £9000 per year
2013	Student number cap removed for AAB or above
2014	National Strategy for Access and Student Success

2015	Student number controls removed entirely
2017	Higher Education and Research Act
2018	Creation of Office for Students (OfS)
2020	Creation of Access and Participation Plans (APPs)

Table 3 includes a list of the constantly changing regionally based collaborative outreach programmes over the last twenty years.

Table 3: Regionally Based Collaborative Programmes

Programme	Duration
Excellence Challenge (EC)	2001-2004
Partnerships for Progression (PfP)	2003-2004
Aimhigher (EC and PfP merged)	2004-2011
National Network of Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)	2014-2016
National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)	2017-2019
Uni Connect	2019- 2021

Progresssion to HE Within a Global Neoliberal Shift

This thesis focuses upon progression to HE within the English education system, however it is important to acknowledge that this sits within a wider national and global context. The reshaping of the public sector in England from the post-war period to the present day follows a trajectory from a Keynsian welfare state, to an increasingly marketised, individualised system with increased private sector involvement, whereby citizens are positioned as consumers. This trajectory has been mirrored by many other Western states. The election of the Thatcher government in 1979 signaled a seismic, and pervasive, neoliberal reorientation towards free trade, and the reduced role of the state in terms of direct provision of welfare services (Olssen, 2009; Peters, 2012). Increased 'policy mobility' (Lewis, 2021) has seen these neoliberal ideas move, not only across nation states but through so-called public-private networks or 'heterarchies' (Ball & Junemann, 2012).

Across the education sector this is manifested in the increasing rhetoric of 'choice' at all stages of education (Ball et al., 1994; McCaig & Taylor, 2014), in the promotion of students as consumers (Molesworth, 2010), and in the intensifying use of data by government to regulate institutions (Ball, 2001; Perryman et al., 2018). In particular, the introduction of

tuition fees and the establishing of university league tables created a quasi-marketplace across HE. More recently, the rhetoric around ‘value for money’ and the economic framing of the value of HE has intensified the sense of consumerism. The interaction between the market place of HE and government intervention in the area of access and participation has led to significant tensions across the sector (McCaig, 2015), the implications of which underpin much of the discussion in this thesis.

A further manifestation of neoliberalism can be seen in the shift from government to governance across all areas of policy. This shift reflects the neoliberal belief that the state is an inefficient vehicle for solving so called ‘wicked problems’, such as lack of social mobility (Rittel & Webber, 1973), and that non-state actors such as voluntary organisations, charities, businesses and philanthropists are better placed to tackle these issues. The retreat of the state as a direct provider of education, and the shift to an increasing number of actors can be seen in the introduction of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), the opening of free schools, and the privatisation of many services adjacent to schooling, such as careers services. Within progression to HE, the increasing involvement of third sector organisations demonstrates a clear example of network governance (Ball & Junemann, 2012), which brings together public-private and sometimes national-global ‘heterarchies’ (Lingard et al., 2013).

In order to better understand the influences different actors and connections bring to bear on policymaking, Ball and colleagues have undertaken ‘network ethnography’ (2012). Although I have not explicitly used network ethnography within this thesis, it has informed my thinking in two key ways. First, as a lens to understand the many informal, decentralised, and ambiguous ‘sites’ of policy which have appeared throughout the course this research, such as the Fair Access Coalition (FAC), which represents many of the third sector organisations involved in the sector. In attempting to understand and navigate the wider landscape, I made informal maps which enabled me to better understand the ways policy ideas ‘travelled’ (Bhambra, 2020) around the sector. Second, I considered the ways individual schools and universities ‘mapped’ their networks; the sense of ‘matching’ I describe in Chapter 10 between schools and universities shares many commonalities with diverse relationships within a network.

The changes that are associated with neoliberalism have clear manifestations, such as those discussed above. However, neoliberalism is also insidious in its manifestations across all areas of society. Shamir defines it as:

> ‘A complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organised around a certain imagination of the ‘market’ as a basis for the universalization of social relations, with the corresponding incursion of such relations into almost every single aspect of our lives’ (2008, p. 3).

There is a differentiation then, as Ball highlights, between big ‘N’ and small ‘n’ neoliberalism. The former describes the economic and social policies which one can identify, whereas the latter is of ‘the heart and soul’ (2016, p. 1047). Together, they are a fundamental and intimate reworking of the way in which we understand the relationship between education and the state. Throughout this thesis, I examine some of the ways in which neoliberalism manifests itself within the sphere of progression to HE. This includes the datafication seen in the collection and use of destinations data in schools, the shift to outcomes-based APPs, and the ways in schools and universities are held accountable by their regulators.

From Inception to the 1960s

The university as an institution has been a part of English society since the creation of the University of Oxford in c1096. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that university education began to make the transition from small, scholastic communities in Oxford and Cambridge, closely associated with the Christian church and the preserve of the elite, to institutions which could serve a wider social and economic purpose (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002). The founding of what Thomas Arnold famously described as, ‘that godless institution on Gower Street,’ (UCL) in 1826 marked the first step in over six hundred years towards the opening up of HE in England. Throughout the nineteenth century HE remained 'intrinsically inequalitarian’ (Anderson et al., 1961, p. 457), with little concern expressed about the demographics of its makeup. Where debate existed, it focused on the call for wealthy women to have access to university (Kettley, 2007, p. 335), and meeting the increased demand from the middle classes (Scott, 1995a).

The next one hundred and fifty years would see the transition from an ‘elite’ to a ‘mass’ system of HE (Ibid,.). The creation of civic or ‘redbrick’ (Truscot, 1943) universities at the turn of the twentieth century saw centres of HE established in large industrial cities, and an increasing focus on ‘delivering education and training to meet the needs of the local

economy' (Willetts, 2017, p. 35). Despite the expansion, HE remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the privileged, with significant barriers for those outside of this social group (Archer et al., 2002). England had fewer university students than most other Western countries up to and throughout the interwar period (Barr, 2014, p. 4). The Second World War marked a change in HE in many countries - exemplified by America's GI Bill, which incentivised mass access to HE for returning troops - but this was not seen on the same scale in England. The 1944 *Education Act* introduced universal publicly funded secondary education, but only a modest expansion of HE.

The 1960s to 1990s – The Seminal Reports of Anderson and Robbins

The most significant expansion of HE occurred in the 1960s, underpinned by the 1960 *Grants for Students* (Anderson) Report and the 1963 *Report of the Committee on Higher Education,* more commonly known as the Robbin's Report (1963). The former set in place a mandatory grants system, replacing the 'haphazard' system of discretionary LA based grants in favour of a standardised system (Hillman, 2013; Malcolm, 2014). The Robbins Report has been widely heralded as an 'epochal moment' (Willets in Barr, 2014, p. 3). It contained the now famous axiom that, 'courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so' (Robbins, 1963, p. 8). This principle defined much of the subsequent fifty years of HE policymaking and provided the foundation for policy focused on increasing progression from under-represented groups.

The 1960s saw the establishment of a further eight 'plate glass'[4] universities, and a wider increase in student numbers, with a threefold increase in the number of first degree graduates by 1980 (Bolton, 2012, p. 20). The 1960s also saw the introduction of the 'Binary Divide' in 1965; the creation of polytechnics as an alternative, less autonomous form of technical HE, focused on meeting the needs of the labour market (Crossland, 1965). When the thirty five polytechnics were given university status in the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*, the notion of what constituted a university broadened and the number of degrees awarded in the following years more than doubled (Bolton, 2012). Although HE expanded during this period, its composition did not significantly diversify, and university admissions remained heavily in favour of those from the most privileged socioeconomic

[4] The term plate glass was coined by Michael Beloff (1968) to reflect the modern architectural design of the newly created institutions, which often contained wide expanses of plate glass in steel or concrete frames.

groups (Kelly & Cook, 2007, p. 10). Moreover, there were increasing concerns over how the rising numbers entering HE would be funded. These concerns led to the creation of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in 1996, with bipartisan support and a wide-ranging remit to make recommendations on the 'purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education' (1997). Its report, commonly known as the Dearing Report, was published in July 1997 in the wake of Labour's landslide victory in May of that year, and provided a blueprint for university access in subsequent years.

New Labour and University Access

The Dearing Report

New Labour regarded HE as a tool to both boost economic competitiveness and as a vehicle for social justice (Wilkins & Burke, 2015). Blair's commitment to 'Education, Education, Education' (1996), his subsequent target of '50% of young adults going into higher education in the next century' (1999) and the publication of the Dearing Report (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997) marked the beginning of a more deliberate focus on progression to HE from under-represented groups (Robertson & Hillman, 1997). The report offered two policy solutions which influenced the next twenty years; 'raising aspirations' and 'closing the attainment gap', by raising the academic achievement of under-represented groups. Notably, it highlighted the importance of school-based activities recommending, 'the bodies responsible for funding further and higher education in each part of the UK collaborate and fund - possibly jointly - projects designed to address low expectations and achievement and to promote progression to higher education' (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997, p. 108).

The Dearing Report recognised schools as essential actors within progression to HE policy, identifying examples of school-university collaboration already in place such as the 'Birmingham Compacts' and Wolverhampton's 'outreach and inreach schemes,' explicitly recognising the value of partnership working within progression to HE:

> 'We endorse such initiatives, the most successful of which recognise the need for institutions to collaborate with schools, colleges and other local agencies; that improvement will require a long term investment of commitment and resources; and that funding needs to be focused in order to be effective' (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997, p. 108).

The Dearing Report marked a shift from individualised and ad hoc progression to HE work, to a more strategic and streamlined approach. Universities were required to create statements outlining their work in this space from 1999, and this was consolidated in 2001 with the introduction of formalised 'widening participation strategies' (HEFCE, 2001).

The Higher Education Act (2004)

The passing of the controversial 2004 *Higher Education Act* created a market-place within HE by introducing variable 'top up' fees to a maximum of £3000 per year, with the explicit intention that different institutions could charge differing fees in order to attract students, who were positioned as consumers of HE. In response to concerns that this would discourage those from under-represented groups from applying to HE, and particularly those most selective institutions who were expected to charge the highest possible fees (Callender & Jackson, 2005), the Act also created OFFA. OFFA's remit was to commit universities to 'attracting, retaining and promoting the progress of students from low participation groups', through the agreeing of formal Access Agreements with OFFA for all institutions wishing to charge the 'top up fees' (DfES, 2003, p. 19). Non-compliance would supposedly be met with sanctions from OFFA, including the right to impose financial penalties or refuse to renew an Access Agreement, thereby capping the fees institutions were able to charge.

Market forces created an environment where all institutions wished to charge the highest fees in order to signal their value within a marketised HE economy, which in turn increased attention on access issues. However, OFFA was not empowered to place specific requirements on individual institutions, or to consider their admissions criteria (McCaig & Adnett, 2009). The lack of power to influence outcomes rather than inputs resulted in ongoing criticism that OFFA was 'light touch', 'toothless' and 'a sop' (Batty, 2004; Gill, 2009; Thomson, 2003). Moreover, although OFFA was theoretically able to impose significant sanctions, these were never used, which reinforced the idea that the regulator was not able to provide effective incentives for change.

Aimhigher – National Partnership Working?

In direct contradiction to the competitive environment marketisation had created within the HE sector, the first national access programme, Aimhigher, was created under New Labour in 2001. Aimhigher had a specific focus to 'develop partnerships between schools, colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs) in order to raise aspirations and attainment' (Judkins et al., 2005, p. iii). The diverse nature of the activities undertaken under the umbrella of

Aimhigher made evaluation of the programme challenging, although multiple evaluations were attempted (Morris, Golden, et al., 2005; Morris, Rutt, et al., 2005; Pennell et al., 2004). These difficulties were compounded by a lack of clarity about the programme's aims and changes in the metrics by which it was judged (Harrison, 2012). Bowers-Brown and colleagues concluded that 'although its potential is sometimes dissipated by the diverse nature of the activities to which it is linked, Aimhigher has clearly had a major role in widening participation' (2006, p. ii). The evaluations of Aimhigher were criticized by Gorard and others suggesting, 'causal models have been claimed based on multiple and uncontrolled interventions […]. While often interesting and indicative, none of these claims can actually be justified by the logic of their research design' (2006, p. 139). The critique regarding the ability to demonstrate impact fueled an increased focus on tracking and evaluation of activities, which has played a growing role in progression to HE (Rainford, 2019, p. 23).

The Schwartz and Browne Reports

Concurrent with the expansion of national progression to HE schemes, and institutional regulation around fair access, was the commissioning of a review into university admissions. The Schwartz Report found that whilst 'admissions are generally fair,' there was 'scope for improvement' and made recommendations of five 'common sense' principles underpinning fair admissions: transparency; ability to select by achievements and potential; reliability and validity; minimisation of barriers; and a professional approach (2004, p. 13). Harrison argues that Schwartz, 'stopped short of a more radical approach to address fairness of access' (2011, p. 451) by failing to enforce any approach to admissions that contextualised students' backgrounds. Instead it further elevated the neoliberal language of marketisation, suggesting that a 'legitimate aim' for universities was to 'recruit the best possible students' (2004, p. 4) in the context of competition between institutions.

The Schwartz Report was also cautious of the use of so called 'compact schemes'[5] or other formalised school-university partnership working, suggesting that they 'could be vulnerable to legal challenge if they target only a limited number of schools or colleges, or give only some disadvantaged potential applicants the opportunity to participate' (2004, p. 38). Again,

[5] Compact schemes were defined in the Schwartz Report as, 'arrangements between providers of higher education and secondary or further education. Their primary aim is to raise aspirations and improve knowledge of HE. They often require a student to identify and progress towards key steps (such as attendance and homework targets) that will help prepare him or her for HE study. They can also allow for students in partner schools and colleges to receive an advantage in the admissions process, provided they meet their targets (Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group, 2004, p. 38).

this approached partnership working from a neoliberal position of competition for limited resources, rather than a social justice framing of ensuring that pupils from under-represented backgrounds were able to access HE.

The 2008 economic crisis triggered further policy change. Concerned about the rising cost of HE as student numbers increased, and with it the expense of the student loan book, the government reintroduced number controls which undermined the notion of a free market economy within HE. Institutions who over-recruited were fined, causing increased caution around offering places to students with lower grades (Whitty et al., 2015). As part of a wave of government cost cutting, Aimhigher was defunded, first at a national and then a regional level (Harrison, 2012), setting in motion a cycle of funding and withdrawal for collaborative schemes that has continued to the present day.

In 2009 Labour instigated the Browne Review of HE with a remit to 'review the funding of higher education and make recommendations to ensure that teaching at our HEIs is sustainably financed, that the quality of that teaching is world class and that our HEIs remain accessible to anyone who has the talent to succeed' (Browne, 2010, p. 2). HE was further reframed as a personal rather than a public good, with students positioned as consumers paying for a service (Collini, 2012). The report also highlighted that although progress had been made regarding progression to HE for under-represented groups across the sector, little progress had been made in the most selective institutions (Browne, 2010, p. 22). Given that the economic value of HE was highly differentiated by institution, this lack of progress was deeply problematic for the government's dual economic competitiveness and social justice agendas.

2010 – 2015: Coalition Policies

Under the Coalition government, focus shifted from social justice to an explicit agenda of social mobility. The *Students at the Heart of the System* White Paper drew heavily on the Browne Report, proposing a rise in tuition fees to £9000, and increasing marketisation of the HE sector (2011). Student number controls were first eased, allowing for the unrestricted recruitment of students achieving AAB or above at A Level, and from 2015 abolished in totality. Concerns were again raised over the impact of increased tuition fees on progression to HE of those from under-represented groups (Callender & Scott, 2013), however these

fears did not appear to be realised (Corver, 2014; Pollard et al., 2019) as HE continued to expand.

In order to counteract concerns regarding the effects on progression to HE and university relationships under a increasingly competitive system (Hillman, 2014; McCaig, 2014; McCaig & Taylor, 2014), the National Scholarship Programme was introduced for students from under-represented backgrounds and OFFA was given a wider reaching mandate (Department for Business, 2011). In 2014 the newly empowered OFFA published the *National Strategy for Access and Student Success* which positioned access within a wider 'student lifecycle', including not only access to HE, but success within it and progression after it (2014, p. 3). This whole student lifecycle approach would subsequently become a central tenant of future regulation. The report was strongly couched within the terms of social mobility, with HE explicitly positioned as a driver for social mobility as 'the outcome that the Government wishes to see' from access and participation work (Ibid,. p. 6). Bowl and Hughes suggest that the introduction of these policies caused significant tension within the system; universities should encourage social mobility by widening access to HE more generally, whilst competing to attract students within the quasi-market place (2016). Whitty et al suggest the changes to funding and access marked a 'significant change in the way that university outreach activities were funded and delivered', with a movement away from collaboration between HEIs, and an increased focus on individualised access targets (2015, p. 38).

A Succession of National Networks

In 2014, after criticism over the disbanding of Aimhigher, and a reduction in direct school-university relationships (Whitty et al., 2015), the government introduced the first in a series of national outreach schemes. The National Network of Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) aimed to embody a 'new approach to collaborative outreach' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p. 95) in the context of a highly competitive student recruitment market. It was hoped NNCO would reduce the problems associated with the perverse incentives for universities to target schools that enabled them to meet their own narrow performance indicators, rather than all schools within their local area (Whitty et al., 2015, p. 40).

Although NNCO was only funded for two years, its successor, the NCOP, was introduced in January 2017. It was initially funded until July 2019 and later extended to July 2021 and

rebranded as Uni Connect. Its stated aim was to 'support the government's social mobility goals by rapidly increasing the number of young people from underrepresented groups who go into higher education' (Office for Students, 2018b). Although NCOP was widely welcomed by the sector (Atherton et al., 2020), critics suggested that the short term funding of successive partnership based programmes inhibited the effectiveness of such efforts (Shukla, 2018), not least because of what Whigham describes as school 'initiativitis'; schools growing tired of investing in new initiatives which then have the funding withdrawn (2018). In January 2021 it was announced that the budget for Uni Connect would be halved (Williamson, 2021b), a decision which drew significant criticism from the sector which asserted that 'without sufficient funding to sustain the programme, this established infrastructure […] is at risk of falling away' (Boffey, 2021).

The Creation of the Office for Students and a Shift in Regulation

The 2017 *Higher Education and Research Act* saw the creation of the new university regulatory body in April 2018, the OfS. The OfS has a broader remit than OFFA and took a more adversarial tone, using rhetoric around creating a shift from 'incremental' to 'transformative' change in access (Millward, 2019). Annual Access Agreements were replaced with APPs, which in 2020 became five year agreements setting out how each institution would meet both their own individual targets, and contribute towards the national targets set out by the OfS (Office for Students, 2020b). The definition of under-represented groups was expanded to include a broader remit and the requirement for a 'minimum spend' was replaced with an outcomes-based assessment of success (Office for Students, 2018c, p. 22). The OfS also pledged to increase understanding of effective practice across the sector, suggesting that despite the £887.7 million spent in 2016-17, access for under-represented groups had not significantly improved (Millward, 2019). Such announcements highlight the contradictions between a marketised HE environment and government interventions around access and participation.

The Current Situation

After twenty years of political focus on increasing progression to HE from under-represented groups, recent indications from government suggest that such support may be waning. In a speech to the Social Market Foundation on the 9th July 2020, then Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson suggested that, 'it's clear that there are limits to what can be achieved by sending ever more people to university' and decried Blair's target of 50% youth

participation in HE, stating that in doing so Blair had ‘cast aside the other 50%’, and pledged to refocus efforts on vocational and further education (2020). Despite encouraging early evaluation (Office for Students, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2020), the Uni Connect budget was halved (as discussed above) in yet another example of inconsistent funding for national collaboration between universities.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan has taken a similar tone, stating that ‘social mobility isn’t about getting more people into university’ (2020b), explicitly moving away from the foundational thinking behind earlier Coalition and Conservative policies. Her comments were met by criticism from those who accused her of a lack of understanding of the sector (Blower, 2020), acting against the evidence (Atherton & John, 2020; Crockford, 2020), and undermining the regulatory body (Dickinson, 2020). What is clear is that progression to HE and fair access remains an issue of fierce debate, subject to constant political flux. This study is situated in the midst of policy churn, funding changes and programmatic uncertainty across HE. This chapter now turns to look at the situation of university progression in schools.

A History of CIAG Provision in Schools

Work to support pupils to progress to HE in schools falls within the broader remit of CIAG. CIAG is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as referring to ‘services intended to assist people, of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers’ (Sweet & Watts, 2004, p. 19). Unlike universities, school-based policies do not have a specific focus relating to the progression of under-represented groups to HE. Moreover, schools do not share a common terminology for this work with either the university sector, or each other. This difference in emic language between the school and university sector makes tracking university progression work in schools over time more challenging. The term CIAG covers a significantly broader remit than university progression, and much CIAG is focused on employment and training. For this reason, this section briefly maps the history of CIAG more broadly, highlighting where policy has – purposefully or otherwise – impacted progression to HE work in schools. Table 4 lists key dates and events.

Table 4: Key Dates and Events – School CIAG

Year	Event
1944	Education Act (Butler Act)
1945	Report of the Committee on the Juvenile Employment Service (Ince Report)
1965	The Future Development of the Youth Employment Service (The Albemarle Report)
1973	Employment and Training Act
1994	Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win White Paper
1994	Better Futures White Paper
1997	Education Act
2009	Access to the Professions (Milburn Report)
2011	Education Act
2012	Introduction of Destinations Measures
2013	Careers Guidance Action Plan
2013	Inspiration Statement
2014	Creation of Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC)
2014	Good Career Guidance Report (Gatsby Report)
2017	Careers Strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents
2019	Education Inspection Framework (EIF)

From Inception to 1973

Until the twentieth century labour policy was shaped by the view that 'all workers who wanted to work could do so', and any interventions were intermittent and localised (Bradley, 1990, p. 137). The end of the Second World War saw increasing focus on the transition from school to work, and the implementation of universal secondary education by the 1944 *Education Act*, which increased the school leaving age to 15. The Ince Report of the same year marked a 'watershed moment' (Peck, 2004, p. 14) in CIAG, recommending the creation of a comprehensive Youth Unemployment Service and introducing the principle of involving teachers in CIAG through school-leaver reports. Emphasis shifted towards choice and guidance rather than 'matching' young people with jobs (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Super, 1953), moving the focus from a single interview to a longer term process embedded within schools (Daws, 1968; Hopson & Hayes, 1968). Further emphasis on school-based guidance was recommended in the 1965 Albemarle Report, which also emphasised earlier contact with

pupils. That said, the expansion of CIAG until this point should be seen against a backdrop of very small, socially stratified numbers of pupils progressing to HE, and was focused almost entirely on employment and training.

1973 to New Labour

HE in this period was expanding in the wake of the 1963 Robbin's Report, although CIAG policy of the time does not reflect a parallel growth in university focused support in schools. The 1973 *Employment and Training Act* introduced a comprehensive Careers Service under the control of LAs, and embedded the practice of working in association with schools and colleges, but this had a strong focus on work-related CIAG. The 'Ruskin Speech' by then Prime Minister James Callaghan in 1976 (1976) and the 'great debate' on education which followed, ensured that discussion over the purpose of education, and the transition between education and work remained at the centre of policymaking in subsequent years, yet HE's role in this was limited.

Under a strong Conservative government, scepticism about local governance and the belief in the power of the markets to provide solutions was embodied by the 1988 *Education Reform Act* and the 1994 marketisation of the Careers Service. Roberts suggests this marketisation was indicative of a 'much broader change in educational policy making', politicising CIAG with the consequence that 'career guidance has been subjected to a further major overhaul with every subsequent change of government' (2013, p. 247). Despite this, the 1994 *Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win* and *Better Futures* white papers set out a wider remit for careers within schools; a written careers policy for each school, structured provision of guidance with an entitlement for all pupils aged 11-18, and additional funding (House of Commons, 1993). This commitment was to be delivered in partnership between schools and LAs, and was enshrined in the 1997 *Education Act*.

1997-2010: New Labour

The landslide victory for New Labour in 1997 brought with it a new focus on social inclusion and in particular on young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). CIAG through the Connexions service was frequently criticised for its narrow focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable, to the detriment of broader CIAG for all young people (Watts, 2001). Towards the end of the Labour government, the Milburn Report on *Access to the Professions* (2009) yielded a new, broader careers strategy with a greater focus on HE

(Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). Despite this, and Blair's commitment to the 50% HE youth participation target (1999), CIAG policy and the access agenda in HE remained divorced, with little recognition of their symbiotic nature and the role schools played in the delivery of both.

Coalition CIAG

Under the Coalition government there was a significant change in CIAG policy, which was couched in the new government's rhetoric around social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2011; Hayes, 2010). The 2011 *Education Act* devolved the statutory duty of providing CIAG directly to schools, making it a legal requirement to ensure 'all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance during the relevant phase of their education' (Education Act, 2011). 'Independent' was defined as 'external to the school' implying a partnership model with external organisations and agencies, and offering another opportunity for private sector involvement with state education (Department for Education, 2014, p. 7). However, the policy created a contradiction between this partnership model and the marketisation of the careers service, whereby schools were positioned as consumers (Watts, 2013, p. 450). There was no new or ringfenced funding provided for schools to meet this statutory duty. Concerns were raised about these changes including by Watts who suggested that, 'there are strong grounds for doubting whether most schools of their own accord will give high priority to careers education and guidance' (Ibid,. p. 447), given the multiplicity of demands made on their resources.

A clear indicator of the low priority given to CIAG was the position of Ofsted, which said that it would not inspect against the statutory duty (Adriaanse, 2012). This was in contrast to the message given by the then Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, Matt Hancock, who suggested that there was a 'clear accountability framework [for CIAG in schools] through the introduction of destination measures and a revised Ofsted framework' (The Education Committee, 2013, p. 18). Evidence to the Education Committee suggested that, in the context of high stakes accountability in other areas, schools would not prioritise CIAG. This included testimony from a headteacher who described a scenario of being faced with buying either careers guidance or extra tutorial support for maths and English and commented, 'if I do not hit the floor targets [for maths and English], I get fired. If I do not do careers, I am not sure that I do get fired' (Ibid,. p. 18). The testimony demonstrated the perverse incentives created by neoliberal performativity, which pushes all none or lesser regulated activities

(such as CIAG at the time) to the margins. Sector bodies also voiced concerns, including The Careers Sector Strategic Alliance who suggested that 'where schools are failing to meet the duty, there are seemingly no grounds for challenge and remedial action' (Ibid,. p. 18).

In September 2013, an Ofsted review of CIAG found that, 'the new statutory duty for schools to provide careers guidance is not working well enough' and reported that, 'only one in five schools were effective in ensuring that all its students in Years 9, 10 and 11 were receiving the level of information, advice and guidance they needed to support decision-making' (2013, p. 4). The government responded with a 'Careers Guidance Action Plan' (Department for Education & Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013) and an 'Inspiration Statement' (HM Government, 2013), aimed at clarifying the policy discourse surrounding CIAG. There appeared to be little tangible change to CIAG however, with no additional funding provided and a lack of clarity surrounding regulatory requirements (Holman, 2014; Hooley et al., 2014; Hughes & Chambers, 2014). This combination led the then Chief HMI to describe CIAG as, 'a disaster area in schools' (Wilshaw, 2015). In December 2014, the then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced a new Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), as a response to these concerns, stating that, 'it is clear that many schools and colleges need additional support' (Morgan, 2014). The CEC has been criticised for the lack of clarity regarding its remit and, as a private company funded by government, the lack of transparency over its impact (Hughes, 2017, pp. 6–7).

Destinations Data

Alongside the transfer of responsibility for CIAG from LAs to schools, Destinations Measures were introduced in July 2012 and made a headline accountability measure for schools in 2016. Destinations Measures report the proportion of pupils who have successfully (sustained for two academic terms) transitioned to their next destination (education, employment or training) at both Post-16 and Post-18 (Department for Education, 2018a, p. 5). A fuller discussion of destinations data is included in Chapter 6. The final responsibility for collating destinations data sits with LAs who have a statutory duty to report pupil destination data to the DfE (Department for Education, 2019c, p. 5), although in practice the data collection is frequently devolved to schools.

The DfE explicitly linked Destinations Measures with CIAG in the statutory guidance stating that, 'schools can measure the effectiveness of their careers and inspiration activity by considering both the attainment and the destinations of their pupils' (2014, p. 6), and

asserted that the measures 'provide clear and comparable information on the success of schools in helping all of their pupils take qualifications that offer them the best opportunity to continue in education or training' (2018a, p. 5). However, there have been significant criticisms made of Destinations Measures as a way of assessing the quality of CIAG, in particular, the lack of recognition for the structural inequalities which influence pupils' destinations. Watts describes Destinations Measures as a 'crude measure, influenced by a wide range of factors outside the quality of guidance programmes' (2013, p. 447). Further criticism focuses on the perverse behaviors which Destinations Measures incentivise within schools. This includes the inability of the quantitative measures to capture the complexity of CIAG and pupil pathways (explored in Chapter 7) and the lack of focus on ongoing CIAG (Chapter 9). In addition the 'lag time' of two years between the pupils leaving the school and their destinations being published undermines the use of such data for accountability purposes, a concern highlighted by the Education Committee, which suggested that the measures were 'not effective for ensuring that schools meet their statutory duty' (2013, p. 20).

A New Direction for CIAG in Schools?

In December 2015, Sam Gyimah, then Education and Childcare Minister, announced the planned publication of a Careers Strategy which would, 'ensure that teachers, careers professionals and employers know what the department expects of them' (2015). The Strategy was repeatedly delayed and finally published in December 2017 (Department for Education, 2017c). The Strategy and subsequent statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2018b) set out the government's vision for a 'thriving careers system', focused on increasing social mobility and productivity, in line with its wider rhetoric (Department for Education, 2017c, p. 3). Key aspects included the endorsement of the Gatsby Foundation's 'Gatsby Benchmarks'[6], as 'world-class standards', the expansion of the CEC to act 'as a backbone for coordinating all Gatsby Benchmarks', the designation of a 'Careers Leader'

[6] The Gatsby Benchmarks were published by the Gatsby Foundation in 2013 in a report (Holman, 2014), which drew upon international evidence to create a framework for what successful CIAG in schools looked like (Holman, 2014). It also sought to quantify the economic benefit of such a programme (PwC, 2014). The Benchmarks are:

1. A stable careers programme
2. Learning from career and labour market information
3. Addressing the needs of each pupil
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
5. Encounters with employers and employees
6. Experiences of workplaces
7. Encounters with further and higher education
8. Personal guidance.

responsible for the CIAG programme in each school, and access to ‘Enterprise Advisors’. HE was included within Gatsby Benchmark 7, a move which explicitly linked progression to HE into CIAG.

Although the Gatsby Benchmarks were billed as non-statutory, the DfE’s guidance suggested that, ‘government’s expectation is that schools begin to work towards the Benchmarks now and meet them by the end of 2020’ (2018c, p. 5), and the Careers Strategy stated ‘Ofsted will take account of the requirements within the new statutory guidance for schools, which is being updated to reflect the Gatsby Benchmarks’ (2017c, p. 20). The explicit link between the Strategy and Ofsted’s regulation moved CIAG up the agenda in schools. The Strategy reinforced the government’s commitment to the ‘effective use’ of destinations data in order to understand the impact of CIAG in schools (Ibid,. p. 33).

The greater clarity was initially welcomed after what Hughes described as a period of ‘chaotic and congested’ CIAG policy (2017, p. 11). Concerns were raised about the potential for both ‘highly variable and fragmented’ implementation, and the scope of funding which was limited to small sections of the Strategy - such as for Careers Leaders - and only then for targeted schools (Dominguez Reig, 2017; Halfon, 2017; Marsden, 2017; Parker, 2017). This was especially concerning in the context of wider cuts to school budgets.

Although the Careers Strategy provided greater coherence for CIAG more broadly, it still offered only a brief acknowledgement of progression to HE as part of this. These acknowledgements aligned with the broader policy focus on access to highly selective institutions, suggesting that, ‘schools and colleges should also encourage more able disadvantaged young people wanting to go to university to apply to the most selective universities’ (Department for Education, 2017c, p. 26). In line with wider government policy of the period (Department for Education, 2016) the Strategy also included recommendations that outreach activity should include ‘interventions that raise attainment, such as supporting curriculum programmes and formally sponsoring or establishing schools’ (Department for Education, 2017c, p. 14). University progression is included as half of Benchmark 7; ‘Encounters with Further and Higher Education’, but the latter was given only the briefest of

coverage in the DfE's guidance, which focuses almost wholly on the implementation of the Baker Clause, which makes provision for advice on non-academic routes.[7]

Apart from acknowledging that 'most pupils will be more immediately concerned with the next stage of their study and choosing the right post-16 and post-18 options rather than choosing the right occupation', the guidance gives little indication of what appropriate CIAG for HE might consist of within a school (Department for Education, 2018c). Whilst the absence of direct reference to university progression within the Careers Strategy perhaps reflects the current government drive towards parity of esteem between academic and technical education (Department for Education & Department for Business, 2016), the lack of guidance within the strategy does not join up school CIAG with the university access and participation work, which remains siloed across the two sectors.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken a chronological approach to the history of both progression to HE, and CIAG, in order to understand how both have shaped the present day. It demonstrates the relatively separate nature of these two histories, which helps to explain how schools and universities approach the shared terrain of progression to HE from such different standpoints. It then looks at the current neoliberal environment in which schools and universities operate. It suggests that the introduction of university progression into the Gatsby Benchmarks as part of formal CIAG, linked to Ofsted's new EIF, and the addition of Destinations Measures to the headline accountability measures in schools, has raised the profile of progression to HE in the school sector. That said, there remains a significant disconnect between school CIAG and university 'access and participation', which recent policy change has failed to bridge.

The next chapter of this thesis continues to situate this study in the wider literature. It looks at the different factors of participation which influence progression to HE in order to understand who is referred to by the phrase, 'under-represented groups', as well as recognising the intersectional nature of many of these factors.

[7] Introduced in January 2018 as an amendment to the Technical and Further Education Act 2017, the Baker Clause stipulates that schools must allow colleges and training providers access to every student in Year 8-13, to discuss the non-academic routes that are available to them. On February 1st 2022, a Private Members Bill was introduced to extend the reach of CIAG into Year 7.

Chapter 3 - Factors Influencing Participation in Higher Education

Introduction

There is a huge literature on the different factors which influence progression rates to HE including socioeconomic background, geography, ethnicity, gender and school environment. Many of these factors influence attainment throughout schooling. Progression rates also differ by the selectivity of HEIs and the ways in which universities identify schools to 'target' for progression to HE work. This chapter briefly discusses each of these characteristics, as well as some of the intersectionalities between them.

Factors of Influence

Attainment

There are variations in HE progression rates across all the characteristics subsequently discussed in this chapter. However, underpinning these differences is the educational attainment of pupils. Harrison and Waller remind us that this does not suggest that the range of other characteristics addressed in this chapter do not impact progression to HE, but rather that their effects are mediated through earlier attainment (2018).

Differences in attainment between children start young and continue to widen throughout schooling. Gaps in educational outcomes have been measured from the age of three (Dickerson & Popli, 2016). Research by Waldfogel and Washbrook and others find that children from low income families are nearly a year behind their peers when starting school (Bradbury et al., 2015; Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2010). Moreover, research by Feinstein found that the highest scoring children from disadvantaged backgrounds start to fall behind the lower scoring children from more advantaged backgrounds from the age of three and half (2003).

The attainment gap widens throughout primary school, where only 75% of pupils from the poorest fifth of families achieve the government's expected level by the end of KS2, in comparison to 97% of pupils in the richest quintile (Goodman & Gregg, 2010, p. 6). Crawford and colleagues find that disadvantaged pupils achieve poorer results in GCSE exams at the end of KS4 (2014; 2017). GCSE attainment was found to be the most significant indicator of subsequent progression to HE (Anders, 2012; Chowdry et al., 2009; Crawford, 2014; Galindo-Rueda et al., 2004). In particular, Chowdry and colleagues found that although

poorer students attained lower GCSE grades, those who achieved comparable GCSE grades with their wealthier peers are equally likely to progress (2013), suggesting that closing gaps in attainment at GCSE should underpin strategies aiming to increase progression rates to HE. Although A Level results also play an important role as the main gateway qualification to HE, Chowdry and colleagues suggest that they primarily act as a sorting effect on the type of institution a student would be able to access; more affluent students who achieve higher grades on average are able to progress to more selective institutions, which in turn convey higher future labour market outcomes (Ibid,.).

Although attainment appears to be the most significant factor in participation, Chowdry et al. exercise caution in interpreting these results, suggesting that attainment might be explained in part by the idea that;

> ‘Pupils look forward when making decisions about what qualifications to attempt at ages 16 and 18 years, and indeed when deciding how much effort to put into school work. If disadvantaged pupils feel that HE is ‘not for people like them’, then it may be that their achievement in school simply reflects anticipated barriers to participation in HE, rather than the other way around’ (Ibid,. p. 454).

Furthermore, Crawford and colleagues suggest ‘low achievement earlier in the school system is itself likely to have a strong influence on both effort and expectations of students’ (2017). Research into the effect of attainment grouping on educational progress and teaching expectations demonstrates the ‘double disadvantage’ experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds encountered from as early as Key Stage 1 (KS1), whereby low attaining pupils make less educational progress than their peers in higher sets (Francis et al., 2019). Such findings suggest that efforts to improve access to HE should be focused on raising attainment throughout schooling, in order to achieve equality of opportunity at the age of 16, rather than focusing on Post-16 pupils studying A Levels who are already highly likely to progress to HE.

Historically, the acknowledgement that attainment at GCSE or earlier presents a significant barrier to university progression has been met with the suggestion from some that this means, ‘disparity in participation is not a problem caused by higher education nor one which higher education is able to resolve’ (Bekhradnia, 2003, p. 4). However, the increasing expectation from government that universities play a role in the raising of attainment in schools (Blake, 2022; Office for Students, 2020c), and the pressure to use contextualised

admissions in order to reflect these differing levels of attainment, (Boliver et al., 2019; Office for Students, 2019a) has placed more responsibility on universities to help address the attainment gap in schools.

Improving the absolute attainment levels of pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is in itself a laudable social justice aim. That said, in terms of increasing progression to HE as a vehicle for social mobility, the attainment of pupils from these backgrounds must also improve relative to their higher socioeconomic peers, if admission to university is going to remain predominately based upon attainment, and the number of places available does not increase.[8] Improving relative attainment positions the interests of many middle-class parents in direct competition with such school-level interventions. Within a system where there is only a limited number of places, especially at the most prestigious institutions, it is misleading to imply that a net increase in attainment will ensure disadvantaged children the opportunity to move up the ladder. It is only an increase in their attainment relative to their peers that will afford disadvantaged pupils the opportunity to be socially mobile, if progression to university is the sole vehicle for this. Bourdieu classifies this as the ultimate failure of the education system, its giving 'recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one' (1974, p. 32).

The focus on attainment as a vehicle for progression to HE only offers a partial explanation at best for the difference in progression rates. Research by Boliver (2013), Crawford et al. (2017) and others, demonstrates that even when disadvantaged children achieve comparable grades with their peers, they are less likely to progress to HE or to a professional career. The potentially meritocratic effects of reducing the attainment gap - even if possible - is not reflected in the composition of universities and professions. The struggle to raise attainment is limited by the relative nature of academic achievement and the additional externalities (such as private tutoring), many middle-class parents are able to harness using cultural, social and economic capital. The link between HE and social mobility, and the challenges this poses to increasing progression from under-represented groups, is examined further in Chapter 4.

[8] The number of places available in higher education and the funding of those places is in itself a contested policy issue. The government is currently consulting on the introduction of minimum entry requirements and student number controls (Department for Education, 2022a) as part of its response to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, often called the Augar Review (Augar, 2019).

This chapter now turns to discuss the different and intersecting factors which influence attainment and, as a result, progression to HE.

Socioeconomic Background

Despite the expansion of HE, participation remains highly stratified by family background. Discussions around socioeconomic background use a range of terms, including ‘poor’, ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘working-class’ and ‘rich, ‘advantaged’ or ‘middle-class’. All of these terms create binaries which do not accurately reflect the gradations commensurate with the reality of social and economic structures. There are also different ways of measuring an individual’s socioeconomic position; economists may emphasise household income, sociologists parental social class (in which income measurements often play a part), and geographers place-based measures. These measures often yield different and sometimes conflicting ideas around social class and social mobility, which is explored further in Chapter 4. Increasing HE progression by those understood to be from disadvantaged social classes has been a consistent focus of progression to HE policy over the past twenty years.

As well as its influence on attainment, research has found that family background has a significant effect on many other elements of the education system, which may both contribute to the attainment gap, and provide further barriers to pupils from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds progressing to HE. Jackson and colleagues term these the primary and secondary effects of socioeconomic status (2007). Secondary effects include: selection of the most appropriate primary and secondary schools; homework and revision help; choices regarding FE, HE and careers; extracurricular activities; and in the development of so called ‘soft skills’ (Chowdry et al., 2013; Kirby, 2016; McKnight, 2015, p. 40). These are perceived by middle-class parents to bring about advantage in both HE and the job market (Brown, 2003). In her ethnographic work Lareau termed the intensive efforts of middle-class parents to foster the particular talents of their children, ‘concerted cultivation’ (2011; 2008). Weis and colleagues interrogate such behavior specifically in relation to progression to HE, terming the way in which middle-class parents ‘race’ to ensure their children progress to highly competitive colleges in the USA as ‘class warfare’ (2014). Research by Boliver suggests that these attributes are brought to bear in the admissions process to HE, which use personal statements, teachers’ references and face-to-face interviews. Here she asserts, ‘all three of these more subjective selection tools almost inevitably favour applicants from more socially advantaged backgrounds’ (2013, p. 3).

Reay and colleagues suggest that there is a disparity in entitlement regarding HE, with students from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds displaying confidence in their future success at university, in contrast to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (2010). Reay suggests this is due to their progression being seen as 'natural' or a 'non-choice', by many middle-class students and their families, but this same decision is more likely to feel alien and 'not for the likes of us' by some working-class students (2005a). Archer and colleagues find that 'more powerful groups, like the middle classes, tend to enjoy a greater synergy between their own life-worlds and those of dominant societal institutions and structures, and hence benefit from a privileged ability to know, understand and play the "game"' (2007, p. 221).

It is not just pupils as individuals, but their wider families, who feel alienated by formal systems of schooling. Clayton and colleagues find that some working-class parents struggle to navigate education systems and their attempts are often interpreted negatively in school as being 'angry' or 'problematic' (2009). With regards to HE, Thomas and Quinn suggest a fear found amongst some working-class parents that university may result in 'abandoning the family and its norms and values' (2006, p. 63). Reay and colleagues argue that this 'synergy', or lack thereof, between the family and the institution creates a feeling of alienation for some working-class parents when navigating the pathways to HE with their children (2005b). This study is framed around the progression rates of young people, but it is important to acknowledge that they do not exist in isolation; the thoughts and experiences of their families are of relevance to this thesis.

Geography

Recent literature has looked much more closely at the relationship between geography and progression to HE. Donnelly and Evans suggest that a focus solely on class fails to recognise 'the ways mobility decisions are complexly embedded within communities' (2016, p.88). In a similar vein, Allen and Hollingwood in their analysis of place, suggest that, 'we cannot look at the role of school or family in shaping aspiration without looking at the spatial context in which these practices take place' (2013, p. 513). Geographical differences in progression to HE are stark, with significant regional variation. Analysis from UCAS in 2016 found that pupils in the North East and South West were 38% less likely to progress to university than their London peers (2016, p. 22). Additionally, there are variations between

different types of settlement, such as rural and coastal areas, which tend to have significantly lower rates of HE progression than urban centres (Bridge Group, 2019; Bright, 2011; Spielhofer et al., 2011; Wilkinson & Lane, 2010).

Pupils living in 'disadvantaged' places are often described as having low aspirations and are stigmatised by their belonging to these 'undesirable' places (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013). Massey argues that mobility - the act of leaving these places in order to progress to HE and employment - is not just a physical act of moving, but a means of engagement with wider spatial relations of power (2004). Historically these places have been characterised as deficient, and termed 'socially hollowed out' and 'left behind Britain' (Social Mobility Commission, 2016), not helped by 'aspatial' policy solutions (Cunningham & Savage, 2015, p. 321). More recently policy has become more place focused (Wiseman et al., 2017), with initiatives such as Opportunity Areas[9] and placed-based consortia for Uni Connect. However, Batey and Brown add a note of caution with regards to geographical intervention, stating that 'a degree of inefficiency is built into targeting by area, because people who are not the intended beneficiaries will be included' (2007, p. 2775). This has been echoed in the criticism of the place-based POLAR index used by the OfS to measure HE participation rates (Gorard et al., 2017).

Both progression to HE as a whole, and progression to different types of institution, varies significantly by geography. The traditional, and still dominant, narrative surrounding HE is one of movement by individual students to a geographically distant university. However, research from Donnelly and Gamsu suggests this is no longer the reality of the majority of students' experiences, with only 47% of those entering HE in 2014 regionally mobile (2018, p. 964). Instead, it is suggested that mobility and class strongly intersect; 51% of mobile students have a university-educated parent and 74.6% of private school pupils are regionally mobile (Ibid,. p. 968). This dominant model of university progression, closely resembling that of elite private boarding schools (Anderson, 1992; Holdsworth, 2009) is primarily the pursuit of middle-class students (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, p. 967).

[9] The Opportunity Areas programme was announced in October 2016, with initial six areas identified and a further six areas were announced in January 2017. The government describes the primary purpose of Opportunity Areas as, 'to focus local and national resources on a common goal - to increase social mobility' (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 1)

The most notable influence over mobility to university is the 'home region' of the individual. Here, students from the North East and North West are far less likely to be regionally mobile than their counterparts in the south. Geography remains the strongest indicator of mobility, even when considering social background. In addition to progression rates, there is a difference not only in participation, but in the 'sorting of students' between institutions (Gibbons & Vignoles, 2009, p. 3). Gibbons and Vignoles suggest, 'even if distance has no effect on participation, it could affect choice of institution, and hence the sorting of students across institutions, both within and between cities' (Ibid,. p. 3). This is particularly relevant for the differing progression rates to highly selective institutions, rather than university more broadly, when distance to such institutions may be much further.

Rees et al. argue that 'learner identities' are regionally and socially specific and regions such as the North East have higher concentrations of working-class post-industrial areas (1997). Arguably, these areas have developed what Willmott and Young described as 'working-class localism' (1965), providing a specific and localised 'structure of feeling'[10] (Williams, 1978), which elicits a stronger attachment to a local area. However, the North East remains an anomaly, with not only working-class students choosing to remain in the region. Donnelly and Gamsu suggest this could be a result of the region's remoteness from other urban centres, the presence of a range of different universities, and the distance from the 'Golden Triangle'[11] institutions in the South East (2018, p. 976). The exception of North East students to the dominant discourse of middle-class university progression demonstrate that there is no 'simple binary' between class based mobilities. Donnelly and Gamsu are keen to assert that the act of being regionally mobile is not in and of itself of importance, but that it is the 'broader geography of uneven economic development which students' spatial trajectories are located in which determines the structure of local opportunities on graduation' (2018, p. 977).

[10] Raynard Williams' first coined the concept of the 'structure of feeling' in the 1970s in an attempt to describe the irreconcilable paradox of lived social experience, as opposed to official and defined understandings.

[11] The Golden Triangle is an unofficial name for a group of research-intensive universities in the southern English cities of Oxford, Cambridge and London. The University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge create two points of the triangle. The third point includes several London institutions; Imperial College, University College London (UCL), King's College London (KCL) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). There is criticism from elsewhere in the sector that the research funding received by these institutions is disproportionate and not in the best interests of the country.

Geographic disadvantage is mirrored in access to university access interventions, where both public and philanthropic funding in recent years has been focused upon urban areas, where it is more cost effective to reach larger groups of pupils, rather than in parts of the country with more dispersed populations. Although there are examples of organisations investing in delivering programmes in more remote areas, such as The Brilliant Club[12], Teach First[13] and The Access Project[14], as well as online provision, such as the mentoring platform Brightside[15], there remains a disparity in the provision available across the UK. This can be seen both in terms of what is available to different schools, and the logistical challenges of being involved. Underpinning this is an ongoing 'time and cost implication for schools and pupils who want to travel' (Rünz, 2018, p. 5) in order to visit universities and participate in activities offered on campus.

Race and Ethnicity

The uneven geographical distribution of different ethnicities creates clear intersections between place and ethnicity, where London has a far more diverse ethnic composition than any other region, and the highest rates of progression to HE. Both Crawford and Greaves, and Modood, find that ethnic minorities are substantially more likely to go to university than White British pupils, and this has been so for more than two decades (2015; 1993). Kirby and Cullinane suggest that whilst minority ethnic groups as a whole are over-represented at university, this claim can be misleading due to the high participation levels from particular ethnic groups (e.g. Indian and Chinese rather than Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller) (2016, p. 3). This is further stratified by selectivity (Boliver, 2015a, 2016), where White British students are more likely to progress to an 'old' university than any other ethnic group (Shiner & Modood, 2002).

In policy terms, the intersection of class and race in progression to HE has focused attention particularly on the low participation of White working-class boys, with only around 10% of this group progressing to HE each year (Baars et al., 2016; Wiseman et al., 2017). Research published by the Sutton Trust suggests that this group were significantly less likely to take A Levels (Kirby & Cullinane, 2016), supporting Crawford and colleagues' work that GCSE attainment is the main barrier to further widening participation for White working-class boys

[12] The Brilliant Club: https://thebrilliantclub.org/ (Accessed 13/03/2022).
[13] Teach First: https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/training-programme (Accessed 13/03/2022).
[14] The Access Project: https://www.theaccessproject.org.uk/schools (Accessed 13/03/2022).
[15] Brightside: https://brightsidementoring.org/ (Accessed 13/03/2022).

(2013; 2014; 2017). They acknowledge that there may be different factors driving this, including expectations and cultural norms of different groups.

A wealth of research suggests that applicants from Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi backgrounds were substantially less likely than their White counterparts to be offered places at Russell Group universities, even when they had achieved the same A-level grades (Boliver, 2013; Noden et al., 2014; Parel & Boliver, 2014). Such findings received significant push back from the universities in question, and the Russell Group issued a statement blaming the disparity on 'poor A-level [subject] choices, which lead them to fail to meet entry requirements', and on applicants from these groups being 'more likely to apply for the most over-subscribed [degree] courses' (Coughlan, 2013). This response subtly blames the poor decision-making of young people, and demonstrates a clear belief from the university sector that information-giving sits at the core of resolving this difference in progression.

In addition to the admissions process itself, Stuart and colleagues suggest that ethnicity impacts in particular ways on students' sense of belonging and identity within the HE environment (2011). Reay highlights the significant barriers minority ethnic students face in her research into student experiences at Oxbridge, including the intersection between race and poverty (2018). Research by Crozier and colleagues demonstrates that the emphasis is placed upon ethnic minority students to 'fit in' rather than recognising this exclusion as a 'white majority act' (2016, p. 45). They suggest that students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are often accused of 'not mixing', or 'grouping', which is seen as challenging the norm of White dominance (2016; Puwar, 2004), and that their very presence in institutions is seen as 'devaluing' the potential capital which can be derived from the experience (Morley, 2003). This is exacerbated by the neoliberal market conditions, which frame university experiences as an exercise in maximising the development of capital and subsequent labour market returns (Crozier et al., 2016, p. 50).

This process of 'Othering' or alienation begins during students' first interactions with universities, and is an important consideration of progression to HE work; how this is targeted and who is involved. The complexities of how students perceive HE clearly has implications for whether they make choices to keep this option open to them at Post-16, and provides a clear mandate not only for earlier intervention but diverse representation.

Gender

Women are over-represented across HE and the gender gap is growing, with women 36.7% more likely than men to enter HE, and 29% more likely to enter a high tariff institution (UCAS, 2018a). Research commissioned by UCU suggests this could be due to boys seeing other routes more favourably than their female counterparts (2014, p. 19). Thornton and colleagues found that men in their survey are more likely to eschew the idea of a highly selective university, with 36% stating that elite universities 'are not for people like me', compared to 30% of women (2014, p. 124). Baars and colleagues suggest that this may in part be due to the tendency of young men to access fewer types of advice and guidance, preferring informal information sources, including family and teachers (2016). The picture is not without nuance: women progress to HE in greater numbers, but men still outperform women in some of the most prestigious areas, including some of the highest tariff institutions, and progression onto science and engineering courses (Hillman & Robinson, 2016, p. 6). Walker and Zhu argue that women have greater incentives to gain a degree, not because the financial gains are greater for women than men, but because of the hugely reduced earnings non-graduate women see in relation to non-graduate men (2013).

The debate regarding the seeming reversal of gender inequality within the university sector is ongoing, with some suggesting that male under-representation within HE is of little importance in the context of higher male earnings for both graduate and non-graduate men. A 2010 report for the HE Academy summed this up; 'those opposing this refocusing [on men] suggest that it fuels moral panic about women's HE progress, detracts from ongoing female disadvantages, and from a much larger socio-economic gap within the student body' (Higher Education Academy, 2010, p. 3). Nonetheless, in a report on the participation of young men in HE, Hillman and Robinson argue that 'policymaking is not a zero-sum game', and suggest lower male progression rates should be understood as part of the wider factors impacting not only progression, but retention and degree performance (2016, p. 12).

School Environment

Many of the factors previously discussed in this chapter coalesce within any given school. Some researchers, for example Reay and colleagues, present the school as a mediator of its intake, but crucially controlled by the summation of those individuals who make up its roll. They suggest that 'wider socio-economic cultures impact on organisational practices within schools and colleges in ways which [...] also shape opportunities and constraints within the

higher education choice process' (2001, p. 2). Research attempting to understand the influence of schools has extended Bourdieu's concept of habitus, 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' (1977, p. 72), to an institutional level, a concept I explore further in Chapter 10. In its institutional formulation, habitus can be understood as, 'a product of the school's history and experiences, as well as its pupils and staff (past and present)' (Ingram, 2009, p. 424). Like individual habitus, a school's habitus has capacity for change but 'through dint of their collective nature are less fluid than individual habitus' (Reay, 1998, p. 521). Differences between schools can be seen in delivery of the core curriculum (Iannelli, 2013), subjects available for pupils to pursue at GCSE (Anders et al., 2018; Moulton et al., 2018), and the extracurricular opportunities available (Stuart et al., 2011), all of which may influence progression to HE. Moreover, Donnelly points to the 'hidden curriculum', whereby subtle messages regarding teachers' expectations surrounding post school and HE choices are transmitted through the routines of school life (2014, 2015a).

Pupils from private schools are significantly more likely to progress to HE and to highly selective institutions, but the interaction between school environment and HE progression is far wider ranging and nuanced than a binary divide between private and state schooling (Crawford et al., 2016; Green et al., 2017). This thesis focuses on pupils within the state schooling system. The increasing policy focus on parental 'choice' of schooling, and the diversifying of the education 'marketplace', has created an additional vehicle for those in positions of privilege to 'keep ahead' (Ball, 2002). Children growing up in low income households are likely to live in areas with similar demographics, and to attend schools with poorer educational outcomes and progression rates to HE (Clifton & Cook, 2012; Kintrea et al., 2011). Wealthier parents are able to afford houses in 'good catchment areas' (Butler & Hamnett, 2010), transport children greater distances (Apple, 2001), and navigate the increasingly complex admission systems to ensure children attend their desired school (Ball et al., 1994, p. 19). In contrast, disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be able to compete and are 'crowded out' of the market (Reay, 2012).

There is also a significant difference in the CIAG offered across different schools. Reay and colleagues found that schools with more advantaged intakes provided greater quantity and quality of careers advice in comparison to those with more disadvantaged intakes (2005b). Pupils attending schools with the most disadvantaged intakes reported that they had little careers advice, and what was offered was inconsequential and often unhelpful. One student

in the study encapsulated this sentiment with the response, "'careers advice, what careers advice?"' (Ibid,. p. 39). Recent research from UCAS found that this social gradient remained, with the result that disadvantaged students tend to consider the prospect of HE later than their more advantaged peers (2021, p. 8).

The type of school attended influences not only progression to HE, but specifically progression to highly selective institutions. The Sutton Trust found that 43% of state secondary school teachers would rarely or never advise their 'bright' pupils to apply to Oxbridge, with just 21% saying they would always do so (2016). A majority (60%) reported that this was because they never advise students on the right university for them, suggesting that although CIAG is focused in schools, many teachers lack confidence in discussing HE options with pupils. Kirby suggests this may be a result of the proportionally fewer state school teachers who have attended Oxbridge; 10% compared to 30% of independent school teachers (2015, p. 5). Oliver and Kettley examined the role of teachers as agents of the process of HE progression. They found that the personal beliefs, experiences and connections of teachers, played a significant role in being either 'facilitators or gatekeepers' for students' applications, especially regarding highly selective institutions (2010, p. 750). The importance of the role of the teacher is reinforced by Reay's research, where disadvantaged students cited the proactive efforts of individual teachers as being decisive in their application to elite institutions (2009).

Selectivity in Universities

University Categorisations

Although much of the preceding chapter has discussed 'progression to HE' as a single concept, the UK HE sector is not homogenous, and there are significant differences between institutions. Universities are ranked, grouped and categorised in many different ways. These categorisations are influential on the way in which institutions are perceived by pupils, parents, schools and the wider public.

Issues of equal representation are most acute at more highly selective institutions (Crawford et al., 2017; Gibbons & Vignoles, 2009), and more recent policy interventions, such as APPs and the OfS' national targets, reflect this (2019b). The different ways in which universities are classified, ranked and categorised are of great concern to all institutions in the quasi-market environment of modern HE, where accolades are frequently used for marketing and

recruitment purposes. Moreover, the terms ‘elite’, ‘selective’, and ‘highly selective’, amongst others are often bandied around in the describing, marketing and classifying of institutions.

The final section of this chapter examines some of the common ways in which universities are categorised. First, it looks at the age of a university, university rankings in league tables, and the formation of mission groups. It then turns to look at two more bureaucratic methods of categorisation; the creation of the ‘highly selective’ metric by the DfE, and the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In addition to these categorisations, many English universities are included in an array of global league tables, such as the QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education World University Rankings, however, these are less relevant to my England based research and are not discussed in detail.

Exploring these different types of university, and their categorisations, is important in the current neoliberal, marketised HE system, where universities must compete with each other for students. These categorisations, groupings and types create hierarchies where universities are not seen as equal. Where this has social justice implications is in the distribution of students across different institutions. Newer universities, those with lower league table positions, and those who are part of less esteemed mission groups, all tend to have significantly more diverse intakes of students. This creates a clustering effect, whereby students from under-represented groups are more likely to be found in less prestigious institutions, which have poorer graduate outcomes (van der Erve et al., 2021). This negatively impacts upon the social mobility of these students (Sutton Trust, 2021).

University Age and Formation

Both the number and types of universities have changed over time. The establishment of different institutions at different times have created different – and often overlapping – descriptors. For example, the UK’s two oldest universities, Oxford and Cambridge, are often termed ‘Oxbridge’. They are also included in the group of ‘ancient’ universities founded in medieval and early modern period alongside four Scottish institutions; St Andrew’s, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and the University of Dublin in Ireland. Collegiate universities, mostly founded in the early 1800s or before, include some of the ‘ancients’, as well as the somewhat later established University of Durham. Later again, redbrick universities such as Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield were founded in the late 1800s. There is significant overlap between the terms redbrick, plate-

glass and civic universities, the latter of which also include institutions such as Nottingham, Newcastle and Reading. Finally, a wave of 'new' universities and polytechnics were created during the Robbins' era of university expansion in the 1960s, including Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities in the North East, amongst many others (Archer, 2003; Scott, 1995b; Tight, 1988).

A key shift towards the current configuration of different universities can be seen in the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*, which granted thirty five polytechnic institutions full university status, doubling both the number of institutions and university students in the process (Halsey & Webb, 2000). Subsequently, universities are often described as 'Pre' and 'Post-92' institutions, creating a binary divide which is often associated with prestige. The 1992 Act was rapidly followed by the two main means of differentiation between institutions we see today; the introduction of league tables in 1993, and the formation of the first mission group in 1994.

University League Tables

A consequence of the increasing marketisation of HE has been the vast expansion in league tables. Universities are consistently ranked using a wide range of metrics as part of both national and international tables (Greatrix, 2020). The first university league tables for the UK were published in 1993, and since then, there has been a proliferation of different rankings published covering all aspects of university life. There are three main league tables used in the UK for undergraduate admissions purposes: *The Guardian University Guide* (The Guardian, 2021), *The Complete University Guid*e (Oliver et al., 2020) and the *Times Good Universities Guide* (O'Leary, 2020). They all attempt to rank universities based on a range of different strengths including: entry standards; the quality of teaching and learning; student satisfaction; research quality; and graduate outcomes. These league tables are advertised to students on the basis of making informed decisions as consumers; selecting the best university for them based on the market information. The result is that universities see their position in the league tables as crucial for the attraction of students to their institutions.

Universities are ranked according to a wide variety of metrics and groupings, which may have superficially different outcomes for individual institutions, depending on what is

measured. For example, in the Guardian University League Table 2019[16], the University of East Anglia ranks 1st for 'value added', but 79th for 'career 6 months after graduating'. In contrast, in the Complete University Rankings[17] it is ranked 48th for the similar sounding 'graduate prospects'. Some seemingly significant year on year change can be seen in the league tables, with the University of Lincoln moving up twenty-five places in a single year (2018-2019), from 47th to 22nd overall in *The Guardian University Guide* (The Guardian, 2021). That said, the majority of institutions see their rankings across all three league tables remain relatively static year on year. Boliver suggests that 'all three extant university rankings are highly correlated with one another' (2015b, p. 5).

Despite significant efforts from more recently established universities, they are consistently perceived as less prestigious than their older counterparts and achieve consistently lower positions in league table rankings (Brennan & Shah, 2003). In a marketised HE environment with significantly different levels of prestige, Baker and Brown argue that choice becomes deeply problematic for equality of progression to HE (2007). Choice frequently undermines efforts to diversify the HE sector, with students from under-represented groups reporting that they selected less prestigious institutions based on feelings of 'fitting in' there (Reay et al., 2010).

Mission Groups

In the wake of massification of HE, brought in by the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act,* and the 1993 publication of the first university league tables, came the formation of the first university mission group. The Russell Group was formed in 1994 with the specific purpose of 'advancing its members interests as large "research-intensive universities"' (Boliver, 2015b, p. 5). Subsequently, and defined against the Russell Group, further mission groups emerged in order to represent particular groups of interests; the (now defunct) 1994 Group formed in 1994, Million+ formed in 1997, GuildHE and University Alliance formed in 2006 and latterly, the Cathedrals Group formed in 2013. Fillipakou and Tapper suggest mission groups were born out of the inability of the existing representative body, Universities UK, to effectively express the views of what was by this point a highly diverse sector. Mission

[16] The Guardian University League Table for 2019 can be accessed here: https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2018/may/29/university-league-tables-2019 (Accessed 13/03/2022).
[17] The Complete University Rankings for 2019 can be accessed here: https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings (Accessed 13/03/2022).

groups were therefore, ‘a product of the desire of different self-identified groups of universities to express policy positions that they believe will enhance the welfare of their own members’ (Filippakou & Tapper, 2015, p. 124). These reflect not only different ‘brand images’ (Kress, 1989), but different ‘epistemological positions and commitments [which] have ontological significance: on the character and purposes of higher education’ (Filippakou & Tapper, 2015, p. 124).

Although these mission groups have no formal admission criteria, the Russell Group has been particularly successful in its claim to represent the UK’s ‘leading universities’, and describe their members as ‘world-class, research-intensive universities’ (Russell Group, 2021). This claim has been challenged by those who suggest that what began explicitly as a lobbying group has become a ‘pervasive brand’ and an ‘oligarchy’ (Coughlan, 2014), which ignores the fact that many Russell Group institutions are being outperformed by non-Russell Group institutions on measures including the research intensity on which they define themselves (Boliver, 2015b, p. 15). Despite this, the Russell Group has gained a semi-official status, reinforced by its inclusion in DfE destinations data, where they are the only mission group to have published data as a separate group (Department for Education, 2019). The marketing of the Russell Group members as ‘prestigious’ and ‘elite’ has been highly successful amongst students, parents and schools. Research conducted by YouthSite found that the Russell Group was ‘by far and away the best recognised group regardless of university attended’, with 94% of students who were aware of mission groups recognising it, compared to just 8% for GuildHE (Orsier, 2013).

Russell Group universities are amongst those with the most acute gaps in participation rates from under-represented groups (Stevens & Turhan, 2020). 60% of those from independent schools who progress to HE attend a Russell Group university, compared to just under 25% of those from comprehensives and sixth form colleges (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018, p. 3). In 2016-17, nine Russell Group institutions took fewer than 70% of their UK domiciled full time undergraduate entrants from state schools (Ibid,. p. 9). The North East has two Russell Group institutions; the University of Newcastle and Durham University and the concentration of Russell Group universities in the north of England is higher than any other region outside of London. However, the North East of England also has a high proportion of local authorities with the lowest acceptance rates to Russell Group institutions (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018, p. 28).

Belfield and colleagues find that attending a Russell Group university increases earnings by around 10% more than the average degree (2018, p. 46). Even after controlling for differences in attainment, as Russell Group universities select the highest attaining students, these universities still provide the highest returns on average. However, the authors make clear that their analysis cannot distinguish between the differences in the economic value of the skills provided by the universities, or the 'signalling' value of having attended a prestigious university (Ibid,. p. 62).

DfE Top Third

Since 2006 the DfE have defined 'highly selective' to mean 'the top third of HE providers when ranked by mean UCAS tariff score from the top three A level grades of entrants' (2017b, p. 21). This definition is used to inform regulation and policy from the OfS focused on the 'highly selective progression gap' (2019b). Its use in this study is discussed in Chapter 6. Although the metric has been in use since 2006, it does not appear to have permeated into the public sphere, and does not commonly appear in research or mainstream discussion. The institutions included in this group change every year to reflect the fluidity in UCAS tariff scores, although over 80% of HEIs remained in the top third for 9 consecutive years, from 2006/07 to 2014/15 (Department for Education, 2017b, p. 21).

In 2020 the DfE announced they would be replacing the 'Top Third' classification with a new 'High Tariff Providers' metric (2018d). The new measure moves from including the top third of institutions to the top third of students, in order to reflect the fact that the most selective institutions tend to be bigger than less selective institutions. Although there are significant similarities between the two, the High Tariff Providers metric includes fewer universities and is expected to be more volatile over time (Ibid,.). This change may make it more difficult for the metric to be used for research purposes as there will be less continuity. The data in this study was collected prior to the change to 'High Tariff Providers' and uses the old 'Top Third' metric.

The TEF

Another clear example of the datafication of policy can be seen in the introduction of the TEF by the OfS in 2017. The purported aim of the TEF was to provide a more standardised metric, implemented by the regulator. It was billed as an attempt to both help 'prospective

students to choose where to study', and 'encourage universities and colleges to work with their students to develop an even better student experience for all' (Office for Students, 2018a). The TEF provided further differentiation between universities, with institutions awarded gold, silver or bronze (Ibid,.). Although the introduction of the TEF, and its promotion of teaching rather than research, had the potential to reshape the landscape of university rankings and recognise those institutions which provided a diverse intake of students with excellent teaching, this potential for change has not been realised. The TEF remains linked to labour market outcomes for graduates, which reflects existing inequalities, rather than the quality of teaching. This compounds the challenges faced by institutions with more diverse, less socially advantaged intakes.

The TEF's introduction and infancy has been met by significant sector level criticism regarding the fitness for its self-proclaimed purpose of informing students, asserting that 'applicants will be misled' and it 'doesn't inform students' (Morris, 2019; Strike, 2016). In 2018, research suggested that fewer than one in five applicants knew what the TEF was prior to applying, and a smaller percentage suggested they had used the TEF to make their application choice (UCAS, 2018b). Both the Pearce Review (2019) and a statistical evaluation from the Office for National Statistics (G. James et al., 2019) raised concerns of the consistency of the metric and its fitness for purpose. The TEF was suspended throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and in June 2021 the OfS wrote to universities asking them to not to use their TEF awards in marketing or promotional materials from September 2021 (Millward, 2021). The OfS has released a further consultation on the future of TEF in January 2022 (Office for Students, 2022). Despite efforts to measure teaching standards, entry standards remain of significant influence, and are reflected in all major league tables and the TEF.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the structural barriers and influences on university progression rates. It first considers attainment as a lens through which other structural barriers are reflected, and suggests that attainment at GCSE, and to a lesser extent A Level, is a crucial factor in students from under-represented groups progressing to HE. It goes on to examine the different factors which contribute to lower progression rates of particular groups including socioeconomic background, geography, ethnicity, gender and school environment.

Finally, this chapter examines the ways in which universities are ranked, grouped and categorised, arguing that in a neoliberal, marketised HE system, these categorisations undermine efforts to improve social justice through progression to HE. Newer universities have significantly more diverse intakes of students, however these institutions are less prestigious than their older counterparts, attain lower positions in league tables, and are not part of the dominant Russell Group. In order to achieve more social justice in access to HE, access and participation strategies are increasingly focused on more prestigious institutions.

The following chapter provides further context for this study, considering some of the key themes underpinning this research. This includes a discussion on social mobility and social justice and an outline of two different narratives surrounding progression to HE; ‘raising aspirations’ and ‘possible selves’.

Chapter 4 – Dominant Discourses in Progression to Higher Education

Introduction

This chapter presents a critique of some of the key policy discourses currently influencing progression to HE. In doing so, it grapples with the thesis on both the policy science and policy scholarship levels discussed in Chapter 1; by taking a policy sociology perspective in its examination of the limitations and problems of the current discourses – research *of* policy - whilst also using these discourses in analysis '*for* policy', suggesting they have value in understanding how the system currently operates (Gerald, 1998).

I look firstly at social mobility as an example of a policy discourse which has been particularly pervasive within progression to HE in recent decades. This chapter examines and problematises social mobility as a lens through which progression to HE is understood, encouraged and prioritised in policy. It offers a discussion of the different ways in which social mobility has been defined and deployed in order to better understand its importance in this research. Whilst acknowledging the limitations and problems of using concepts of social mobility as a theoretical resource, this chapter argues that it is essential to understand the role of social mobility within education policy and in particular, as a driver for access and participation policy over the last two decades.

This chapter then looks at the issue of accountability in English schools. It discusses the ways in which schools are measured and inspected, and positions CIAG and HE progression within this system. It highlights another tension: that high stakes accountability measures create unintended consequences, and many of these cause further problems within the education system. However, within the context of the current system, the inclusion of CIAG and specifically HE progression within accountability measures has increased how schools prioritise this activity. This focus sits alongside the increasing accountability of HEIs through the access and participation agenda.

Two further concepts are discussed in the remainder of the chapter. First, the notion of 'raising aspirations', which suggests that the cause of individuals and groups being under-represented in HE is a result of their being less ambitious for themselves than their peers. It highlights that such ideas ignore the structural barriers faced by many individuals when accessing HE (Archer et al., 2002; Reay, 2017), and that the framing of low rates of

progression as a 'deficit model' places blame on the individuals who do not progress to HE (Ball, 2006).

Finally, this chapter examines the concept of 'possible selves' (Harrison, 2018), as a potentially more useful way of understanding progression to HE than 'raising aspirations', setting out both the benefits and challenges of drawing upon this notion. It is a further example of the two levels on which my thesis works: acknowledging the limitations of the theory of possible selves, whilst positioning it as a more helpful – although still imperfect – concept, one which has the capacity to recognise the structural inequalities faced by individuals whilst also providing a more practitioner-friendly lens within the current system.

Social Mobility – Rocky Foundations?

In a time of polarised politics, it is rare to see full and committed cross party support for any policy or idea, yet social mobility for several decades has seemingly transcended partisan political debate; a 'panacea for British ills' (Keep & Mayhew, 2010, p. 567; Payne, 2012). Through New Labour's adoption of social mobility rhetoric under Tony Blair (2001), the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's pledge that 'improving social mobility is the principle goal of the Coalition Government's social policy' (Clegg in, Cabinet Office, 2011, p. 3), and the Conservative majority government's ongoing commitment to a 'great meritocracy' (May, 2016), all three major parties have all subscribed to social mobility as a key policy discourse. The then Opposition Leader Jeremy Corbyn marked a brief departure from this political hegemony in June 2019 when he announced a refocus on social justice (2019), but under current leader Keir Starmer, Labour appears to have reverted to a social mobility framing (2021). Reay characterises social mobility as having an 'iconic place in English political discourse' (2017, p. 101) and it is important to recognise its centrality to the movement to broaden access to HE, and therefore to this thesis.

Definitions of Social Mobility

Social mobility has developed a multiplicity of synonyms and its use expanded to cover a broad range of ideologies; social justice, equality, equity and meritocracy, are all used interchangeably and frequently merged into a single – often confused – discussion. The deep irony that the term 'meritocracy' has morphed into common political usage, although it was coined by Michael Young (1958) as satire to illustrate the failings of creating a ruling class based on social position, demonstrates the depth of the confusion (Devine & Li, 2013,

p. 767). The generalised way in which such terms are used within policy allows the authors to 'slide over difficult political, practical issues' associated with societal inequalities (Griffiths, 2003, p. 43). This thesis has primarily used social mobility as a lens for theorising the ways in which progression to HE forms part of wider discourse around moving up or down a social hierarchy. However, I also draw upon ideas of social justice and the role of higher education in establishing a more equal society, whereby such hierarchies are narrowed and less defining of life outcomes. Gregg suggests that, 'social mobility is one dimension of social justice' (2019, p.1), albeit one which has dominated much recent policy and political discussion. However, it is important to acknowledge that social mobility does not necessarily equal social justice and in policy terms is often significantly removed from aspirations of equality across society, instead focusing on the mobility of a few chosen individuals within what remains a deeply unequal society. This perpetuates what Brown describes as a 'narrow version justice as fairness' (2013, p. 690), rather than a wider focus on the 'conditions' (Ibid, p. 691). As Swift demonstrates, social mobility as measured by 'fluidity' tells us nothing about the distribution of opportunities in any more general sense' (2004, p. 3). Later in this chapter I discuss further the unhelpful 'false binary' between social justice and social mobility.

On its website the Social Mobility Commission, an independent statutory body with responsibility for monitoring and promoting social mobility in England, defines social mobility as, 'the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents.'[18] Yet underlying any definition of social mobility is the acknowledgement that it is not a priori term, but instead an intensely political one with many contested elements, whose interpretation and use has become convoluted, nuanced and politically charged. It is important therefore to firstly place social mobility as a term in its political context, before discussing its meaning and use with particular reference to education and specifically, progression to HE.

The rise of New Labour brought a concerted effort to 'refocus the discussion' on social equality, moving from the traditional Labour concept of equality of condition, towards that of equality of opportunity (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2007, p. 526). Blair's *'Education, Education, Education*' manifesto (1996) offered a headline insight into the thrust of Labour policy, however, social mobility under Labour actually encompassed a broader understanding of

[18] Social Mobility Commission, https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission/about#:~:text=Patrick%20White,Definition%20of%20social%20mobility,lower%20level%20of%20social%20mobility (Accessed June 2022).

social mobility than solely mobility via education. Instead, social mobility described 'recurrent, lifelong equality of opportunity, prioritising the closing of social class gaps in life chances between the poorest and those in the middle of the income distribution…'(Pearce, 2011, p. 4). Indeed, David Miliband stated that the 'ultimate test' of any policy was whether it increased social mobility (2005). Pearce argues that from 2010 under the Coalition government the term increasingly narrowed to focus on education, and specifically on the closing of the educational attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers (Cabinet Office, 2011; Pearce, 2011).

Successive Conservative education ministers have placed the rhetoric of social mobility front and centre of their work. Justine Greening launched the *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential* social mobility strategy (Department for Education, 2017), whilst her successor Damian Hinds called social mobility a 'core purpose' of the DfE (2018) and as recently as April 2021, Universities Minister Michelle Donelan called social mobility her 'top priority' (2021). In defining social mobility as an 'education based meritocracy' (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008), education has been presented both as social mobility's silver bullet and Achilles' heel. Rarely in the heat of political debate are the complexities and limitations of education as a vehicle for social mobility fully discussed, which risks social mobility being seen in simplistic terms with simplistic solutions.

In order to examine social mobility further as a discourse, it is imperative to establish a clear understanding of what is being discussed, particularly in light of its multifaceted and contested nature. The definition of social mobility and how it is measured has important – and drastically differing – implications for policymaking (Pearce, 2011, p. 2). Intergenerational and intragenerational mobility; income mobility, social class mobility and educational mobility; absolute and relative mobility all offer different insights into the rate and methodology for defining social mobility. Some terms are more contested than others and I discuss each below in order to provide a clear framing for this study.

The focus, both in terms of academia and politics, has largely centred on intergenerational mobility; the difference in mobility between generations, which Goldthorpe also describes as 'stickiness' (2016, p. 96), rather than intragenerational mobility; the extent to which an individual's income or occupation changes throughout the course of their lives. In part this focus is practical; there has not been reliable data for measuring intragenerational mobility

due to the lack of panel studies that lend themselves to such research (Tampubolon, 2009). However, intergenerational mobility is a fundamental part of the political rhetoric that every generation aspires both to ‘do better’ than its predecessors and, for their children to ‘do better’ again. This discourse of constant improvement is particularly powerful in education, informing the idea that all pupils should have constant, linear and measurable progress.

From here, what is meant by social mobility diversifies into two broad schools of thought often described as ‘economic’ and ‘sociological’. Research undertaken by economists, most notably Blanden et al (2002, 2005; 2004) has demonstrated that social mobility in recent decades has been in decline when measured by income inequality, using two birth cohort studies twelve years apart. More recent research by the Social Mobility Commission appears to affirm this finding (M. Milburn, 2020). Sociologists, led by John Goldthorpe, have strongly criticised both the Blanden et al study, and its findings. They assert that it has methodological flaws such as ‘selective drop out’ of participants, the high level of missing data, the comparison of very different data sets, and the inclusion only of men (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2019; Goldthorpe, 2013; Gorard, 2008). They also disagree about the unit of measurement used; income mobility, as opposed to the sociologically preferred measurement of class mobility (Goldthorpe, 2013, 2016, p. 90).

Criticism of the economists’ work has been compounded by its high profile use across the political spectrum to evidence the pursuit of social mobility through investment in education (Blanden et al., 2012; Blanden & Machin, 2007), and in the widening participation agenda. Blanden and Machin have both defended their work, suggesting replication of their results in other studies (Björklund et al., 2006; Ermisch & Nicoletti, 2005), and cautioned against the over-interpretation of their findings (*Evidence to House of Commons Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families*, 2008). Nonetheless, it has formed what Goldthorpe describes as the ‘consensus view’ of declining social mobility which is now firmly entrenched in popular discourse (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). Goldthorpe has criticised this dominance suggesting that not only does, ‘the consensus view of declining mobility in Britain rests empirically on a single piece of research, it rests in effect on the interpretation of a single variable, the family income variable’ (2013, p. 9). It fails to reflect the view of sociologists that there has been a ‘high degree of constancy in relative rates of class mobility’ when measured by social class (Goldthorpe, 2016, p. 100). Instead sociologists suggest that there has been neither significant increases or decreases in relative social

mobility since the Second World War (Breen, 2004; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 2010; Goldthorpe, 2004), and most importantly for policymaking that 'what can be achieved through education, whether in regard to absolute or relative mobility, appears limited' (Goldthorpe, 2013, p. 431). This position would call into question investment in education as a vehicle for social mobility (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2019).

In further research Goldthorpe and Mills (2008) asserted that when social class is used as a measurement, social mobility remained broadly constant throughout the period, a finding which sits in direct opposition to the economists' work. Goldthorpe does however note that there is 'no inherent reason why results relating to class mobility and to income mobility should tell the same story as regards change over time' (2008, p. 527). This is an important admission, often lost in the debate between class and income mobility disparities; there is no reason for these two measures to provide identical outcomes and this does not necessarily discredit either body of research. In fact, what the disparity between schools of thought could demonstrate is that whilst class mobility has remained static, younger generations earn less than their parents within the same social class as a result of an increasingly economically unequal society.

There are limitations to the measures of both income and class mobility, and disagreement over which measure most accurately reflects changes in individual and family lives. Goldthorpe and McKnight argue that social class captures the more important and permanent features of mobility as a more stable measure than income (2004). However, McIntosh and Monk critique the seven occupational categories used in the Goldthorpe model, and suggest this limits an understanding of the economic variability *within* families (2009). The fight over the single measurement of social mobility does not allow for a more nuanced picture within the field, and has undoubtedly contributed to the misconceptions, in both discussion and policy, which have subsequently unfolded.

The final area of definition regarding social mobility is that of absolute and relative social mobility. Although there is methodological convergence between the economist and sociologist argument, it is the wider misconception regarding these terms which has fuelled such heated debate in the field. Both Blanden et al and Goldthorpe and colleagues measure and assert the importance of relative levels of social mobility. Goldthorpe defines the difference thus: 'absolute rates refer to the *actual proportions* of individuals of given class

origins who are mobile to different class destinations, while relative rates *compare the chances* of individuals of differing class origins arriving at different class destinations and thus indicate the extent of social fluidity' (2013, p. 5). There is widespread agreement that absolute levels of mobility did indeed increase in the decades after the Second World War, attributed to the structural changes within society, most obviously the expansion of professional and managerial positions (Thompson & Simmons, 2013). Increased absolute mobility created a 'contrary impression' that Britain had become a more fluid society, despite the fact that 'the strength of the association between the class positions of children and their parents, considered net of class structural effects, appeared remarkably robust' (Goldthorpe, 2013, p. 433). Moreover, in what Brown describes as 'sociology's inconvenient truth', absolute mobility increases did nothing to narrow the inequalities of life chances associated with relative mobility (2013, p. 681), and from the 1970s onwards expansion of the top of the social structure began to slacken, with the result that absolute social mobility began to stabilise and the apparent 'Golden Age' of social mobility ended.

It is relative mobility with which the modern academic debate has been concerned, as absolute mobility levels can only be increased with the unending continued expansion of professional jobs and therefore more 'room at the top'. When we look at relative social mobility, 'it is simply not possible to increase any form of upward mobility without a commensurate rise in downward mobility' (McKnight, 2015, p. ii). Relative mobility is therefore of much greater importance for both sociology and modern politics.

Social Mobility vs Social Justice – A False Binary?

High levels of intergenerational relative mobility could provide a political justification for the establishment of policies based upon equality of opportunity; every individual could secure a place at 'the top' based upon their own hard work and merit. However, social mobility suggests an acceptance of inequalities across society and a departure from social justice aims; that allowing individuals to move up or down a hierarchy means there must be people at the bottom of this social order. Critics of the political focus on social mobility, such as Reay, suggest that it is used as a damaging distraction from the breadth and depth of these inequalities in British society, describing increasing social mobility as an 'optimistic fantasy' (2017, p. 102). In his speech rejecting social mobility in favour of social justice, Corbyn argued that;

> ‘For decades we’ve been told that inequality doesn’t matter because the education system will allow talented and hard-working people to succeed whatever their background. But the greater inequality has become, the more entrenched it has become’ (2019).

In response, Gregg suggests that Corbyn created a false binary between social mobility and social justice and failed to acknowledge that social mobility was really about, ‘the differences in life chances for all those born into deprivation versus affluence’ (2019). Regardless, the pre-eminence of the rhetoric of social mobility in policy has obscured the need to tackle many social injustices.

During her time as Equalities’ Minister, Theresa May excluded the socioeconomic aspect from the *Equality Act 2010*, stating that ‘you do not improve the lives of those at the bottom by limiting the ambitions and opportunities of others’ (2010). In fact, the process of ‘déclassement or ‘social demotion’ (Peugny, 2007) is enacted by precisely this notion of social fluidity. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, Goldthorpe makes clear that in order for relative mobility rates to become more equal, ‘it is a mathematical necessity, that downward mobility has to increase just as much as upward mobility’ (2016, p. 106). In contrast to this need for ‘mathematical symmetry’ is what Kahneman terms ‘loss aversion’; ‘when directly compared or weighted against each other, losses loom larger than gains’ and there is in fact an ‘asymmetry between the power of positive and negative expectations’ (2012, p. 282). This desire to avoid déclassement from those who stand to lose most through downward social mobility, coupled with their relatively greater resources to avoid this is, Goldthorpe suggests, a ‘powerful resistance to change’ (2016, p. 106). This can be seen in middle-class parents and private schools opposing greater equality of access to HE, through contextualised offers and targeted access programmes (Gant, 2019; Weale, 2020). Moreover, countries with high income inequality, such as the US and the UK, also have lower social mobility (Ermisch et al., 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), demonstrated by Alan Kruger’s ‘Great Gatsby Curve’ (2012). This relationship between social mobility and social justice is the source of ongoing political and sociological debate. Within this debate, the role of education remains a significant and contested issue.

Education Policy – A Silver Bullet for Social Mobility?

A narrowed understanding of social mobility places the education system under increasing pressure to meet the demands of a political agenda, in what Pearce describes as the

‘political sublimation’ away from wider drivers of inequality such as the economy (2011, p. 8). In doing so, policymakers ignore the assertion from academics and others that the education system alone is a fundamentally flawed vehicle for social mobility (Goldthorpe, 2013; Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008; Gorard, 2010). Reay terms the over-reliance on education as a silver bullet for social mobility as ‘a prevailing fallacy’ within policy making (2006, p. 291).

The extent to which education can act as a vehicle for social mobility is much researched and contested. Indeed, Bourdieu suggests that education is not the site of social restructuring but instead;

> ‘One of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one’ (1974, p. 32).

Duckworth and Cochrane take this further, asserting that far from promoting social mobility, the education system in fact dupes the working classes into a state of ‘false consciousness’ by falsely promising mobility, and thereby ensuring they buy into their own repression (2012, p. 587). Brown suggests that attempting to ‘narrow the gap’ in attainment and increase progression to HE assumes that education exists in a vacuum. This has resulted in an ‘opportunity trap’ whereby middle-class parents invest larger and larger sums in beating a system set up to ensure greater social mobility, and preventing their own offspring falling through the ‘glass floor’ (2003, p. 142). Their actions limit the upward mobility of those working-class pupils who fulfil the demands of higher attainment levels and progression to HE. Education as it is currently conceived and organised, can therefore only ever be part of the answer to social mobility.

Higher Education and Social Mobility

Given that access to the highest paid jobs is often and increasingly dependent on having achieved a degree level qualification, HE is often portrayed as the golden ticket to upward social mobility (Montacute, 2019). In 2013, Walker and Zhu estimated the lifetime ‘graduate premium’ to be £168,000 for men and £252,000 for women, supporting the political rhetoric that university provides better economic outcomes for those who attend (2013, p. 5). Chapter 2 sets out how progression to HE has traditionally been the preserve of the elite, and the access and participation agenda is premised on the belief that HE confers additional individual and societal benefits upon those who take part.

As the number and the diversity of those progressing to HE has increased over recent decades, there remains an economic premium to HE. However, there is significant variation in the benefit conferred between institutions and courses (Sullivan et al., 2018). The Milburn Report found that graduates from more advantaged backgrounds continued to be more likely to secure higher-paid professional roles, and that many employers recruited from a very limited range of highly selective universities and traditional degree subjects (2009). Work undertaken by Macmillan and colleagues found that there is a large socioeconomic gradient in accessing top jobs, which persists when educational achievement and social networks are controlled, and discounts the idea that HE completely levels the playing field between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (2015). Finally, work by Savage (2015) and Friedman and Laurison (2019) find that not only is upward social mobility into traditionally high status professions difficult, but those who do manage it face a 'class ceiling' on their success in comparison to those who come from elite backgrounds. They are likely to earn less than their peers and are less likely to achieve promotions throughout their careers. This suggests that the idea that HE promotes social mobility is true only to a point, and that its effects in the labour market is nuanced by institution and course type. Recent research from the Sutton Trust has created a 'social mobility league table' in an attempt to quantify this (van der Erve et al., 2021). The differences in perceived desirability across HE, and how this influences the relationships between schools and universities, is the focus of my analysis in Chapter 10.

It is important to acknowledge both the role and the limitations of HE as a tool for social mobility as a foundational discussion for this thesis. Whilst setting out the limitations, research undertaken by Blanden and colleagues, amongst others, suggest a more optimistic view of the role education can play (2015; Crawford et al., 2014). This section has set out the debate surrounding this assertion, and questioned social mobility as a premise for policymakers. Yet it is important to acknowledge that, in the current political climate, education as a vehicle for social mobility is a dominant narrative. In recent years, increasing progression to HE from under-represented groups, particularly focusing upon the most selective institutions, has become a major focus for policymakers attempting to drive social mobility through education. Whilst this thesis is premised on the understanding that more equal access to HE would contribute to a more socially mobile society, it also acknowledges

both the limitations of education in achieving this, and the problematic nature of contemporary narratives of social mobility.

High Stakes Accountability in English Schools

This section examines the multiple different ways in which English schools experience accountability, as well as considering the implications of the systems in place regarding progression to HE. Measures include pupil performance in national examinations (e.g., SATs, GCSEs and A Levels / BTECs), the publication of data and resultant league tables by the DfE and school inspections carried out by Ofsted. Performance measures based on national data are used both to inform Ofsted inspections, and published as league tables for use by parents and the wider public. The DfE has designated the accountability measures which appear as 'headline measures' in performances tables (2020). An overview of these measures can be found in Table 5. 'Destinations' at both Post-16 and Post-18 form part of these headline measures, and I have used this data to frame this thesis (set out in further detail in Chapter 6).

Table 5: DfE Accountability Measures for Schools – Secondary and Post-16

Measure	Information
Secondary:	
Ofsted Rating	Inspectors use a four point grading scale to make judgements during inspections: • Grade 1: outstanding • Grade 2: good • Grade 3: requires improvement • Grade 4: inadequate
Progress 8	Aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of KS2 to the end of KS4. It is a value-added measure, which means that pupils' results at KS4 (GCSE) are compared to the actual achievement of other pupils with similar prior attainment at KS2 (SATs), although no other characteristics are controlled for.
Percentage GCSE 5+ English and Maths	Percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in English and maths at GCSE. A grade 5 or above in English or maths is

	recognised as a 'strong pass' for the purposes of school accountability only.
GCSE English Baccalaureate (EBacc)[19] Entry	Percentage of pupils entering the EBacc at GCSE.
GCSE EBacc Average Point Score	Pupils' point scores across the five pillars of the EBacc.
GCSE Attainment 8	The achievement of a pupil across eight qualifications at GCSE.
Destinations	Percentage of students staying in education or training, or going into employment after KS4.
Post-16:	
Ofsted Rating	Inspectors use a four point grading scale to make judgements during inspections: • Grade 1: outstanding • Grade 2: good • Grade 3: requires improvement • Grade 4: inadequate
Progress	Value-added progress measure for academic and applied general qualifications, and a combined completion and attainment measure for tech level and Level 2 vocational qualifications.
Attainment	Average point score per entry, expressed as a grade and average points.
English and Maths GCSE Progress	For those students who have not achieved GCSE grade 9-4 or A*-C by the end of KS4.
Retention	The proportion of students who are retained to the end of their main programme of study.
Destinations	The percentage of students staying in education or employment for at least two terms in the year after completing 16 to 18 study.

[19] Ebacc subjects are: English language and literature, maths, Combined Science or three individual sciences, geography or history and a language.

Table 5 shows the breadth of performance measures used to judge schools' performance. Its length gives a visual sense of the many different and competing pressures that exist for schools at both Post-16 and Post-18; from the ways in which the curriculum is delivered, to attainment across multiple different subjects, to the pathways pupils progress onto. In addition to the breadth of measurement, the use of this data must be understood in the context of high stakes regulation within the school sector. Schools who do not meet baseline targets, or those who experience a significant drop in their results in a particular area, are subject to additional regulatory intervention through Ofsted. Performance measures are publicly available and any fall in results may also result in negative media attention, backlash from a school's local community, and falling applications to the school. The high stakes nature of these measures provides important context when understanding how schools approach accountability surrounding progression to HE.

Inspections from Ofsted take place at least every five years, although schools given 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' judgements are monitored more frequently (2019b). Between May 2012 and September 2021 schools graded 'Outstanding' were exempt from inspection as long as data suggested they were 'maintaining performance'.[20] Ofsted's role in school accountability, and its consequent influence over the school sector, has been much researched and frequently discussed in mainstream media (Cladingbowl, 2014; Ferguson, 2020; Flanagan, 2014). In what is widely accepted as a 'high stakes' inspection regime (Hutchinson, 2016; Muijs & Chapman, 2008), there are significant unintended consequences of Ofsted inspections, including the negative impact on teacher retention and recruitment (Hutchinson, 2016, p. 8), increased workload and stress of teaching staff (Wolf & Janssens, 2007), and a short term focus on 'quick fix' solutions (Ehren et al., 2014; Perryman, 2010). Given the significant repercussions for those who are judged negatively, schools are more likely to 'concentrate their efforts on those things they are judged on' (Muijs & Chapman, 2008, p. 41). This is particularly the case for schools with high numbers of pupils classed as disadvantaged, with many in the sector accusing Ofsted of favouring schools with middle-class intakes (Dickens, 2020; Mansell, 2019).

[20] In September 2021 when Ofsted's full programme of inspection resumed after the Covid-19 pandemic this exemption was lifted, and the reinspection of previously exempt schools recommenced. HMCI Amanda Spielman has suggested that she expects over half of the 4000 schools currently awarded 'Outstanding' to be downgraded in subsequent inspections (Terry, 2021).

In order to create a focus on HE progression within schools in this context, it seems that CIAG would need to be incorporated into these measures. This was enacted in the inclusion of Destinations Measures as a headline accountability measure from 2016 (Department for Education, 2020), and the introduction of the Gatsby Benchmarks into the EIF in 2019 (Ofsted, 2019a). However, the way in which CIAG accountability measures are perceived by schools still lacks parity of esteem with other accountability measures, most notably attainment. This leads to schools performing policy for accountability purposes, with those measures deemed to be subject to lesser scrutiny 'seen to be done' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 56), rather than creating the intended outcome of increased focus on pupils' destinations.

In September 2019 Ofsted introduced a new EIF. The EIF increased focus on whether 'pupils are being prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment at each stage of their learning' with explicit inclusion of CIAG within the Personal Development judgement (2019b, p. 47). 'Good' Personal Development provision for pupils is cited as schools which:

> 'Prepare pupils for future success in education, employment or training. They use the Gatsby Benchmarks to develop and improve their careers provision and enable a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils in Years 8 to 13. All pupils receive unbiased information about potential next steps and high-quality careers guidance. The school provides good quality, meaningful opportunities for pupils to encounter the world of work' (Ibid,. p.63).

This guidance explicitly situates CIAG within a school's core remit and, through the Gatsby Benchmarks, provides a far more explicit outline of what 'Good' looks like to the regulator than has previously been the case. This is somewhat complicated when looking specifically at progression to HE, as there is no explicit mention within the EIF, although HE is included in Gatsby Benchmark 7, and the implication is that it would be covered within the 'next stage of education' (Ibid,.) for pupils in sixth form. This makes it difficult to use Ofsted inspections to understand how progression to HE is being supported in schools.

The greater focus on CIAG within the EIF may have begun to raise the profile and quality of CIAG in schools. Ofsted stated that, based on a representative sample of 120 inspection reports, 'we saw evidence of integrated, coherent and effective careers strategies in more schools' (Harford, 2018). However, complying with regulatory guidance effectively does not necessarily mean schools have embedded this policy. Ofsted's endorsement suggests that

the boxes surrounding CIAG are increasingly being ticked, however in Chapter 7, I examine the differences in how policy is enacted and performed to meet the demands of increased regulatory pressure.

Do We Really Need to Raise Aspirations?

Rhetoric around raising the aspirations of young people as a solution to increasing progression to HE from under-represented groups – as well as a host of other social and educational inequalities – has been a prevailing element of English policy discourse since at least the New Labour government (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014; Department for Education and Skills, 2003), and continues to dominate the public imagination (Reay, 2013). The theory posits that some pupils, notably those from groups under-represented in HE, are in some way less ambitious for themselves and as a result are not applying to HE at all, or are settling for less prestigious institutions when they do apply. In recent years both Damian Hinds, then Secretary of State for Education, and Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, have spoken of the need to 'raise aspirations' in order to improve outcomes for young people (Burns, 2018; Hinds, 2019). The term is also widely used by outreach teams within universities, where activities billed to 'raise aspirations' are still common-place, although Harrison and Waller suggest this is a relatively loose term, used to describe a wide range of access and participation work (2018).

Many researchers have rejected the notion that low aspirations drive low educational outcomes and rates of progression to HE. Spohrer and colleagues' discourse analysis of policy documents published by the New Labour and Conservative-Lib Dem Coalition governments (such as White Papers, departmental strategies and independent reports commissioned by government), argues that raising aspirations is a neoliberal construct which places the onus of responsibility on the individual to transform themselves, and ignores the structural barriers many young people face (Spohrer et al., 2018). Others suggest that raising aspirations operates as a 'deficit model', whereby 'the working-classes and/or other 'non-traditional' groups are pathologised and blamed as the 'causes' of unequal patterns of participation'' (Archer, 2007, p. 643). Moreover, several studies have shown that disadvantaged young people do not have inherently lower aspirations to progress to university than their peers (Archer et al., 2014; Baker et al., 2014; St. Clair et al., 2013). Parental aspirations for their children to attend university are equally high, demonstrated by analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study which found that 97% of mothers want their children

to go on to university (Hansen et al., 2010, p. 140). In fact, many more disadvantaged young people aspire to HE than go on to participate (Croll & Attwood, 2013).

The relationship between aspiration and attainment is complex and contested. Goodman and Gregg (2010) report a strong association between aspirations for HE and secondary attainment, influenced by other related concepts such as self-efficacy or locus of control (Baker et al., 2014; Chevalier et al., 2009). However, Cummings and colleagues' review of the research found no strong evidence to suggest that interventions focused on raising aspirations positively influences attainment (2012). A further review by Gorard agreed that there was a relationship between aspiration and attainment but that there were 'no rigorous evaluations of interventions explicitly concerned with raising or lowering aspirations or expectations and so influencing educational outcomes' (2012, p. 4) He suggested that 'aspirations can be both a predictor of educational achievement and an outcome of it' (Ibid,. p. 3). Much access and participation activity sits within this disputed environment, premised on a causal link between raising aspirations in order to improve academic attainment. Croll and Attwood suggest that whilst, 'there may be some mileage in schools and others seeking to raise aspirations, this is nothing like as important as raising achievement for less advantaged young people' in order to widen participation in HE (2013, p. 201).

Rather than aspirations, research suggests that expectations may be a more useful concept for understanding progression to HE (Anders, 2017; Boxer et al., 2011; Harrison & Waller, 2018). Gutman and Akerman draw the distinction between aspirations, which 'involve desired ambitions and goals', and expectations, which 'connote a more realistic assessment of how much an individual believes he or she will actually achieve based on their own abilities and society's opportunity structures' (2008, p. 5). Boxer and colleagues find that disadvantaged young people have significantly higher aspirations than expectations, but that this mismatch caused significant emotional and social difficulties (2011). More recent work by Anders and Micklewright and others suggests that the 'expectation gap' also widens over the course of education (2015; Cummings et al., 2012). Anders reports that:

> 'While young people across the socioeconomic status distribution start their adolescence with high expectations of applying to university, those from less advantaged backgrounds are much more likely to revise their expectations downwards and much less likely to raise their expectations during this period' (2017, p. 18).

Gutman and Akerman suggests this reflects young people 'relinquishing their most preferred choices and settle for more acceptable, available choices' (2008, p. 5). Bourdieu terms this the 'choice of the necessary', which he argues is often made by working-class groups. It is the notion that:

> 'necessity imposes a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary, a resignation to the inevitable, a deep-seated disposition which is in no way incompatible with a revolutionary intention' (1984, p. 373).

Such a framing suggests that 'raising aspirations' without addressing the structural barriers fails to address the reality of what influences working-class pupils' choices.

For disadvantaged young people, the gap between their aspirations and expectations is a complex web of influences including family and community, and their understanding of structural constraints such as those provided by the education system and labour market (Harrison & Waller, 2018; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993, 1997). This is an effect Morgan terms 'rational fantasies,' positioning young people as rational but optimistic thinkers, whose decisions vary with the marginal cost and benefits of continuing education (1998). Such findings suggest that aspirations and expectations are 'cognitively distinct' (Harrison & Waller, 2018, p. 921), and therefore that simply 'raising aspirations' - even if it were possible – would not lead to higher progression rates to HE.

The idea of raising or maintaining expectations to align with aspirations has fuelled a shift from the 'red herring' of aspiration raising (St. Clair et al., 2013, p. 736), towards activities which inform students and diversify the opportunities available to them (Archer et al., 2014), such as high quality CIAG, work experience and support in navigating these often complex choices. In particular, Harrison's work on 'possible selves' (2018), explored in the next section, provides a clearer potential role for university outreach work within a wider network of CIAG.

A New Framing - Possible Selves

The final section of this chapter sets out the way in which the concept of 'possible selves' could be applied in progression to HE. Its application within sociology, and particularly progression to HE, is relatively recent. However, its origins in Markus and Nurius' work in the field of psychology dates back to 1986. In the following section I attempt to do three

things in order to provide a grounding for the use of possible selves in subsequent analysis chapters. First, I provide a brief overview of the origins of possible selves, and its initial use in psychology, and later in sociological research. I set out Harrison's (2018) recent work, applying possible selves to progression to HE I then discuss the limitations of possible selves as a theoretical framing, specifically the risk of continuing the deficit analysis that I have critiqued in my earlier discussion around raising aspirations, as well as its temporal framing. Finally, I seek to demonstrate the value of the possible selves concept in this thesis and argue that, despite its limitations, possible selves represents an imperfect step forwards in understanding progression to HE. In doing so, I draw upon the framing of my thesis as operating on two levels, discussing the use of possible selves for both policy science and policy scholarship (Grace, 1995).

Markus and Nurius' foundational work in the field of psychology theorised that for each individual there are many 'possible future representations of the self', including 'the ideal selves that we would very much like to become […] the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming' (1986, p. 954). Writing in a sociological context, Harrison describes possible selves as 'part of narratives that we use to make sense of our lives in our own social contexts' (2018, p. 4). They are influenced by factors both within and outside of our control:

> 'An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences. Possible selves thus have the potential to reveal the inventive and constructive nature of the self but they also reflect the extent to which the self is socially determined and constrained' (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954).

From the outset, the concept of possible selves has had the capacity to reflect the social, economic, cultural and geographic influences further discussed in Chapter 9, which Harrison acknowledges 'normatively shapes the individual's values about what selves are to be considered appropriate or attractive' (2018, p. 5). In doing so, a framing of possible selves does not seek to dismiss the structural barriers that individuals may face, but does suggest that individuals retain some 'freedom to define and redefine their significant possible selves' (Cross & Markus, 1991, p. 233), echoing Evan's notions of 'bounded agency' (2002).

Research undertaken in school settings supports the view that interventions based on a concept of possible selves, such as a series of workshops focused on strategies to achieve goals related to academic possible selves (Oyserman et al., 2006), or specific goal setting programmes (Hock et al., 2003), has led to increased and sustained student motivation and attainment in schools. Hock and colleagues reported that interventions based on a concept of possible selves increased, perhaps temporarily, both the specificity of goals pupils identified, and increased the number of 'life roles' they hoped to play in their future. In turn, these goals may be important in 'enhancing academic motivation and performance' (Ibid,. p.24). Similarly, Oyserman and colleagues designed and evaluated a series of interventions to improve outcomes for young people in schools based on a possible selves model, and found young people from low-income backgrounds with more highly elaborated possible selves had higher academic attainment than their peers (2004, 2007).

Harrison (2018) has applied Markus and Nurius' theories to his sociological work on progression to HE, suggesting that the theory of possible selves offers a rationale for both of the key elements of university outreach activity: information-giving and attainment raising. Information-giving increases the desirability of HE by providing information regarding possible selves which are premised upon HE such as desiring a graduate level job, which increases the likelihood of individuals applying to HE. Second, and perhaps more importantly given the prior discussion in Chapter 3 on attainment presenting the largest barrier to progression to HE (Chowdry et al., 2013; Crawford et al., 2014), work to widen and define possible selves can drive attainment. It may do so by acting to 'stimulate everyday actions that work to boost attainment as a means of acquiring the qualifications that permit access to higher education, including the higher levels required by elite institutions' (Harrison, 2018, p. 12). This could increase the probability of an individual attending HE.

Harrison argues that 'the intersection of desirability and probability is a potentially powerful component of the self-concept, containing positive visions of the future that are felt to be attainable through good decision-

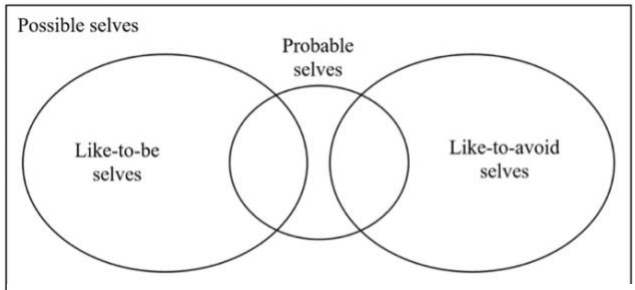


Figure 1: Graphical Representation of Possible Selves (reproduced from Harrison, 2018 p. 5)

making, persistence, and hard work' (2018, p. 5). Harrison does not define what or whom makes 'good decision-making'. His framing in this way puts forward a more neoliberal understanding of the self-responsible individual than other commentators (see discussion of Clegg (2018), Rainford (2021) and Henderson (2018) later in this chapter). 'Good' within the current policy environment is strongly defined as aiming for strong academic results and progressing to the highest ranked HEI an individual's grades allow. Such a definition does not reflect the many complexities influencing decision making for each pupil.

The idea that possible selves remain in a constant state of flux means that there 'is scope for planned interventions to enable individuals to envisage and assess new or developing possible selves' (Harrison, 2018, p. 6). Thus, Harrison suggests that HE outreach activities can support the distillation from possible to probable selves which includes, but may not be exclusive to, HE. This element of 'broadening the palette' (Ibid,. p.7) does not necessarily mean that such activities should be exclusively focused upon progression to HE, and indeed there is an increasing consensus that HE progression work should actively promote a broader range of pathways (Sandhu et al., 2020). Therefore, although a possible selves framing could be seen as both linear and positivist (Ball, 2017), I argue that it encourages a 'broadening of the palette' (Harrison, 2018, p. 7) that has the potential to contribute to a far wider, multi-dimensional approach to CIAG across all stages of schooling. That said, in the current environment where universities are responsible for delivering such activities and the present regulatory incentives encourage progression to HE, it would be naïve to assume that discourses of progression to HE are not at least foregrounded in these discussions.

Alongside the flux of possible selves which suggests that individuals' conceptions of themselves are open to influence and change, is what Markus and Nurius (1986), and later Ruvolo and Markus (1992), term 'elaboration': the detail and 'vividness' of the possible self which is understood to be both desirable and probable. In further work, Cross and Markus (1991) argue that possible selves which have undergone greater elaboration exert more influence over the choices made by an individual. The concept of elaboration has been furthered by others who have used varying terms for how it might be enacted, such as Oyserman and colleagues who use 'roadmaps' (2004), whilst Erikson describes 'narrative plots' (2007), but ultimately all are tools which, 'allow us to plan out what steps are needed to move from the present to a like-to-be self' (Harrison, 2018, p. 4).

Oyserman and colleagues (2011) suggest that the development of such strategies have a socioeconomic gradient, with young people from more advantaged backgrounds more likely to deploy tools such as goal making and roadmaps. As such, these strategies could be critiqued as another example of economic and cultural resources necessary to allow such self-facilitation opportunities not being evenly distributed, with middle-class children more able to benefit (Skeggs, 2004; Reay, 2001, 2002). Harrison applies the concept of elaboration to progression to HE, suggesting that, 'having strategies for achieving possible selves may be an important element in why advantaged young people have (and expected) higher attainment than their peers' (Harrison, 2018, p. 11).

The concepts of elaboration and flux provide a clear rationale for the instigation of interventions which 'can harness motivation and direct action toward self-improvement' (Oyserman et al., 2004, p. 132). It should be acknowledged here that 'self-improvement' (like 'good decision making') is not a priori term and may be defined by the school, university or organisation, as well as the individual. Progression to HE has historically been considered the aim of university outreach work, and interventions have been designed with this as the key success criterion. However, more recently programmes such as Uni Connect, as well as individual university outreach initiatives, have broadened their criteria to incorporate a wider definition of 'self-improvement'. Activities which introduce new 'possible selves' hold merit to 'widen the palette of possible selves known to a young person' (Harrison, 2018, p. 14). However, singular interventions are unlikely to enable individuals to create a 'vivid' possible self or offer a 'desirable and probable' vision. Ongoing work is needed to elaborate on these possible selves, and form more detailed 'roadmaps' or 'narratives'. The way in which early and ongoing progression to HE activity is undertaken in schools is discussed further in Chapter 9.

In the context of progression to HE activities, the work of Hock, Oyserman and colleagues suggests that engaging pupils through initiatives designed to broaden their palette of possible selves to include university would be of value (2003, 2004, 2011). If such initiatives were successful, this could have significant implications for school-university partnerships as such activities would both engage pupils in HE (the regulatory focus of universities) and raise attainment (the regulatory focus of schools). In Chapter 7, I outline the current difficulties created by different regulatory outcomes, which create incentives to deliver activities at (different) specific times across the educational trajectory. A possible selves lens

gives rise to the potential for activities which meet both sectors' regulatory incentives; this speaks strongly to the practitioner level of my thesis.

Although possible selves provides a strong justification for CIAG and HE focused activities, there are potential and considerable challenges which come with the concept, most particularly its focus on the individual. In using a sociological framing, rather than Markus and Nurius' original psychological application, more recent uses of possible selves within education have explicitly acknowledged the key role of systemic inequalities, whilst still asserting the value of the concept (Clegg, 2018; Henderson, 2018; Rainford, 2021). Henderson suggests that a key benefit of the possible selves concept is in the 'personalised nature of the imagined future', (2018, p. 29) which is particularly relevant given that many HE outreach programmes focus on familiarisation. Henderson also highlights the way in which possible selves brings together 'theorisations of both the individual and the social' (Ibid,. p. 31). Here, the two levels of my thesis collide; possible selves allow for individual pupils, schools and universities to use their – limited – agency to create changes within and challenges to the existing system (policy science), however these efforts will always be inhibited unless the structural inequalities underpinning the system are challenged and removed (policy scholarship). I do not deny this limitation and the theoretical level within this thesis seeks to highlight this, however on a policy science level, a possible selves framing of progression to HE activities could lead to improvements within our current system, which I believe to be of value.

Whilst cautioning against replicating the problems of 'raising aspirations' by allowing possible selves to create a deficit narrative around the individual, Henderson makes clear that the risk is, 'a reason to use the concept thoughtfully, rather than a reason to dismiss it' (Ibid,. p. 37) suggesting that, 'if the social construction of possible selves is given more emphasis […], the concept can be used instead to identify where there are inequalities of available resources, and the analysis therefore focuses on systemic inequalities, rather than on individual lack' (Ibid,. p. 32). In subsequent analysis chapters, I look both at the influence of policy and regulation in maintaining or challenging structural inequalities - the implications of which have a societal reach far beyond HE - and the roles of individual schools and universities. In addition, both Prince (2014) and Harrison acknowledge that sociocultural context also influences the personal experiences individuals are exposed to, 'creating a situation where young people in different social groups will have very different views of what

selves are possible for them' (2018, p. 208). Although the sociological framing of possible selves is 'messier' (Henderson, 2018, p. 37) than its psychological application, I argue that this messiness explicitly acknowledges the tensions I experienced in undertaking this research: that the system is highly problematic, allowing limited opportunities for individuals to exert their own agency to influence their life outcomes. However, this limited space could, I argue, be enhanced and developed to some extent through opportunities to increase more young people's sense of possible selves to include progression to HE.

A further challenge of the theory of possible selves lies in its explicit temporal framing. Possible selves' conception of the connection between the actions of the present and the imagined future self aligns with a 'linear, future-oriented coherence' (Henderson, 2018, p. 34). This strongly aligns with formal education, which is based on a series of chronological events; the ideal promoted is that an individual progresses through the different stages of education and into employment. However, Clegg cautions against presenting the future as 'a blank canvas, with every possible self an option for every individual as in doing so, 'human will and agency are imagined as having the potential to transform the future in ways which transcend the structural liabilities of the past and present' (2018, p. 47). Instead, she argues it is important to understand that 'different conceptualisations of the future are also a site of struggle and power' (Ibid,. p. 47). The way in which we conceptualise our 'like-to-be' and 'like-to-avoid' selves are highly influenced by societal pressures, which reinforce structures of power, and conceptions of which of our possible selves would be favourably viewed by society.

Archer suggests that rather than seeing structural constraints as variables of the present, possible selves must also acknowledge the ways in which these mechanisms may operate into the future (Archer, 2012). We must therefore problematise the concept of the 'future' within a narrative of possible selves, understanding that it is not a neutral concept, but imbued with the dynamics of power described above. In Chapter 9, I draw upon the theoretical framing of possible selves to chronologically map school-university relationships onto the activities undertaken throughout schooling, arguing for both early and consistent work around progression to HE. Whilst doing so, I explicitly acknowledge the structural barriers surrounding progression to HE for some groups of pupils, rather than understanding education, and progression to HE as one coherent, and inevitable, journey.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I highlight key debates which underpin this thesis. Beginning with social mobility, this chapter sets out the ways in which it is both pervasive and problematic as a policy discourse. I argue that recognition of the way in which the concept dominates and directs both discussions of progression to HE, and ensuing enactment in schools and universities, is fundamental. I then examine accountability in the school system, highlighting that its high stakes nature currently drives school policy, but that within this context, the adoption of Destinations Measures within the headline measures has led to an increased engagement with CIAG and HE progression.

The latter part of this chapter looks at concepts more specific to progression to HE. It examines both 'raising aspirations', which has received significant attention from policymakers and the media, and sets out the problematic and neoliberal nature of this narrative. It then suggests that 'possible selves' is a potentially more helpful alternative. However, I acknowledge its limitations in recognising structural inequalities and the risk of a neoliberal, individual, deficit framing of progression to HE. I argue that an application of possible selves that seeks to move the framing of progression to HE away from a deficit narrative may be possible. This would involve a practical focus on the structural barriers, by explicitly acknowledging them, and seeking to address them on a greater scale through broader policy work, whilst also working to meaningfully support pupils on a more individualised basis to develop 'possible', 'probable', and 'desirable' selves. Yet I caveat this with the admission that the 'messiness' of possible selves does not fully address the problems of the 'raising aspirations' narrative (Henderson, 2018, p. 37). Indeed, if conceived of and explained poorly, it could contribute to a continued focus on the supposed deficit of individuals, a position which it seeks to critique.

Throughout this thesis, I continue to set out the challenges of progression to HE policy on two levels, both critiquing the structural underpinnings of the education system, and suggesting where improvements to it can be made.

Chapter 5 – Theoretical Resources

Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical resources I have drawn upon in this thesis in order to make sense of my data. It begins by setting out the three understandings of P/policy I use in this thesis. I then orientate this thesis within the field of policy sociology, setting out its use as a lens for my subsequent analysis. I draw upon Ozga's (1987) foundational ideas of policy sociology as a response to what she considered to be the field of sociology of education's tendency towards documentation rather than critical analysis, to set out some of the key debates within the field. I show how policy sociology rejects the idea that policy is unproblematically 'implemented' on the ground (Taylor et al., 1997), and instead understands policy as a process which 'may be considered to have neither a beginning nor an end' (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 9).

I move on to set out the 'tools' of policy sociology that I have drawn upon in my work. I first consider Bacchi's framework of questions which ask us to consider, 'what is the problem represented to be' (Bacchi, 2009). I then examine the work of Ball and colleagues in considering policy as text and policy as discourse (1993a, 1993b, 1994). I draw upon the policy cycle in an attempt to move away from the notion of state centred, top-down policymaking, and engage with a cyclical, interrelated approach to policy. This chapter finishes by discussing policy enactment, and the role it has played in developing my analysis (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Braun et al., 2010; Maguire et al., 2015). In particular, the ways in which policy 'travels' and is interpreted by different 'policy actors' who influence how policy is enacted (Braun et al., 2010).

What is P/policy?

It is important to define what is meant by 'policy', and this chapter aims to set out an understanding of how policy is understood therein. Ball cautions that often in research, 'the meaning of policy is taken for granted and theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built in to the analytical structures they [analysts] build' (2006, p. 44). As a result, the term policy is used imprecisely and indiscriminately to 'describe very different things at different points in the same study' (Ibid,. p. 44). I actively heed Ball's warning by setting out my understanding of policy in this thesis in three distinct ways. Firstly, policy as a manifestation of an ideology or concept that is poorly defined but fiercely believed in. I saw examples of this in my

interviews, whereby emotion was attached to ideas such as social mobility as a general concept, its meaning apparently assumed. One school-based participant told me that social mobility was, 'basically the point of what we do'. Several participants strongly endorsed social mobility, but when I asked them to explain what social mobility meant to them, they struggled to describe it. Another school-based participant who began by saying she wanted all pupils to be socially mobile, later said she wanted pupils to be, 'happy with whatever choice they make', implying her thoughts on social mobility were more complex than she had initially suggested. Although difficult to capture, the emotional attachment to concepts such as social mobility and raising aspirations is important in understanding policy discourses surrounding policy and enactment across this thesis.

The second definition draws on Ball's notion of policy as 'an enlightenment concept' which captures the idea of policy as an inherently progressive force, 'about moving from the inadequacies of the present to some future state of perfection where everything works well and works as it should' (2017, p. 11). I return to this definition later in this chapter when considering policy as text and as discourse. This second dimension of policy often underpins HE progression work. It is premised upon the positivist notion that more pupils progressing to HE is an inherent good, and that closing gaps in progression is unequivocally beneficial. This understanding of policy often contributes to the deficit narratives of particular groups of students which have often surrounded progression to HE policy, in particular the discourse of raising aspirations. In the previous chapter, I set out how I see 'possible selves' as an opportunity to move away from this positivist lens, but also how using the concept risks succumbing to this embedded 'enlightenment' understanding of policy.

This second definition of policy was the view held by many practitioners that I spoke to across my research; that regardless of the structural barriers which existed across society (which they often articulated), they strove for improvement within their own sphere of influence. It is also where I identified my own tendency as a practitioner to focus, presenting a tension with Ball's critical view (Ibid,.). In reconciling exploring my thesis on two levels and attempting to resolve these tensions, I have drawn upon Savage's thoughts:

> '…while I agree with Ball's claim that much policy sociology research remains wedded to Enlightenment narratives and risks being rendered impotent by narratives of hope, redemption and emancipation that often lead us nowhere, I personally struggle with the notion of what policy sociology might look like if we unanchor our work from the

> desire to generate visions and strategies towards social transformation […]. Indeed, I have always understood criticality as being about an agitative relationship to power, paired with a desire to carve out strategies for transformation. While in recent years, I have tempered my previously grand hopes of revolution with a more pragmatic understanding of my potential to influence change, I maintain a view that, for me, being a critical scholar involves a strategic probing into things in order to seek out loose or weak threads that, if pulled, might provide options to rearrange the current state of affairs. Not revolution, but incremental rearrangement' (2021, p. 282).

I have found Savage's insights to be immensely helpful when grappling with my thesis on two levels. As discussed in Chapter 1, I have often felt conflicted in my different roles; simultaneously too radical, and not radical enough. However, in the quotation above, Savage provides a useful bridge between my two levels. On one level providing an 'agitative relationship to power' and 'carving out strategies for transformation' (Ibid,. p. 282) - despite Ball's criticism of these aims (2020) - which I do by critiquing the system itself. On the second level, adopting a 'pragmatic understanding of my potential to influence change', I identify areas where we could 'rearrange the current state of affairs' (Savage, 2021, p. 282). Within this thesis, I attempt to seek out 'loose threads' as Savage suggests (Ibid,. 282), and some of these inform my policy recommendations in Chapter 11. This framing gives value to 'incremental rearrangement', without departing from the field of policy sociology.

Finally, this thesis draws upon the importance of also understanding policy as it is enacted locally. Here, the concept of policy enactment provides a rich frame for understanding the difference between what Evans and colleagues describe as 'Policy' – the formal and legislated – and 'policy' – the many and varied sites where policy is formed, individuals enact it, and how this process evolves over time and across spaces (2008). Ozga describes this type of 'small p' policy as a 'process rather than a product, involving negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making' (2000, p. 2). I found this notion of policy to be particularly useful in Chapter 7 when considering the ways in which 'Policy' surrounding progression to HE as legislated and published was understood and enacted, both in a comparison between the school and HE sector, and between different institutions within the same sector.

Policy Sociology

As Bell and Stevenson suggest, 'policy is political: it is about the power to determine what is done. It shapes who benefits, for what purpose and who pays' (2006, p. 9). In acknowledging that policy involves power, it is important to recognise the many ways in which power can shape agendas, control political processes, and is enacted at every level; from institutional, to local, regional, national and supra-national levels. Ozga suggests that 'policy is to be found everywhere in education' (2000, p. 2), and in this thesis I take an approach informed by policy sociology to a particular element of policy - progression to HE - whilst acknowledging that this sits within a broader context of many overlapping policies across education.

Policy sociology highlights the juxtaposition between the complexities of many of the 'policy problems', and the simplicity of the 'policy solutions'. Moreover, it challenges the view that the policies themselves are always part of the solution, and never part of the problem (Ball, 1997). In Ozga's foundational definition, policy sociology is understood as 'rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques' (1987, p. 144). Its roots, as a response to what Ozga perceived to be a preoccupation 'with documenting events [rather] than with analysing them' (2021, p. 291), challenges the traditional approaches of policy science, where policies are understood as 'concrete entities, employed by rational actors to solve known problems with clearly definable outcomes' (Lewis, 2020, p. 3). Using a policy sociology lens is helpful to this thesis on both a theoretical and a personal level. Firstly, given the highly politicised space progression to HE occupies, taking a policy sociology perspective acts to differentiate this study from what Ozga describes as a 'pragmatic, rational and positivistic orientation', that focuses exclusively on 'application and improvement' (2021, p. 291), and instead encourages a more critical approach. Secondly, and more personally, notions of policy sociology challenged me to move away from my policy science focus of working within the system, to consider the system itself. It has helped me to, as Savage puts it 'interrogate my own claims' (2021, p. 276). Without this approach, my 'thesis of two levels' would have remained resolutely on a single axis.

As suggested in Ozga's early definition, context is fundamental to policy sociology analysis. In Chapter 2 I set out the historical context of both HE and school policy in this space in order to understand the different chronologies of the two sectors. For example, a discussion

as to why schools appear to be far less engaged in progression to HE than universities is far richer for understanding the lack of historical policy focus on CIAG in schools. Ball and colleagues further use policy sociology to highlight the 'messiness' of policymaking, and the importance of grounding our understanding in not only the historical but the economic, social and political contexts. They are explicit that policy never exists in a vacuum of a single policy being implemented into a school with a blank canvas (2012). Remnants of previous policies remain, and each school operates within a different context, even within 'superficially similar' schools (Braun et al., 2011, p. 587). It felt particularly important to remind myself of this during this study where I grouped schools and found areas of similarity based on particular rates of progression. Comparability on one measure did not necessarily mean these schools shared other characteristics, and it was important to see them all as individual entities when undertaking my research.

As Savage reflects, scholars of policy sociology have put forward 'highly diverse theoretical and methodological approaches' (2021, p. 276), and in the subsequent sections I set out the approaches I have used in this study to analyse policy, drawing significantly on the work of first Bacchi, and then Ball and colleagues to do so.

What is the Problem Represented to Be?

Policy sociology has an explicit concern with issues of social justice by seeking to understand who benefits from a policy, and who does not. Throughout my research, I have found Ball's description of policy sociology as a 'toolbox of diverse concepts and theories' (1993b, p. 10) particularly useful in considering how best to undertake the sense-making of my research. This has allowed me to embrace the complexities of policy sociology and explore the fragmented and often muddled nature of progression to HE policy. That said, Ozga cautions against generating 'a view of policy making which stresses ad hoc-ery, serendipity, muddle and negotiation' (1990, p. 360), suggesting this risks losing sight of the coherences within and across policies, for example the established neoliberal nature of education reforms, discussed in Chapter 2. I note Ozga's critique and have sought to counterbalance the limitations of Ball's approach by also considering my research in the context of Bacchi's more systematised, questioning approach of 'what is the problem represented to be (WPR)?' (Bacchi, 2009, 2012, 2016). Although Bacchi's work sits more within political science, her questions have helped me to consider the different and intersectional 'problems' within HE progression policy, and how they are represented in

different policy spheres (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). Below, I briefly set out my own thinking in answer to each of Bacchi's six WPR questions and how I have approached each of my subsequent analysis chapters using this method. In doing so, I have strengthened the 'sociology of policy' (Grace, 1998) lens I have applied across this thesis, ensuring that it does not become the documentation of policy that Ozga cautioned against in her foundational work (1987).

Table 6: WPR Approach to Policy Analysis (reproduced from Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 20)).

Questions for WPR Policy Analysis	
1	What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2	What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions (conceptual logics) underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3	How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4	What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently?
5	What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6	How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

Bacchi first asks, what is the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies? (Bacchi, 2009). The 'problem' in progression to HE is positioned as the unequal rates at which different groups progress (as discussed in Chapter 3). However, this is represented as a specific problem within HE, where universities are held accountable for closing these gaps within progression rates through their APPs. This can be seen in the OfS guidance for APPs (Office for Students, 2018a, 2018b). In schools, the 'problem' is represented more broadly to be a lack of appropriate CIAG, that would ensure pupils don't become NEET. This is reflected in the most recent Careers Strategy (Department for Education, 2017), and in the Gatsby Benchmarks within the CIAG guidance for schools (Department for Education, 2018). Whether the 'problem' lies with individuals or society also varies, with different

framings set out in Chapter 4 such as ‘raising aspirations’ and ‘social mobility’. Such framings often lead to a focus on providing opportunities to the ‘brightest’ amongst the under-represented. Moreover, the ‘problem’ has undergone a shift over time; the focus on access has moved to ‘access and participation’ and Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan recently stated that, ‘real social mobility is as much about getting on as it is about getting in [to HE]’ (2021). Within this thesis, I focus on a subsection of this policy area and represent the ‘problem’ as school-university relationships, or the lack thereof.

When considering Bacchi’s second question, which asks what the ‘deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions’ are which underpin the representation of the problem (Bacchi, 2009), I have reflected upon the notion of HE being an unequivocal positive force, and Ball’s characterisation of policy as a linear, process of enlightenment (2017), which feels particularly appropriate within this sphere. It also positions HE as the ‘silver bullet’ to ‘solve’ the ‘problem’ represented in question one, often without recognising the structural barriers discussed in Chapter 3, which inhibit this. Within this, I also note that the system is heavily stratified, with the most highly ranked selective institutions being understood as the ‘best’, in terms of their economic outcomes (Sutton Trust, 2021), despite Reay and other’s work into the social challenges for those students who progress to these institutions from under-represented groups (Crozier et al., 2008; Reay, 1998, 2018). Finally, my own thesis interrogates school-university relationships, and examines the assumption that they are a positive force, even if one accepts progression to HE as such.

The third question in WPR asks how the representation of the problem has come about (Bacchi, 2009). In Chapter 2 I set progression to HE policy and school-university relationships in the context of schools and HE policy in an attempt to root this thesis in a broader, chronological narrative of policy in both spheres. I also consider the dominant, positivist narratives surrounding progression to HE as an unequivocal good which aligns with the discourses of both social mobility and raising aspirations. In addition, I suggest that the very fact that HE progression is inherently a shared policy area between schools and universities leads to less ownership from either sector, and a greater potential for politicians and policymakers to represent the problem in particular ways, without challenge.

Policy sociology, as Ozga understands it, is based on the notion of criticality (1987, 2021), and this thesis attempts to problematise much of the policy landscape in progression to HE.

It highlights the structural barriers which inhibit progression to HE from under-represented groups in Chapter 3. I explicitly seek to address some of the silences across the representation by identifying the lack of school-based voices in the current research and policy space and elevating school-based participants through this research. This is not the only silence, and in Chapter 6 I highlight those areas this thesis does not address, calling for further research to better understand these going forwards.

Progression to HE is currently the dominant narrative within this policy sphere however, there are many other conceptions of the 'problem'. One representation, which has gained significant traction with the Conservative Party in recent years, is the growth of the Skills agenda, and the role of tertiary and vocational education as alternative pathways to HE in order to upskill the population and provide similar – or better – outcomes. England has historically performed poorly in this sector in comparison to the OECD (Musset & Field, 2013), but the recent debate over the Skills and Post-16 Bill demonstrates increased policy focus in this area (Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, 2021).

Bacchi's next question is what effects are produced by the problem (2009). These effects can be seen on an institutional level, in the performative behaviours of schools and universities regarding progression to HE, that is discussed in more depth in Chapter 7. Individual level effects are also visible in those students from under-represented groups who progress to HE as a result of the access and participation agenda, and report that they do not feel they belong (Crozier & Reay, 2011; Reay et al., 2010), or for whom HE does not provide the outcome they had been 'sold' (Bradley et al., 2013).

Question six provides a call to action, asking not only where the problem has been produced and disseminated, but how can it be disrupted or replaced? (Bacchi, 2009). This strongly echoes Savage's understanding of policy sociology, where he asks how such work can contribute to the 'incremental rearrangement' (2021, p. 282) of the system. In Chapter 11, I set out my response to this call to action in the context of school-university relationships within progression to HE, demonstrating where I believe this study can disrupt the status quo, or contribute to its rearrangement.

As I move in the next section to examine some of concepts and theories within the policy sociology 'toolbox' (Ball, 1993b, p. 10) and embrace the 'muddle' (Ozga, 1996, p. 360), I do

so having considered my research using Bacchi's (2009, 2012, 2016) more systematised WPR approach as a counterbalance.

Policy as Text

Progression to HE is subject to policy across both the school and university sectors. In recent years there have been a significant number of policy publications, speeches and legislation published in this space. Ball encourages us to consider policy as text and policy as discourse (1993b). This distinction draws our attention to the idea that each of these policies is contested, mediated and diversely represented by actors in different contexts - policy as text - but that text is also constrained by the 'common sense' implicit knowledge and assumptions about the world and ourselves - policy as discourse. Analysing both levels allows us to consider what is written down and how that came to be constructed, but also what isn't written down and why that might be so.

Firstly this section considers policies as texts which are 'encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context)' (Ibid,. p. 11). Policy texts are rarely singular endeavours but rather the summation of many influences and actors. When such texts explicitly span different sectors, such as in progression to HE, there is an overt need to bring together these different actors. Policies surrounding progression to HE should be understood as products of the influence of the history, experiences, skills, resources and context of those actors across both schools and universities.

Texts are 'open' documents which are often changed or updated, as can be seen in the regular updates to policy documents such as regulatory guidance between the DfE and OfS (Office for Students, 2018d). Moreover, 'policies shift and change their meaning in the arenas of politics' (Ball, 1993b, p. 11), sometimes as a result of changes of key interpreters such as Secretaries of State, ministers, or civil servants. Gavin Williamson's tenure as Secretary of State for Education was marked by an adversarial tone between the DfE and the wider education sector, whereas his successor, Nadhim Zahawi, seems to be seeking a more collaborative approach. Any given policy may be reoriented, repurposed, or reworked over time, as can be seen in the many iterations of national collaborative outreach programmes discussed in Chapter 2. Most policies are not read first hand, with many

individuals accessing policies through intermediaries; policy actors who influence how a policy may be enacted (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Regardless of these caveats, policies are 'textual interventions into practice' (Ball, 1993b, p. 12) and are important not because they necessarily have clarity, impetus or provide coherent policy solutions to identified policy problems, but because they are 'texts which are (sometimes) acted on' (Beilharz, 1987, p. 394 in Ball 1993b). This can be seen in the increased work around the Gatsby Benchmarks in schools, although few school-based staff spoke directly of the Careers Strategy (Department for Education, 2017) or DfE guidance (2018) where the Benchmarks are set out. It can also be seen in the focus of universities on the particular under-represented groups identified by the OfS, despite few practitioners in my research having been involved in creating their institution's APP, and even fewer having read the regulatory guidance (Office for Students, 2018c, 2018c).

Policy texts can be extremely directive or far more general. Bowe and colleagues (Bowe et al., 1992) have drawn on Barthes work on 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts (1975) in order to conceptualise this phenomenon. Readerly texts are 'clear and inescapable' offering 'minimum opportunity for creative interpretation by the reader' (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 11). They can be seen in 'imperative or disciplinary policies', where enactment and creativity is narrowly defined and original thought is limited – although within the context of practice there is always an element of opportunity to do so (Ball et al., 2011, p. 612). These policies still 'land' differently depending on the different organisations. However, recipients are intended to be passive and compliant. Readerly texts create a binary whereby the only options are 'compliance or rejection' (Ibid,. p. 613). Clear examples of readerly texts are in Ofsted's publications, notably the EIF (2019). School policy is far more readerly in nature than university policy (discussed further in Chapter 7), although under the OfS universities have experienced a far greater number of readerly policy texts, such as in the APP guidance (2018a). The inaugural Chair of the OfS, Michael Barber, termed the use of readerly texts as 'informed prescription' (2007) which he enacted through 'deliverology' (2010). Such an approach sits in contrast to the notion of informed professional judgement (Ball, Maguire, Braun, et al., 2012).

In contrast, writerly texts can be seen as exhortative or developmental policies which 'self-consciously invite the reader to 'join in', to co-operate and co-author' (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 11). These offer more freedom for interpretation in each institutional context. This may be

tempered for an individual staff member by the layers of policy enactment within the school, such as whole school or department wide responses to a policy (Braun et al., 2010). These policies have greater scope for enactment within the school or university, as well as greater potential for what Ball terms 'creative non-implementation' (1994, p. 20), depending on the context.

Chapter 7 sets out the transition within the sphere of HE progression from more writerly policies under OFFA to readerly policies, most particularly those enacted through 'deliverology' since the inception of the OfS. This is also reflected in CIAG policies in school, which transitioned from writerly texts, which allowed for a high level of school level interpretation, to more readerly policies since the 2018 introduction of the Gatsby Benchmarks (Department for Education, 2018).

Policy as Discourse

Whereas policy as text relates to the written products of policy, policy as discourse refers to 'what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, where, when and with what authority' (Ball, 1994, p. 21). It refers to language, values, beliefs and practices; what is discussed, and the arguments and rhetoric used to support what is said. Importantly, it also refers to what remains unspoken, deemed impossible or considered unsayable. Drawing on Foucault's work on the nexus between power and knowledge, Ball suggests that the concept of discourse describes what is thinkable:

> 'We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do not 'know' what we say, we 'are' what we say and do. In these terms we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies' (1993b, p. 13).

Analysing policy as discourse has an explicit social justice focus that includes consideration of who is speaking and who is not. Ball suggests that, 'it does not matter what some people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative' (Ibid,. p. 15). Dominant discourses can strengthen, weaken and change over time, as can be seen in the education sector through the transition from 'teacher professionalism' to 'managerialism' since the 1988 *Education Reform Act* (Maguire & Ball, 1994), or the rise of the discourse of marketisation of the education sector (Ball, 2017) or the rise and fall of the rhetoric of 'raising aspirations'. It is therefore important to understand policy discourse as set in a history of

prior discourses, which leave traces or 'policy sediment' (Ball, 1993b, p. 11) or, as Veyne terms it, 'a vast cemetery of now dead great truths' (2010, p. 14). Sometimes, within these competing and contradictory discourses it is possible for new, different discourses to emerge. However, Ball and colleagues caution that within the education system 'there is little space, time or opportunity to think differently' (2012, p. 138). This lack of resistance – whilst not the fault of teachers – reinforces the hegemonic nature of prevailing discourses and the solutions they offer. Moreover, the recent proposals to increase the regulatory requirements for HE from both the DfE and OfS (Department for Education, 2022; Office for Students, 2022c, 2022a, 2022b) suggest that the time, space and opportunity within universities is also shrinking.

Such an approach is not without criticism; Ozga suggests that a focus on discourse, rather than text, concentrates too much on the 'ad hoc-ery' of policy and discounts the value of state-centered theory, caricaturing its problems without acknowledging its capability to 'accommodate complexity and difference' (1990, p. 361). This thesis acknowledges the importance of taking a 'toolbox approach' (Ball, 1993b) in order to unpick the complexities of policy as it is understood and enacted within the varying contexts of the schools and universities within this study. Understanding policy as discourse helps to highlight the struggles over both the interpretation and enactment of policies, whilst acknowledging that these sit within a discursive framework which both articulates and constrains the possibilities of what is conceivable. In this sense, Bacchi's questions provide a useful alternative framework, but are also constrained by the same limitations.

The Policy Cycle

This thesis is interested in the way in which policy and regulation around progression to HE is interpreted and translated in schools and universities. In order to understand the complexities of policy, and to move away from the simplified notion of state centered, top-down policymaking, Ball and colleagues have developed the policy cycle as a framework for analysing policy:

> 'A state control model distorts the policy process. Indeed, it seems to us that the image implicit in the conception of distinct and disconnected sets of policy-makers and policy implementers actually serves the powerful ideological purpose of reinforcing a linear conception of policy in which theory and practice are separate and the former is privileged. The language of 'implementation' strongly implies that there

is within policy, an unequivocal governmental position that will filter down through quasi-state bodies and […] into the schools' (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 10).

Bowe et al. argue here that such analysis neglects the agency of any actors other than the state, suggesting that, 'in these conceptualisations schools remain either marginal to the policy process or they are 'represented' via the teaching unions. The voices of the heads, senior managers, classroom teachers or the students remain, for the most part, strangely silent' (Ibid,. p. 6). In framing policy as a continuous cycle influenced by many actors in many contexts, a policy cycle approach highlights, includes and foregrounds the voices of those outside of the government. A desire to hear the voices of those non-government actors was a driving force in designing the methodology of this study, and foregrounding the policy cycle within my theoretical understanding enabled me to continually return to those voices throughout my analysis.

In their initial work, Bowe and colleagues suggest understanding the policy cycle as three primary 'policy contexts' (Figure 2); the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice (Ibid,.). Similar ideas are also explored by Taylor and colleagues using the notion of policy context, text and consequences (1997). Whilst the initial conception of the policy cycle used these three contexts, Ball later added two further contexts; the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy (Ball, 1994). Whilst these are less discussed and refined, both have been helpful as part of the overall 'analytical toolbox' within this thesis (Ball, 1993b). In a more recent interview, Ball suggested that although both of these additional contexts offer important tools for analysis, they can be subsumed within the initial three contexts (Ball in, Mainardes & Marcondes, 2009, p. 306).

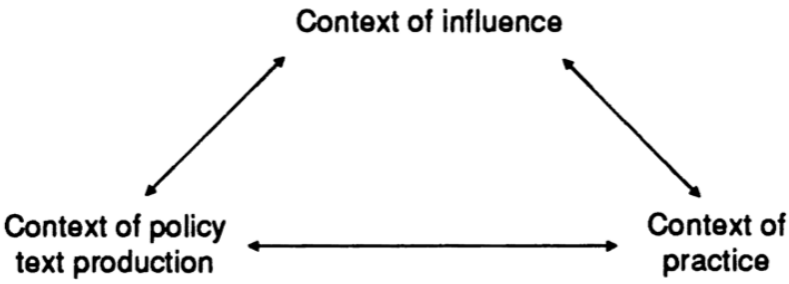


Figure 2: Contexts of Policy Making (Bowe et al,. 1992, p.20).

The context of influence is the site of policy initiation and where policy discourses are constructed (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 19). This includes the formal, public processes of government and the legislative process, and more informal, sometimes private and opaque arenas, such as social networks and lobbying. Examining the context of influence looks at

how the social, cultural, economic and political environment influences how policy is made. Although some of these influences are known or can be inferred from policy documentation, the informal, backstage nature of some of this activity means many areas of this context remain difficult to uncover.

The context of influence has a ‘symbiotic but none the less uneasy relation’ to the context of policy text production (Ibid,. p. 20). Policy texts are usually a popularist representation of policy articulated in terms of ‘general public good’ and common sense. They include official legislation and policy documents as well as documents seeking to explain or make sense of official texts, such as speeches by politicians and representations in media. Whilst policy as influence usually involves a relatively small sphere of highly involved individuals, policy as text has a much greater reach. Examining the context of text productions considers how such text is created and by whom. It acknowledges that individual texts may not be coherent or offer clear representations of a policy, as each reflects the specific agenda and influences of its creators. This can clearly be seen throughout this study in the differences and lack of coherence between policy intended for schools and that for HE, on the shared ground of progression to HE. Where the OfS has produced a myriad of policy documents regarding access and participation, official texts for schools regarding CIAG make little reference to HE. In some cases policy texts may be contradictory, as they reflect ‘struggle and compromise’ amongst those who seek to influence (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 21). This can be seen in the demands from the OfS for universities to develop expertise on their local context and to contribute to national level targets, which may be entirely different to local needs (Office for Students, 2018a). Throughout this study I draw upon policy documents; those published by the DfE, the OfS, and by universities, particularly APPs. These documents were useful when considering the formal, agreed aims between universities and the OfS, and reflected many of the ‘struggles and compromises’ espoused by Bowe and colleagues (Ibid,.). This is a particular focus in Chapter 7, where the tensions between the marketisation of HE and the increasing regulatory requirements to increase the diversity of institutions are explored.

The final context in the original framework is the context of practice, which acknowledges that ‘policy is not simply received and implemented […] rather it is subject to interpretation and then ‘recreated’’ (Ibid,. p. 22). The context of practice recognises ‘policy writers cannot control their texts’ (Ibid,. p. 22), and these texts will be published in many and varied

environments, where their readers will engage with them within their own social, cultural, economic and political contexts. The context of practice examines how actors at the grassroots level such as, in the case of this study, teachers or widening participation practitioners, reinterpret and translate policies to fit their own contexts, values and priorities. In doing so, the context of practice suggests that these grassroots actors have some agency over how policy is enacted, although Bowe and colleagues recognise this agency is limited and varies depending on the individual environment (Ibid,.). My fieldwork focused primarily on this context, and this is understood through the notion of policy enactment below (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Braun et al., 2010; Maguire et al., 2015). I also found Ball's additional 'context of outcomes' to be a useful bridge between my fieldwork and subsequent analysis. Ball describes the context of outcomes as the relationship between 'first order effects' - changes in practice or structure - and 'second order effects' - the impact of these changes on existing social inequalities - in this case articulated by my research participants (2006, p. 51).

This study was conducted during a period of policy change. This can be seen throughout the different policy contexts outlined above; the way in which policy for HE is made has been further devolved from the DfE to the newly created OfS, and Ofsted has been engaged more directly in shaping CIAG for schools. This has spawned many new policy texts being produced which are drawn upon throughout this thesis, such as the EIF (Ofsted, 2019) and Careers Strategy (Department for Education, 2017) in schools, and the guidance surrounding APPs for universities (Office for Students, 2018b, 2018c). In turn, this has influenced the context of practice, with many school and university based participants highlighting the way in which policy change in recent years has changed their work in both sectors. This chapter now turns to examine the context of practice more closely, through the lens of policy enactment.

Policy Enactment

Policy enactment recognises the messy complexity of the context of practice and the process of policy beyond its formal, published and originally envisaged parameters by policymakers. It is conceived by Braun and colleagues as, 'an understanding that policies are interpreted and 'translated' by diverse policy actors in the school environment, rather than simply implemented' (2010, p. 547). It therefore moves beyond the idea of 'implementation' as a specific, defined and isolated event; drawing upon Ball's earlier work

which suggests that, ‘policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set’ (1994, p. 19). Policy enactment sees the relationship between the making and implementation of policy as ‘dynamic and non-linear’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 6) rather than either ‘top down’ or ‘bottom up’ (Sabatier, 1986); the former understanding allowing for the exploration of how policy ‘travels’ within, between and from schools and universities. In doing so, policy enactment also moves beyond the positivist understanding of policy that Ball cautions against (2017).

The complex ways in which policy travels and is enacted is further influenced by the many and varied ‘material conditions’ of each school and university. Ball et al suggest that in their study this includes situated contexts (e.g. locality, history, demographics of intake), professional contexts (e.g. values, experiences and commitments of the professionals within the institution), material contexts (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology) and the external contexts (the broader policy context, Ofsted ratings, league tables, mission groups, MAT or local authority support and expectations), all of which influence the ways in which any given policy may be enacted (2012). However, they argue that these contexts and their variations are frequently overlooked in policy discussion (Maguire et al., 2015). In taking a more holistic view of institutional environments, policy enactment theory allows us to acknowledge that policy is not applied in a vacuum, but rather will ‘land’ differently in schools and universities, which all have different histories and cultures, or, as Lauder and colleagues describe it, ‘capacities, potentials and limits’ (1998, p. 10). Each of these policies have the potential to be aligned with or disruptive to the current ethos of the school or university.

Policy enactment encourages an analysis which moves away from the much critiqued misnomer of rational choice theory (RCT) (Friedman, 1996; McCarthy & Kehl, 2008). The latter asserts that self-interested individuals make rational calculations in order to take rational choices that maximise their own best interests (Becker & Tomes, 1979, 1986). Rather, policy enactment appreciates the ‘complexity of human sense-making’ (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 391), whereby the complex, cognitive process of each individual engaged across the course of a policy’s lifespan is acknowledged. Each individual, whether that be headteacher, university widening participation practitioner, teacher, or careers advisor occupies a different role as a ‘policy actor’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). They are in part influenced by both their professional positions within their school or university, but also a

range of other personal and professional factors including 'prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences' (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 393).

In contrast to much of the literature, which sees actors as homogenous groups of 'implementing agents' (Ibid,.), Ball et al caution against seeing all actors within the policy process as equal, an interpretation which 'obscures and distorts' the 'complex and differentiated activity that goes into the responses of schools [and universities] *to* and their work *with* policy' (2012, p. 49). Instead, the authors consider the many different types of actors who may be involved with the enactment of any given policy. I have drawn upon some of their different categories of actors throughout my analysis as useful ways of conceptualising individuals and their interactions with policy in a particular space.

Table 7: Policy Actors and 'Policy Work' (reproduced from Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 49)

Policy Actors	Policy Work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings.
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration.
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring.
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring / supporting, facilitating.
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career.
Translators	Production of texts, artefacts and events.
Critics	Union representatives, monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses.
Receivers	Coping, defending and dependency.

Within this research project, there are examples of individuals who describe themselves as fulfilling different policy roles, as well as those who appear to span multiple roles, and indeed it is likely that their roles would have changed over time. These different and changing roles can be seen in my analysis chapters (7 to 10). It is important to recognise the fluidity of these roles, which are not fixed to any individual, but rather provide a useful starting point in enabling us to unpick the ways in which policy is enacted by different individuals, in different physical spaces, and at particular points in time. Moreover, it is likely that each individual would move between different policy actor positions, depending on the policy examined.

This research uses the concept of policy enactment to analyse the data collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews. However, throughout the course of this research, a wealth of other data was collected (discussed in Chapter 6). These data provide context for the 'creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 3). In acknowledging the range of 'actors, texts, talk, technology and objects' (Ibid.,) involved in taking policy as it is 'officially' created and 'doing it' within a school or university environment, this thesis draws upon other (non-interview) sources of data which illustrate how schools and universities enact policy, including written documents such as Ofsted reports, APPs, handbooks, presentations, lesson plans and other documents volunteered by the research participants.

Research on policy enactment must also acknowledge that most studies only provide a snapshot of a moment in time, which sits in contrast to the way in which policy is enacted in an institution, described by Ball et al as 'processes of becoming' rather than ever being 'done' (2012, p. 3). Therefore, this research project is not a definitive summary of the ways in which a school, university, or even an individual, has enacted a policy, but an exercise to 'observe politics in action' (Henry et al., 2013, p. 20). In using policy enactment as a lens, this thesis acknowledges the importance of the situated, professional, material and external contexts which underlie each school and university involved within the study. I foreground descriptions of schools and individuals throughout my analysis chapters in an attempt to highlight these contexts. In using policy enactment tools, I seek to examine not just how policy is formally conceived, but how this is understood and practised daily within schools and universities.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the theoretical resources I draw upon to shape this thesis. It sets out the three understandings of P/policy used in this thesis; policy as ideology, policy as an enlightenment concept, and policy in its local enactment. It seeks to ground this thesis in the field of policy sociology as part of a desire to ensure and design a thesis on two levels; not only on the 'application and improvement' (Ozga, 2021, p. 291) of the current system, but also in taking a critical and questioning approach. It sets out how policy sociology focuses on the social, cultural, economic and political contexts for a particular policy, which provides a holistic understanding of the spaces in which policy is made, influenced and enacted. I

also suggest the importance of considering the historical context of policy over time and space, thinking about the local, national, global ways in which policy travels.

Using Ball's work on policy as text and policy as discourse, I interrogate the ways in which texts can be 'readerly' or 'writerly', and how these create different opportunities for interpretation and implementation. I set this in the context of my research and the shift from more a 'writerly' to increasingly 'readerly' policy approach with regards to progression to HE. This is the case both for schools - where readerly policies have been normalised to a far greater extent - and universities, where prescription feels contradictory to the relatively high levels of autonomy experienced by universities in other policy spheres.

This chapter examines the policy cycle in order to interrogate the complex, multifacted and contested ways in which policy is made. Instead of understanding policymaking and implementation as a top-down, linear mechanism, the policy cycle considers this as an interrelated process in which there are different contexts in which policy can be understood. These contexts of influence, text production and practice enable us to examine the different ways in which policy is shaped, understood and enacted.

Finally, this chapter introduces policy enactment to recognise the underlying messiness and ad hoc nature of policy development and enactment, and the different actors who are involved in its creation and use. Policy enactment recognises that these roles are fluid and enacted in different ways by different individuals at different times and in different spaces. In doing so, this approach grounds this study as a snapshot of one particular point in that journey.

The next chapter sets out my research design. I discuss my methods and methodology, the sampling approach I have taken, and the ethical considerations of this study. I build on the personal context set out earlier in this thesis in highlighting my reflexivity in this study.

Chapter 6 – Methodology and Research Design

Introduction

This chapter presents my research design and the methods used in this study. I begin by setting out the epistemological reasoning behind this study and the research questions I have used in order to achieve my research objectives. I then outline the decisions I made to shape the parameters of this study, including situating it geographically in the North East. I also set out the way in which I created my sample of schools and universities and the way I have used the DfE's destinations data to frame this research (2018b). This chapter moves on to explain the way in which I gathered my data. I then look at the way in which I analysed my data using grounded theory and theoretical coding. This chapter concludes with reflections on my own positionality within the research process and the ethical considerations of the study.

Epistemological Position

This study's epistemological position draws on both interpretative and critical post-modernist paradigms whilst being of the belief that epistemological purity is neither possible, nor helpful. It 'assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations of a single event' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 9). As such, the use of a qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate. In particular, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled the collection of in-depth data about the experiences of participants, and supported the 'sense making' of this data. This was based upon the belief that, 'people create their own meanings in interaction with the world around them' (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 8).

This research distances itself from the positivist tradition, positioning the experiences of participants at the centre of this study and viewing the world as 'complex and chaotic, and reality as multiply constructed and transitional – unable to be explained solely by grand or meta narratives' (Grbich, 2013, p. 8). Such an epistemological starting point allows for meanings that are 'varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas' (Creswell, 2018, pp. 43–44). This research design speaks to my own journey of 'conscious exploration' as described in Chapter 1 (hooks, 2014, p. 19) and explicitly highlights the position of the researcher within the research as 'constructing', rather than 'finding' research (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2015). It also seeks to counterbalance the tendencies within a neoliberal education system to try to distil complex experiences into metrics (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016; Selwyn et al., 2015).

This research begins from an epistemological standpoint which acknowledges the 'ways in which power is embedded in the structure of society' (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 8). As a study explicitly focused upon inequalities in HE, it acknowledges that HE sits within a far wider social structure, and that power manifests throughout these constructions. In understanding this, I found Grbich's framing to be particularly insightful:

> 'The search for reality 'out there' is qualified by the understanding that society, laws, policies, language, discipline borders, data collection and interpretation are culturally and socially constructed… Meaning rather than knowledge is sought because knowledge is limited by 'desire' (lack of knowledge or the imperative to bring about change) and constrained by the discourses developed to protect powerful interests and to control the population's access to other explanations' (2013, p. 8).

In relation to this study, I see the areas of 'limited knowledge' surrounding the progression of under-represented groups to HE as driven by a lack of desire from those in positions of power to tackle this. It can also be seen in the way universities dominate the discourse around progression to HE, and school voices rarely being heard.

Research Questions

In Chapter 1 I set out my research objectives; to investigate the ways in which schools and universities interact within the sphere of progression to HE, and to understand the implications of these interactions on progression rates, particularly for those pupils from under-represented groups. In order to achieve these objectives, I have developed the following questions:

1. How do schools and universities work together in the sphere of progression to HE?
    a. How does the regulatory landscape in which schools and universities operate influence school-university relationships?
    b. To what extent can the interactions between schools and universities be understood as partnership working?
    c. To what extent do school-university relationships change depending on the age of pupils?

d. How do school and university characteristics influence the nature of school-university relationships?

2. What is the relevance of the findings of this study for our understandings of access and participation as an initiative to further social mobility?

A Study in the North East of England

The North East has historically been characterised by low progression rates to HE, with pupils in the region the least likely to progress to university across all regions of England, and 50% less likely to apply to university than their London peers (UCAS, 2018, p. 12). Students in the North East are also the least likely to leave their home region for HE than those in other English regions (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018; Social Mobility Commission, 2016), meaning -university relationships within the region remain relatively localised. There are five universities in the North East, which include a diverse range of institutions. This diversity allows this research to cover the different HE categorisations discussed in Chapter 3, such as mission groups, league table positions, selectivity levels and TEF awards.

Map 1: Highlighting the North East within Great Britain, with inset of North East LAs

This research was deliberately focused outside of London. It is well documented that London schools have drawn away from the rest of the country in terms of GCSE attainment and in particular, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils (Blanden et al., 2015; Burgess, 2014; Ross et al., 2020). London as a region has the highest rates of progression to HE in the UK, a trend which has increased over recent years (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018; UCAS, 2019). Higher investment, demographic changes (Knowles, 2013), and the high concentration of schools which made policy initiatives such as the London Challenge possible (Kidson & Norris, 2014; Ofsted, 2010), are all attributable to this success. Efforts to replicate some of these policies elsewhere, such as the Greater Manchester or Somerset Challenge, have not

been nearly as successful (Husbands, 2013; Hutchings et al., 2012). All regions outside of London – despite their different and unique characteristics – bear more similarity to each other than they do to the capital in terms of rates of progression to HE. During a period of increasing demand for devolution, regional governance and place-based policy initiatives including 'levelling up', this study seeks to move away from undertaking London-centric research to examine what are often criticised as London-centric policies. Having previously lived and worked in the North East, I had developed a strong base of contacts and networks, which helped me to gain access to both schools and universities. I consider the implications of my own position later in this chapter.

Although the North East is frequently discussed in policy terms as a single homogenous area, there is significant diversity across the region. I felt it was important to reflect a geographical spread of schools in order for this study to credibly represent the North East, and to acknowledge the 'nuances of local context' (Ball et al., 2012). I employed maximum variation sampling to ensure as wide a range of LAs as possible were represented when identifying schools to include within the sample. This was particularly important given the decentralised, disjointed approach to policymaking regarding progression to HE, which has compounded the variation in how policy has been enacted (discussed further in Chapter 7).

Research Design

Maxwell suggests that, whilst quantitative research can establish correlations, qualitative research should focus on the causal processes, providing both understanding and an explanation as to how such correlations occur (2013). This study uses quantitative data on the number and characteristics of pupils progressing to HE from schools in the North East, to frame a qualitative study. It focuses on developing a deeper understanding of the quantitative correlations found in the current progression data; some schools send significantly larger proportions of their pupils, and specifically 'disadvantaged' pupils, to HE. This varies by different types of institution. In this way, my study examines the system; it is sociology of policy (Grace, 1998).

A further aim of this research is to understand the experiences of both sides of the school-university divide. Rhetoric surrounding progression to HE is currently dominated by universities, and regulated by policymakers. This undervalues the importance of schools – the institutions pupils are attending when they make decisions about their future. The

research design for this project sought to elevate school voices and recognise their importance in understanding the causes of varying progression rates to HE.

Finally, in using destinations data, this thesis aims to engage policymakers in 'sociology for policy' (Grace, 1998), looking at 'incremental rearrangements' of the system (Savage, 2021, p. 282) to improve HE progression rates for under-represented groups, through school-university relationships.

The Scope of this Study

A Focus on Schools with Sixth Forms

As of January 21st 2019, there were 1055 state-funded, mainstream schools and sixth form colleges in the North East (Department for Education, 2019a). There are 157 secondary schools in the region, 90 of which include sixth form provision. This study sampled from these 90 schools. This initial pool of schools enabled me to select schools which met my sampling criteria (discussed later in this chapter) and spanned a diverse range of schools across the region. Focusing on schools with sixth forms enabled me to make use of KS5 destinations data to frame this study. Despite the importance of KS4 attainment in progression to HE (Crawford et al., 2015), KS4 and KS5 destinations data is not matched, so it is not possible to track the percentage of pupils progressing to HE by the schools they attended until the end of KS4.

The Exclusion of Other Education Settings

There are three important areas of the education sector which are not included within this research; primary schools, schools without sixth forms (i.e. secondary schools which take pupils Year 7 to 11), and sixth form colleges. Throughout this research I have aimed to elevate school voices. However, in doing so it is important to be transparent about which school voices this refers to. The exclusion of each of these groups was due to the limited scale of a doctoral project. Although I have not been able to include these other groups in this research project, in Chapter 11 I call for further research into the relationships between universities and each of these sector stages, in order to understand school-university relationships across the full education trajectory.

The Role of the Third Sector

This thesis focuses on the direct relationships between universities and schools within progression to HE. However, there are a host of heterarchical organisations working within this space who also interact with both universities and schools. These include the government funded Uni Connect consortia, as well as third sector organisations. These charities vary considerably from small, localised endeavours, to larger organisations with regional and national reach. The ways in which each organisation works varies significantly, however many have developed their own programmes to increase progression to HE and work directly with schools and universities. Some of these organisations act as intermediaries between schools and universities. Many are partially funded by universities as part of their APPs to deliver outreach activities to schools in different forms. Activities offered include, amongst others, establishing local learning centres in communities with low levels HE participation (IntoUniversity)[21], providing university style learning experiences (The Brilliant Club), online mentoring (Brightside), academic tuition (The Access Project) and residential courses (Villiers Park)[22]. A number of these organisations have come together to form the FAC, and seek to influence government on issues of access and participation (Sansom et al., 2021), making them active policy actors within this space. Having worked for one of these organisations for several years, I have experience in this part of the sector.

Some of these organisations were mentioned by participants within this study. Where relevant I have included references made by participants to these organisations within my analysis. However, I decided not to pursue interviews with individuals working for these organisations for several reasons. Firstly, many third sector organisations were established in London, and there remains a concentration of access interventions in the capital and other urban areas, which have higher concentrations of pupils and better infrastructure to facilitate such work (IntoUniversity, 2015). Far fewer organisations work in the North East, which was reflected in the limited number mentioned by schools during the course of this research. By far the third sector organisation most frequently mentioned was The Brilliant Club, with which several schools within the study worked to deliver The Scholars' Programme. However, within the North East it appeared that relatively little outreach was undertaken by third sector organisations, and rather, universities undertook activities directly with schools. The

[21] www.intouniversity.org (Accessed 23/03/2022).
[22] www.villierspark.org.uk (Accessed 23/03/2022).

exception to this was NECOP, the regional Uni Connect consortium (formerly known as the North East Collaborative Outreach Programme, with the same acronym), which employed staff centrally.

Level 3 Qualifications:

Throughout this study, there is an implicit – and sometimes explicit – focus on students undertaking A Level qualifications at Level 3 as the main progression pathway to higher education. Whilst it is the case that the majority of students who progress to higher education do so through an A Level route, an increasing number do so via BTEC qualifications or a blended (mixture of A Level and BTEC qualifications) pathway (Petrie and Keohane, 2019). BTEC qualifications are disproportionately undertaken by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and serve as a progression pathway for under-represented students (HEPI, 2022). It is probable that the experiences and progression pathways for students on BTEC, rather than A Level pathways may differ however, this has not been a focus of this research.

The Use of Destinations Data

This research uses the DfE's KS5 destinations data to identify schools to take part in this study. It is important to note that KS5 destinations data includes only pupils who sustained an education route after KS4, rather than the total population of young people in this cohort. The headline measure for KS5 destinations data shows 'the percentage of students staying in education, apprenticeships or employment for at least two terms in the year after completing their phase of study' (Department for Education, 2017, p. 5). Sub categories of this measure show the destinations within education, including the percentage of pupils with; sustained participation into HE (Level 4 and above)[23]; highly selective HE; Oxbridge and the Russell Group.

The Ethics of Secondary Data

Whilst the destinations data has provided valuable insights, it is important to recognise the strengths and challenges of using secondary, government data for this research. The use of government data in this study has enabled a far larger dataset to be used, which has

[23] Pupils who are counted as progressing to HE include those that have gone on to universities or other HEIs, as identified in HESA data. This includes designated courses at higher education alternative providers from 2015/16. HE courses at FE providers are also included, identified through Individual Learner Records. This data only includes pupils who are studying for Level 4 qualifications or higher.

been financed, collected and analysed by the DfE. The data is more robust and of a higher quality than any single researcher could hope to achieve due to the reach and resources of the DfE.

All the secondary data used in this study is publicly available and easily accessible. However, as Glaser and Strauss rightly acknowledges, secondary data analysis uses data that was originally collected for a different purpose, and is therefore collected by someone else whose methodological and ethical approach does not necessarily align with your own (1967, p. 11). The ethical considerations of using secondary data in this project are mitigated by its collection as a national database, and the publication of a methodology which describes the processes through which the data was collected and analysed (Department for Education, 2019b). Due to the small datasets in some categories, a small amount of data is supressed within the destinations data due to the risk of an individual student being identified. This was particularly the case in the data regarding disadvantaged pupils progressing to highly selective institutions. 56 schools had supressed data for this subset, suggesting very low numbers of pupils were represented (Department for Education, 2018b).

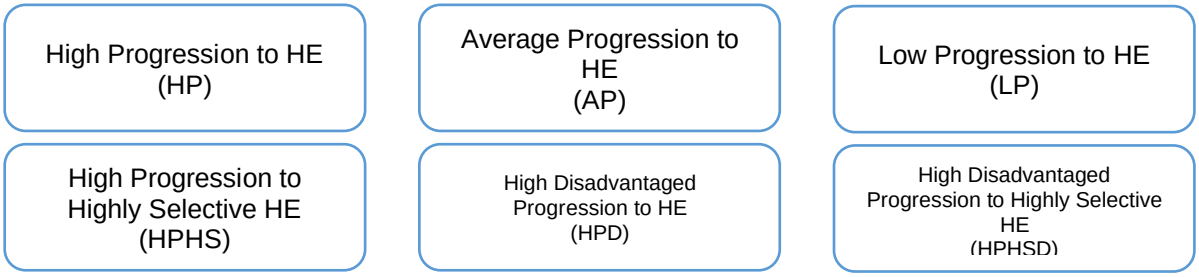
It is important to acknowledge the inherent social, ideological and political influences of government data and the categorisations which are created (Smith, 2006, p. 79). A clear example of this can be seen in the inclusion of the Russell Group as a separate category on the destinations data, despite its function as a mission group rather than measurement of quality, and the failure to include any other university mission groups within the data. Ensuring that the terms and categorisation used in the secondary data are problematised within this research study is important to ensure that this research does not merely uncritically adopt the political paradigms used in the dataset. These terms are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Creating a School Sample

Having set out the parameters for this study, here I set out how I created my sample of eight schools (in addition to two schools in my pilot) from the 90 schools with sixth forms in the North East. I draw upon what Maxwell terms the ‘purposive-mixed-probability sampling continuum’ (2009, p. 85). More specifically, I use a stratified purposive sampling strategy. I

divided the 90 schools with sixth forms into six strata (Figure 3) using DfE KS5 destinations data (2018b).[24] The categorisations which make up the strata are explained below.

Figure 3: Six School Strata



Categorisation Terminology

Defining High, Average and Low Progression

Schools have been designated into 'high' (HP), 'average' (AP) and 'low' (LP) progression strata by using the progression to HE data and creating a ranking from highest to lowest. The schools with the highest percentage of their cohorts progressing to HE and to highly selective institutions have been labelled 'high' progression. 'Low' progression schools have been identified from the schools with the lowest percentages of their cohorts progressing to HE. To create the 'average' progression groups, schools were allocated based on the proximity to the national averages for progression to HE (59%) and highly selective institutions (24%) (Department for Education, 2018b). The groups are based on a relative rather than absolute measure, and therefore the 'high' and 'low' categories are designed to capture the far ends of the spectrum within the North East. This research uses percentages of each cohort rather than the absolute numbers in order to include a greater range of schools within the research. Schools with larger sixth forms would be over-represented in each category if raw numbers of pupils were used.

[24] This research uses the data published in January 2019, based on students who completed KS4 or KS5 in 2015/16 and their 'sustained activity' (education, employment or training) in 2016/17. KS4 and KS5 Destination Measures were published for the first time in 2012, and covered students included in the 2008/09 performance tables and their destinations in 2009/10. However, until the October 2016 provisional publication, all data was released as experimental statistics with changes to methodology made each year. In order to measure a 'sustained destination' there is an inevitable time lag in this data, which is finalised one academic year after pupils complete a phase of study (either KS4 or KS5). The challenges of using this data for accountability measures as a result of this time lag are discussed in Chapter 7.

Disadvantaged Pupils

This study has used the categorisation of 'disadvantaged' as defined by the DfE and applied in the destinations data. The term disadvantaged within this dataset is primarily based therefore on a 'policy' measure of poverty. The destinations data shows the progression rates of both disadvantaged and 'all other' pupils as a binary comparison. Whilst there are many intersections between poverty and ethnicity, class, place and gender, this definition does not capture this and, as discussed in previous chapters, poverty does not present the only barrier to progression to HE. Despite the imprecise nature of this imperfect categorisation, this study uses it in the absence of richer available data.

Disadvantaged pupils are defined in the KS4 destinations data as those who were eligible for Pupil Premium when in Year 11 (Department for Education, 2017, p. 23). In 2014/15 this included pupils who had:

- Been eligible for FSM at any point in the previous six years.
- Been looked after by their local authority for at least 1 day (LAC).
- Left care through adoption, a special guardianship order, or a child arrangements order (previously known as a residence order).

This information comes from the school census and LA records. For KS5, a pupil's disadvantage status in Year 11 is used.[25]

Highly Selective Institutions

This study uses the DfE's definition of the most selective HEIs; the top third of HEIs when grouped by the mean UCAS tariff score from the top three A level grades of entrants (2017, p. 21). The institutions included in this group change every year, although over 80% of HEIs remained in the top third for nine consecutive years, from 2006/07 to 2014/15 (Ibid,. p.21). The top third list used in this research (Appendix 1) is from 2014/15 data and is used in the 2015/16 destinations data DfE methodology (Ibid,. p. 39). The calculation uses only the top three A level grades attained by each pupil, excluding pupils studying any other qualification at KS5.

[25] Pupil Premium funding was introduced in 2011; however, there have been some minor changes to the rules for eligibility each year, affecting a small number of pupils. KS5 students who had not attended a state-funded school in England in Year 11 (for example because they were in independent schools, in other parts of the UK, or overseas) are not known to be disadvantaged and are included in 'all other pupils'.

The percentage of pupils progressing onto a highly selective institution is a percentage of those progressing to ‘HE level 4 and above’. This is important when understanding the relatively small numbers of pupils the highly selective percentages represent in the destinations data as a whole, and within this study.

I then identified a small number of cases within each stratum for more intense study using ‘generic purposive sampling techniques’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 412). Maxwell defines purposive sampling as where, ‘particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide’ (2009, p. 87). I used extreme case sampling (selecting the outliers at each end of the sample) to identify the schools which had the most extreme progression rates (HP, LP, high progression to highly selective HE (HPHS), high progression to HE for disadvantaged pupils (HPD) and high progression to highly selective HE for disadvantaged pupils (HPHSD) strata). I used typical case sampling for the AP stratum to find schools which typified the norm. To do this, I created rankings for all the schools based on their destinations data for each of the strata. I contacted the schools that most typified (using the ranking) each of these strata to form the eight schools within my main research sample (Table 8). Within this, I tried to ensure that I had a minimum of two schools within each stratum. A further two schools are included as part of my pilot study. Although schools were selected on the basis of typifying a particular stratum, many appeared in the top 10% when ranked for other strata, which I note in the ‘Additional Strata’ column of Table 8. Further detail on how I selected the schools within each stratum using the destinations data can be found in Appendix 2.

Schools are busy, often pressurised places, and, as Flick suggests, are not obviously benefited by the inconvenience of research being conducted within their setting (2009, p. 57). Some schools, particularly those serving communities with high levels of socioeconomic deprivation may have experienced being ‘over researched’ (Clark, 2008; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2013), although I felt this was less likely in the North East than, for example, London. The lack of school level accountability for HE progression may heighten this sense of inconvenience without obvious gain. One school, Crescent College, was selected for the study based on their HPHSD rate but declined to participate in the study because of a lack of time. When I spoke to the Deputy Headteacher on the phone, she told me progression to HE was not an area of focus for them. This was interesting to me as the destinations data had identified the school as sending relatively (within the region) high numbers of

disadvantaged pupils both to HE (HP stratum) and to highly selective HE (HPHSD stratum) and I would have expected the school to have been actively involved in this space. However, I did not find accessing schools to be as significant a barrier as I had feared as all the other schools I contacted agreed to take part in the research.

Having previously worked in a school in the North East, I was aware I had preconceptions of particular schools as a result of conversations with colleagues, or interactions with pupils, and this could have added an additional layer of complexity and partiality to my choices when selecting schools as cases. This was significantly mitigated by the use of quantitative data to create categories of schools according to specific criteria, as I then selected schools regardless of any anecdotal information.

Table 8: Schools Selected

School (Pseudonym)	Primary Strata	Additional Strata	Local Authority
Main Study:			
Annersley Academy	LP	N/A	Northumberland
Bettany School	HPHS	HPHSD HP	Durham
Crescent College *(Did not participate)*	*HPHSD*	*HPD*	*Darlington*
Culver Academy	HP	HPHS	Redcar and Cleveland
Dene School	LP	N/A	Newcastle upon Tyne
Ferrars Community High School	AP HPHSD	N/A	Northumberland
Maynard School	HPHSD	HPD	Hartlepool
Stewart College	HPHS	HP HPHSD	Gateshead
Wilson School	HPD	N/A	Sunderland
Pilot Study:			
Linton Academy	AP	N/A	Sunderland
Moore Academy	N/A	N/A	Sunderland

‘Pen portraits’ of the schools in this study, which provide greater description and insight into their ‘contexts’ (Ball et al, 2012) can be found in Appendix 3.

Individual School Participant Sampling

The final level of sampling involved identifying the participants within the schools who would take part in the semi-structured interviews. These participants were self-identified within the school as representing the school’s work with universities. One of the challenges with this research project was identifying the appropriate participants to interview as there is no common role, job title or responsibility for progression to HE used across all schools.

In order to identify participants within schools, I initially asked to be connected to the ‘person responsible for coordinating HE progression.’ I then discussed the study with this member of staff, and used a snowball sampling approach to identify additional members of staff within the school who may be suitable research participants. Table 9 shows a list of the 24 school participants included in my study. I have used pseudonyms throughout in order to protect anonymity of participants and their organizations.

Table 9: Participant List (Schools)

No.	School	Categories	Participant	Role
1.	Annersley Academy	LP	Simone	Sixth Form Tutor
2.			Carl	Assistant Head
3.	Bettany School	HP, HPHS, HPHSD	James	Deputy Headteacher
4.			Juliet	Head of Sixth Form
5.			Felix	Deputy Head of Sixth Form
6.	Culver Academy	HP, HPHS	Grizel	Head of Sixth Form
7.	Dene School	LP	Ernest	Head of Year
8.			Camilla	Sixth Form Careers Advisor
9.			Theo	Head of Sixth Form
10.			Amy	Head of Careers

11.	Ferrars Community High School	AP, HPHSD	Bill	Deputy Head of Sixth Form
12.			Felicity	Deputy Head of Sixth Form
13.			Freida	Sixth Form Administrator
14.	Linton Academy	AP	Mary-Lou	University Progression Coordinator
15.			Tristan	Deputy Headteacher
16.			Gillian	Head of Sixth Form
17.	Maynard School	HPD, HPHSD	Helena	Head of Sixth Form
18.			Constance	Head of Careers
19.			Margo	Sixth Form Careers Advisor
20.	Moore Academy	N/A	Joyce	Head of Careers
21.			Kurt	University Progression Lead
22.	Stewart College	HP, HPHS, HPHSD	Charles	Head of Sixth Form
23.			Maria	Deputy Head of Sixth Form
24.	Wilson School	HPD	Geoff	Head of Sixth Form

Given the diverse nature of school-based approaches to HE progression, the number of participants involved at each school varied from a single member of staff, such as at Culver Academy or Wilson School, through to several members of staff such as at Bettany School and Dene School. I often found that my initial contact would only consider their own role as relevant to the study. However, during my interviews it often became clear that there were a wider number of people involved in HE progression. Although this study employed a formal sampling frame for schools, at an individual participant level an informal approach was taken, and the number of interviews expanded to achieve ‘saturation’ (Creswell, 2012) within the schools wherever possible.

University Selection

In order to select universities to include within this research, a generic purposive sampling approach was taken (Bryman, 2016, p. 412). All five universities within the North East were included within this study. The sample includes two highly selective institutions, characterised by the DfE 'top third universities' (2017, p. 21), and three non-highly selective institutions. These universities also represent different mission groups; two institutions are members of the Russell Group, two are part of the University Alliance group and one belongs to the Million+ group. Following the pilot study, two additional highly selective universities outside the region were included in the main study to reflect universities which were regularly discussed by school-based participants. Thus, altogether seven universities are included in the study.

Once I had identified the institutions within the sample, I approached each university's Head of Access, or equivalent. This was more straightforward than in schools as those working in relevant roles were easier to identify. I identified participants using a snowballing approach (Bryman, 2016, p. 415) based on my initial conversations with the Head of Access, and interviewed between one and four participants in each institution.

During the course of the main study, I became increasingly aware of the important role NECOP played within school-university relationships in the North East. I took an opportunistic sampling approach (Bryman, 2016, p. 409) to enable me to extend my fieldwork to include two interviews with NECOP practitioners, who were based in two of the HE institutions already within my sample.

Table 10 gives an overview of the seven different institutions, 12 university-based participants, and two NECOP participants involved in the study. I have not included pen portraits of the universities in the sample as doing so would make them more easily identifiable.

Table 10: University Participants

	University	Mission Group	DfE Top Third?	North East?	Participant	Role
1.	Barras University	Mission+	N	Y	Daisy	Access Manager

2.					Robyn	Head of Access
3.	Carey University	University Alliance	N	Y	Guy	Access Manager
4.					Kit	Head of Access
5.					Hilda	Access Manager
6.	Howell University	Russell Group	Y	Y	Mary	Head of Access
7.	Lambert University	University Alliance	N	Y	Elsie	Policy Manager
8.					Maurice	Access Manager
9.					Carola	Access Manager
10.	Lovell University	Russell Group	Y	Y	Nick	Access Manager
11.	NECOP	N/A	N/A		Elizabeth	NECOP Manager
12.					Violet	NECOP Coordinator
13.	Rutherford University	Russell Group	Y	N	Madge	Head of Access
14.	Woodward University	Russell Group	Y	N	Polly	(College) Head of Access

Policymaker Selection

In order to better understand the environment in which schools and universities operate, this study included a small number of supplementary interviews with relevant policymakers. I interviewed staff from both the DfE and the OfS regarding the role both organisations play within school-university relationships. These participants are included in Table 11.

Table 11: Policy Organisation Participant List

No.	Name		Organisation
1.	Rufus	Policy Manager	Office for Students
2.	Tom	Policy Manager	Department for Education
3.	Rosalie	Policy Manager	Department for Education

Participant Demographics

At the end of each interview, I asked participants to complete a form which asked details of their demographics. 100% of my participants were White and all but one of them were White British. The non-British participant came from another English-speaking country. This reflects the demographics of the region; the North East has the least ethnic diversity in the UK, with 93.6% of pupils being White British (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Three of the LAs; Redcar and Cleveland, Northumberland and County Durham appear in the top 20 least diverse LAs in the UK (Ibid). Of my 41 participants, 27 identified as female and 14 identified as male. Of those I interviewed in more senior roles in schools there was an approximately even split between males and females. This is not reflective of the general make up of schools, where senior leaders are more likely to be male (Department for Education, 2018a).

I asked participants to identify their socioeconomic background as a child. The school-based participants were more likely to describe themselves as being working-class or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as children. Most described their parents as working in working-class roles. This is reflective of the relatively low proportion of professional roles in the North East when compared to other regions (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Of the 12 university-based participants in North East universities, ten described themselves as from working-class backgrounds. This was also reflected in their interviews, where many of them suggested that their work in access and participation was driven by their own personal experiences of having benefitted from attending HE.

Data Gathering

Semi-Structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews with staff in both schools and universities sits at the heart of this research. Collecting qualitative data in this way enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative correlations found in the destinations data. It also enabled

a flexibility of approach, which allowed me both to embark on interviews with a broad sense of my areas of focus, whilst reacting to the richness of the data participants provided. Oppenheim suggests the increased engagement of participants with interview-based research, in contrast to questionnaires, is due to the level of involvement required and the motivation this engenders (2000, pp. 81–82). In undertaking semi-structured interviews, I also identified potential documents which I requested for documentary analysis (for example, lesson plans used to deliver information to pupils, school level strategies or staff continuous professional development (CPD) sessions). I developed interview schedules, based firstly on areas of interest within my literature review and subsequently shaped by my pilot study to provide a framework for each discussion (Appendix 16). The interview schedule was developed from the literature but then deployed flexibly in interview situations to allow a conversation to develop and to give the participants space to focus the interview on areas they felt were important.

Interviews, Hochschild suggests, 'explore issues in depth, to see how and why people frame their ideas in the way they do, how and why they make connections between ideas, values, events, opinions, behaviours' (2009, p.1). This focus on understanding the 'how' and 'why' was particularly relevant for this study as there is significant research (Chowdry et al., 2013; Crawford et al., 2017), discussed further in Chapter 3, which demonstrates clearly the disparity in progression to HE between different student groups, but this does not tell us why this is the case. I sought to focus my research on understanding 'what', 'how, and 'why the schools identified in the destinations data were doing; the differences and similarities between the schools in my sample and between the ways in which individual participants articulate their work.

I was particularly aware of the role of gatekeepers within both schools and universities, who controlled 'access and re-access' (Miller & Bell, 2012, p. 55), and wanted to avoid both the 'shepherding' effect' whereby the fieldworker is herded in one direction or another (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), and 'surveillance chaperoning' whereby the gatekeeper seeks to keep tabs on the research for their own purposes (Lee, 1993, p. 123). Although this study was not investigating an area which was deemed to be particularly sensitive within schools (Ibid,.), the high stakes accountability measures schools are perpetually subject to have created a sense of wariness in some schools. For universities, my research focuses on an increasingly regulated and high stakes area and I was aware that on both counts this

may influence how gatekeepers acted towards this study. Wanat also draws attention to the differences between ‘access’ and ‘cooperation’ (2008), whereby official approval of a gatekeeper might not be mirrored in the informal cooperation of different participants, although both are important in data collection. In order to gain both access and cooperation, I contacted the person within the organisation who appeared to be best placed to help me navigate the institutions infrastructure, whilst also requesting approval from the Head of Access in universities, or Headteacher in schools. Only one initial point of contact (Crescent College) declined for the institution to participate. I also worked to build rapport with those I interacted with, both in the approval and data collection stages via email and when visiting the institutions.

Interviews are not value neutral, objective exercises, and Cicourel identifies several challenges in using this method, including the differing levels of mutual trust between different interviewees, the completeness of the information provided by a participant, and the potential for misunderstanding or misinterpreting interview data (1964). In an increasingly politicised sector such as access and participation and the greater accountability of universities to the OfS, university-based participants may be more reticent or influenced by external pressures. This is less likely to present the same level of anxiety to school-based participants as the accountability measures used in schools are not focused on progression to higher education. This is not to suggest that school-based participants will not be influenced by sector level issues, such as school funding or the inclusion of the Gatsby Benchmarks in the EIF, which were raised frequently in my interviews (and subsequent analysis chapters). Cicourel’s caution with regard to interviews does not prevent them from being useful research tools, and I found the flexibility to explore different themes in their ‘lived daily world’ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014, p. 27) integral to exploring the ways in which my participants understood school-university relationships.

A further benefit of semi-structured interviews is the ability to use what Brinkman and Kvale term ‘normal language’ to gather knowledge across different settings (2014, p. 33). I set out my understanding of how ‘normal language’ differs across schools and universities in Chapter 1, drawing on the theory of emic (internal to a culture) and etic (applied externally from a culture) language (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2010). The difference in accountability structures between schools and universities, and a lack of a common understanding of progression to HE, has driven significant differences in both the emic

terminology used and metrics the different sectors are held accountable for. This poses a practical challenge when undertaking research in different settings to ensure that research participants who use different emic language and terminology to describe their experiences are not misinterpreted by an etic researcher. This is of particular concern in schools, where there is less defined terminology for progression to HE. It is also notable when making comparisons between universities and schools that language may not be used in the same way.

Document Gathering

The collation of relevant documents occurred during fieldwork in each research site and from publicly available sources. Where participants mentioned documents during the course of interviews, I requested copies of them and recorded their verbal consent (captured on the audio recordings of interviews) to use these as part of the study. At the end of each interview I asked the participant if they would like to share any documentation they thought could be relevant to the study to which they had not yet referred. After this 'open' request had been made, I followed this up with a more structured request where I gave examples of possible documents. This enabled me to gather documentation which the individual participants deemed important, as well as gather some documents which were more commonly used across schools. Where participants said documentation did not exist or were unwilling to share this with me, I did not press the issue. Table 12 lists documents which were gathered from different institutions, although not every document was collected in each setting.

Table 12: Types of documents gathered during this study

Document	Source
CIAG strategy	School
Other school strategies which included progression to HE	School
School Improvement Plan	School
School level UCAS data	School
Lesson plans for CIAG / 'Life' / lessons which included progression to HE	School
Timetable or overview of external speakers	School
CIAG literature given to pupils	School
Photographs of displays on HE	School
University trip calendar	School

Staff CPD booklets on HE	School
University marketing materials given to pupils	School University
University strategy	University
Departmental strategy	University
Session resources	University

In addition to documents gathered during fieldwork, there were publicly available documents and sources of data which I gathered on each institution who took part in the study. These are documented in Table 13.

Table 13: Publicly available documents gathered during this study

Document	Source
Ofsted report	Ofsted
CIAG strategy	School
Current APPs	OfS
Previous Access Agreements since 2006	OfS
Institution Website	School University
Compulsory institutional policies e.g. Pupil Premium Statement	School University
Social media	School University

The documents collected during my fieldwork and the publicly available documents offered useful context and the opportunity to triangulate my data, as understood by Denzin to mean the use of 'multiple observers, theories, methods, and data sources' (1978, p. 307). These documents offered useful insights which allowed for the examination of convergence, inconsistency and contradiction between the data sources (Mathison, 1988). The documents pertaining to each institution were coded and analysed using the same approach as the interview transcripts (discussed further below).

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of using these forms of documentation. These limitations should be recognised in both documents gathered from schools and universities, but also in the official documents including Ofsted reports and APPs. Rather than viewing

documents as sources of 'transparent representations' of an organisational or social reality, Atkinson and Coffey argue that documents should be examined in the context in which they were produced, and the readership they were intended for, as well as their 'inter-textuality'; how they relate to other documents (2011). Academisation and the increasingly performative approach to education within the UK has resulted in official documentation being couched with a view to the institution's 'market' and many of the documents I gathered reflect this discourse. In particular, the influence of the OfS' explicit focus on regulation through the marketisation of HE, can be seen in the language used in the APPs I analysed (Chapter 7). Many of the documents created by school-based participants are in response to and written in terms of Ofsted's EIF. Ball terms this type of policy enactment, being 'seen to be done' (2012, p. 56). In addition, all documents are subject to a range of different influences; including internal organisational dynamics and personal viewpoints, which may be difficult to identify as an outsider.

Fieldwork

In order to maximise the responses to my request to undertake research within schools, I mapped the pressures and timings of the school calendar and tailored the timings of my research plan onto this. This identified when best to make initial contact with schools and to schedule interviews. A secondary consideration was how this timetable fitted to the university calendar. However, I anticipated university-based participants having a more flexible timetable than school-based participants. Appendices 4 and 5 show my Research Timeline and Fieldwork Plan.

Pilot Study

In July 2019, I conducted a short pilot study during which I undertook interviews and focus groups at two schools in the North East; Linton Academy (AP) and Moore Academy (N/A). Linton and Moore Academy were selected through convenience and snowballing sampling as I already had a contact at Linton Academy. At Linton Academy I conducted three interviews with staff, including the Deputy Head, the Head of Sixth Form and the University Progression Coordinator. I also ran two group interviews with pupils, the first with six Year 10 pupils and the second with ten Year 12 pupils. At Moore Academy I interviewed the Director of Careers and the University Progression Lead. I also ran a group interview with six Year 9 pupils. The pilot study gave me the opportunity to trial and edit my interview schedule (Appendices 6 and 7), gather some preliminary data and trial my research

methods. Following the pilot study, I changed my focus to only include staff within schools and universities, rather than including school pupils within my data.

It became apparent that interviews with pupils were less effective at answering my research questions than I had anticipated. Whereas staff were able to talk about school-university interactions across the school and across year groups, pupils had a narrower experience of HE focused interventions. Even within a single year group, few pupils would have experienced all of the activities related to progression to HE. For this reason, group interviews did not give me comprehensive data. Moreover, many of the pupils seemed unsure of what was being asked of them, despite my attempt to use straightforward and emic language (Danby et al., 2011). Although I had intended for group interviews to create a lower pressure (Greig et al., 2013) and time efficient method of gathering data from pupils, group interviews with pupils appeared to produce 'group think' (Leshem, 2012), where one individual spoke and then other pupils all agreed with their answer to each question.

Although the research topic was not deemed to be highly sensitive, as the interview progressed some pupils, particularly in the Year 12 group who were in the process of planning their Post-18 destinations, shared feelings of inadequacy and worry surrounding HE. Morison and colleagues highlight the sensitivity of children, not only to the cognitive element of the interview but the social dynamics (2000), and I was concerned that group interviews in the way I had designed them were not an ethical way of collecting data.

A further reason for removing group interviews with pupils was that in both Linton and Moore Academy, I interviewed more staff than I had originally anticipated. This increased the data gathered and perspectives given within each school. In light of both these developments, I decided to retain the number of schools within the main study but focus only on staff interviews, rather than pupil interviews. Further reflections on my pilot study can be found in Appendix 8.

Main Study

During the study I conducted twenty-four interviews with participants in schools, 14 with participants across seven universities and five supplementary interviews with policymakers and other organisations.

Almost all interviews were undertaken individually apart from the interviews with Charles and Maria at Stewart College, Joyce and Kurt at Linton Academy and Daisy and Robyn at Barras University. Individual interviews were useful both methodologically and logistically. The logistical constraints of the school day meant staff had differing and often limited availability, particularly if they held a teaching post. Individual interviews enabled me to offer greater flexibility and take up opportunities to see more of the school as the interview timetable often meant longer gaps between interviews, or returning to the school on different days. By interviewing individually, I hoped to encourage participants to offer their views without influence from colleagues, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the school's context and any diversity of opinion (Cohen et al., 2017). Interviews mostly took the length of one school period, which was usually around 50 minutes, although some interviews went on for longer than this if participants had more time or wanted to continue the interview. Where participants asked to be interviewed together due to time constraints. I agreed to this wherever it seemed unlikely individual interviews would be possible, although I acknowledge the potential for participants within group interviews to be influenced consciously or unconsciously by their fellow interviewees, and the difficulty of maintaining anonymity (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Interviews were in-person on school and university sites. Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the final interview with Daisy and Robyn at Barras University was rescheduled and conducted via Zoom in May.

Interviews were based around an interview schedule (Appendices 6 and 7), which included key questions around the way in which participants understood and worked on; progression to HE, accountability measures, work with disadvantaged pupils and relationships with different institutions. Under each key question I had several follow up questions which I used flexibly, depending on the how the interview developed. This was particularly important for school-based staff who frequently held responsibility for a specific part of CIAG work, and did not necessarily have an overview of other elements I had included in the schedule.

I drew upon Kvale's 'quality criteria' (1996, p. 145) in preparing for interviews in order to attempt to create both the right physical and methodological environment to gather my data. During the interviews I aimed to build rapport with participants, being aware of the potential power differentiations between participants and myself as a researcher (Mills, 2001). I also sequenced my interviews to ensure easier and less controversial questions were asked at the beginning, such as asking participants about their journey to taking on the role they

currently held (Patton, 2002). In doing so, I was aware that in aiming to reduce the 'impositional strategies' (Barbour & Schostak, 2005, p. 42) which assert the power of the interviewer over the interviewee, I perhaps masked the inescapable power inherent in the researcher. I tried to avoid asking questions which might be seen as testing the individual participant, however sometimes participants appeared to interpret questions in this way. This was particularly relevant to school-based participants who operate under a higher accountability system in their day-to-day roles, and therefore were perhaps more likely to perceive any questions as high stakes. I noticed that responses to questions surrounding Ofsted, such as 'do you ever get asked about progression, careers or destinations by Ofsted?', and 'who do you think is held accountable for the number of pupils progressing to university?', sometimes appeared to make some participants nervous. Whenever this happened I tried to reassure them that there was no correct answer and I was just interested in their opinion.

I was frequently surprised by the openness of participants, particularly those based in schools. Several times, interviewees would share an opinion or story and follow this with comment such as, 'this is anonymous isn't it, I don't want to get sacked!' Often I thought this was said in jest, although I was aware that underpinning this might be a degree of real concern. Regardless of whether I thought they were joking, I reassured participants that both their name and their organisation's name would be anonymised. At the end of each interview I confirmed that participants gave consent for me to use our discussion. One participant asked me to remove a particular line from her interview but was happy for me to use the rest of the data. I found this surprising because the comment she asked to be removed was a throwaway remark which I didn't consider to be related to the question I had asked. This reinforced the sense that my position as a researcher was perceived in different and sometimes unexpected ways by my participants, and increased my awareness of the unknown ways in which power dynamics between myself and different interviewees might manifest.

Patton highlights the importance of language in the 'interpersonal' and 'interactional' elements of an interview (2002). In particular, the 'translation of academic language into more colloquial or domain specific language used by interviewees both to ensure there is clarity over what is being asked but also to make the participant feel comfortable in the interview setting' (Ibid,. p. 225). This was important for my school-based interviews as

participants were less likely to be familiar with the etic language surrounding progression to HE used in policy and universities. Despite my attempts to modify the language and reflect their own emic language where possible, school-based interviewees often appeared less comfortable with my questions than university-based participants, and more frequently asked for clarification, or gave answers which did not fully answer my question. This was not true of all my school-based participants and I discuss the characterisations of some of these as 'policy actors' in Chapter 5. In particular for example, James and Tristan both occupied senior roles in their schools and appeared familiar with the etic terminology used by universities and in policy.

Although audio recording can influence participants' responses, I felt it was important to make an audio recording with the consent of each participant in order to be able to transcribe the interviews. There are benefits to this, such as creating a more complete record of the interview and enabling further and repeated analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 479), but there are also downsides to recording, such as filtering out the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview (Mishler, 1986). I attempted to compensate for this by writing my impressions of the interview in my fieldwork journal immediately after the interview took place with a focus on these elements, often using the gaps between participants where I had multiple interviews during the day. I also wrote reflections on my experiences at the field site throughout the day, particularly immediately after my arrival (reflecting on my initial impressions of the school or university) and immediately after my departure.

Data Analysis

In undertaking my analysis I felt great affinity with Miles' description of qualitative data as 'an attractive nuisance' (1979), promising great richness if only one could find a path through it. This section describes the pathways I found through my data, and the framework I used to guide this analysis.

Transcription

Although transcription formed an important part of allowing me to analyse my data, I am aware that in doing so there is a transition from an interview as both a 'social interaction' and a source of data, to solely a record of data. Kvale suggests that the term transcription should help us to understand its limitations; the prefix trans indicates a change of form and transcription is a selective transformation, which privileges verbal data (1996, p. 166). Cohen

and colleagues assert that there is ‘no single correct transcription’, but instead the issues are how the transcription is used (2017, p. 523). I recognise that a transcript does not record everything that happened in an interview, and attempted to add to the transcription my fieldwork notes on body language, impressions of the interview, and any notable events which had not been captured on the audio. Wherever I judged emphasis, speed of speech, pauses, or inflection to be notable, I recorded these on the transcript. In doing so, I acknowledged Kvale’s reflection that interviewee’s statements are not just collected by the interviewer but in reality, co-authored (1996).

Grounded Theory and Theoretical Coding

I drew on the broad church of grounded theory, originally conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss (1967), whilst acknowledging the considerable controversy and breadth of opinion which exists within and about the approach. For example, whilst finding such framing useful, this study does not use theoretical sampling (whereby data is collected iteratively to generate theory (Ibid,.)), which for Charmaz is a ‘defining property of grounded theory’ (2000, p. 519). However, it draws on many of the other elements associated with grounded theory, in particular the approach to coding and the concept of ‘constant comparison’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I found Charmaz’s approach of initial, focused and theoretical coding particularly helpful (2006) in order to generate a vast number of ideas from my data (initial coding), whereby I coded almost every line of transcript (example in Appendix 9). To produce ‘focused codes’, I found high frequency codes, codes which revealed most about my data, and discontinued and combined codes (Appendix 10) (Ibid,.). I used an iterative approach at this stage, re-exploring and examining my data in light of the focused codes. Finally, theoretical coding, whereby I brought together the codes generated by my focused coding under specific themes helped to build a holistic understanding of my data. Throughout each stage I generated large numbers of ‘memos’ (Appendix 11) which included my reflections, links between concepts and theoretical ideas, and eventually expanded these into longer but separate documents (Appendix 12). This enabled me to see differences and similarities in my data and look at the different narratives. This was especially helpful for retaining a sense of individual identity amongst school-based participants, rather than their holistic experiences becoming lost, subservient to the themes of the data.

I also coded the accompanying documents I had gathered from each organisation. I coded these after I coded the interview transcriptions from each organisation. I initially applied the

same codes that had been generated from the interview coding, as well as generating a small number of new codes. I used keyword searches to help find words and phrases which were commonly used in my interviews such as ‘Gatsby Benchmarks’, ‘CIAG’ and ‘highly selective’. This helped me to see links between the interviews and documents. I began to develop a list of codes which I deployed iteratively, returning to each interview and document to build up and re-evaluate my initial coding in light of new data being added with each subsequent interview and document.

Grounded theory and the use of coding within qualitative research is not without critique. The idea that the researcher can suspend their awareness is heavily disputed (Bulmer, 1979), as it promotes the idea that value-neutral research is possible. Moreover, such an approach runs contrary to the systems used by researchers for both funding and collaboration, whereby both focused research questions and possible implications of planned research are encouraged or required. This was the case with my own project, as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)’s funding application process asks you to ‘show relevance to ESRC’s remit’. Grounded theory also encourages, through the use of initial coding, high levels of fragmentation in the data, which Coffey and Atkinson suggest can result in the loss of context and narrative flow from research (1996). That said, I found that the iterative processes surrounding my coding, and in particular the systematised approach to generating ideas enabled me to feel immersed in my data and negated the feeling of being overwhelmed, which is frequently reported when analysing qualitative data.

After exploring computer assisted data analysis tool Nvivo, I decided to undertake all my analysis by hand. Although I understood the superficial appeal of Nvivo in speeding up the coding and retrieval processes, I found it compounded the sense of fragmentation, and that in increasing the speed, I reduced my holistic understanding of my data. I printed copies of my transcripts and engaged with them directly, using hand coding techniques, and creating handwritten memos.

My four analysis chapters, Chapter 7 to 10 each explore a particular theme which emerged during my analysis.

Which Voices?

This study aims to foreground school voices and recognise their value in understanding the causes of varying progression rates to HE however, this posed more challenges than I had expected. First, defining the 'problem' and 'solution' regarding HE progression work has been dominated by universities rather than schools. This meant that the emic terminology used by many school-based participants was not the same as that used in policy or by university practitioners. In presenting these voices in the context of my academic analysis sometimes they appeared 'simple' (Ribbens & Edwards, 1997, p.127), in contrast to the university-based participants who often presented as being more informed. The lengthier, more in-depth, discussions I often achieved with university-based participants - exacerbated by the greater time constraints placed on school-based participants - made their voices far more present in my analysis. The alignment of policymakers and university-based participants' emic language also made me feel more able to understand how their thoughts mapped onto the policy landscape.

Within my school participant pool, a small number of participants who were more familiar with HE progression policy often dominated my writing. As mentioned earlier, Tristan and James, both men holding relatively senior positions within their schools, framed their responses using the language emic to universities and policymakers, such as 'fair access' and 'outreach' work. The emic terminology used by school-based participants did not usually include this language, as discussed in Chapter 1. Given that I interviewed more female than male, school-based participants but men appeared to make up a greater contribution in my initial analysis, I was also aware of the intersection between gender and positions of power within my interviews, and wary of 'losing voices' of the less powerful by translating them into academic language (Standing, 1998). I returned to my data, paying particular attention to the 'silences' and what this might tell me (Kelly et al., 1994), and in my analysis chapters have actively sought to rebalance the contributions made by different participants where possible.

Reflexivity

In conducting this research, it was important to reflect upon my own position within this project, including both the 'philosophical self-reflection'; how my own beliefs and experiences have influenced how I see the world and the 'methodological self-consciousness'; the influence this has had upon my methodology and the data I have used

(Patton 2002). I acknowledge that as a researcher I am inevitably part of the world I am researching, and as Denscome describes I do not bring a ‘clean sheet’ to the process, but my own prior experiences and values (2014, p. 88), which I shared in Chapter 1. In considering my position within the research, I hope to draw on Cooley’s sense of ‘the looking glass self’ (1902) and explicitly acknowledge the personal roots of my research interest, rather than try to eliminate my effect, which would be impossible (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012).

Having previously studied and subsequently lived and worked in the North East for three years in a school-based HE progression practitioner role, I am aware that I bring to this research preconceived ideas and experiences that may lead me to interpret respondents’ information in certain ways. Although I did not return to the school I worked at as part of this research project, I am aware that the relationships I built during my time working in the region, and my knowledge of the North East, is both an asset and a shortcoming. I am also mindful that I have preconceptions born of working with specific universities and schools across the North East, including working relationships with each of the five universities in the region. This included, for example, having opinions on which universities I found ‘easy’ or ‘good’ to work with as a practitioner, schools whose pupils and staff I encountered on visits, and programmes or initiatives which I was involved in implementing in my school. Having subsequently moved to London and worked for an organisation which partners with schools and universities across the UK, I developed a broader but still practitioner-based understanding of the context in which such relationships are developed. My assumed position as an ‘outsider’ with an etic perspective (Yin, 2010) sometimes blurred with my previous experiences as an ‘insider’ in this sense.

In the five years which have elapsed since I left the North East, the access and participation context has changed significantly, including the transition of university regulation from OFFA to the OfS, the replacement of Access Agreements with APPs, and the introduction of Uni Connect consortia to replace previous iterations of national programmes. The relatively transient nature of university access and participation teams has resulted in many practitioners moving onto new roles. The net result is that the access and participation teams in the North East universities look considerably different to when I worked in the region, and I had fewer personal connections to the individuals involved in this research than I had originally anticipated. I remained aware however of the ‘insider status’ I was occasionally

afforded during interactions with individuals with whom I had previously worked, or those who were aware of my earlier role.

As part of my Information Sheet I included a reference to my previous work as I did not want to mislead my participants, nor did I wish to falsify my past experiences. Occasionally this led to direct references to my role in interviews with university-based participants, such as Mary who said several times, ‘as I’m sure you know, having worked up here’ or Madge, who at one point stated ‘as I know you’re aware’. When this occurred, I attempted to reassure participants that regardless of what they thought my previous experiences may have been, I was interested in their perspectives. Obvious references to my previous role enabled me to directly address this with those participants, however I cannot know how this influenced their responses, or whether it affected the engagement of other participants who did not reference this. Although I tried not to assume I understood the references made by participants and asked for clarity, in my interview with Madge I found that I had referred to our previous work together with remarks such as, ‘oh I do remember that’, and ‘is that still run by X college?’. This was only apparent to me when I listened to the interview back and at the time I didn’t realise I was reacting differently to those participants with whom I had previously interacted.

When I worked in a school, my school-based HE progression role came from a positivist framing of HE; the idea that progression to Post-16 and Post-18 education was unquestioningly desirable and to be encouraged. This was something I thoroughly endorsed at the time. The idea implicit within both the role and the programme I developed in this period was that of a neoliberal model which focused on remedying individual deficits of ambition and aspiration in the students (as discussed in Chapter 4). The assumption was that pupils from particular backgrounds and localities were unlikely to seriously consider and work towards progression to HE without intervention. However, this approach understands it to be the responsibility of the individual pupils to accept and embrace the interventions on offer in order to work on themselves. Pupils were expected to conform to the school’s expectations required to secure progression to HE. The context of the local area, the school, and many pupils’ individual circumstances, as well as the wider discourses of raising aspirations and social mobility, led me to believe that progression to HE was the surest route to securing employment and improving their economic prospects in later life, and that this outweighed any of the downsides I recognised at the time, such as financial concerns or

worries about living or studying outside of their home community. As a researcher, I increasingly recognised the structural barriers surrounding progression to HE, as discussed in Chapter 3.

I am not undertaking this research from the standpoint of having been born and raised in the North East. My accent is an obvious signal of this as I grew up in the East Midlands and do not have a North East accent, but rather a relatively generic 'BBC accent'. This was often commented upon, both when I worked at the school and during my research. This positioning as 'other' was often imposed upon me by both staff and pupils who would assert that I wasn't truly 'one of them', albeit often in an affectionate manner.

Throughout this research, I tried to mitigate my concern that schools may be resistant to outsiders – both as an outsider to the school, but also to the region - by drawing upon my experience of working within the region. Macleod faced similar experiences in his research on aspiration in low attaining neighbourhoods in the US, having previously worked in his field site as part of a youth programme. He asserts that the benefits to his research of having already gained the trust of the community outweighed the ethical – and sometimes emotional - complexities it caused in the blurring of the onlooker with the researcher (2008, p. 8). My positionality as both an 'insider' and 'outsider' concurrently shifted depending on which school or individual I was interacting with, and I tried to draw upon my experience as an 'insider' to build rapport where possible. Although this seemed to be highly effective at engaging schools, it may have heightened the sense of blurring between insider and outsider for both myself and my participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study was subject to the UCL Ethics Approval Process, and draws upon the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018), and the ESRC guidelines for ethical research (ESRC, n.d.). Mitchell argues that social science has a duty to pursue research in difficult settings and that failing to do so denies public access to areas where there are legitimate concerns, bows to the agendas of the powerful and fails to extend public knowledge of poorly understood groups or situations (1993). Discussions around access and participation in HE inherently involve under-represented groups who do not have a strong, homogenous or coalesced voice in society. The first part of this research used publicly available quantitative data, the ethical

considerations of which are explored earlier in this chapter. The second part of this research used qualitative data, which presented different ethical challenges, which I set out below.

A key ethical challenge was around the anonymisation of both institutions and individuals participating in the study. The BERA guidelines state that researchers should 'recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity' (2018). The relatively large number of schools within the region meant anonymity through the blurring of characteristics was relatively straightforward. However, the small number of universities and their significantly different characteristics meant that institutional anonymity within this pool of participants presented many more challenges. Not only was the pool of possible institutions relatively small, but the thick descriptions so important to this qualitative research project provide significant further information, which further narrowed down the identity of the institution. BERA acknowledge this difficulty, stating that when 'researching a very well-known institution, it may be possible for some readers to infer the identity of that institution even from a fully anonymised account of that research' (Ibid,.). Within this study, all five of the universities in the North East are relatively well known, particularly within the region, and the two highly selective universities are known globally. I elected to use pseudonyms for institutions despite this relatively narrow pool to not just 'protect institutional identities but to focus those engaging with the findings' (Rainford, 2019, p. 88). I drew upon other studies which had employed similar methods such as Reay and colleagues (2010) to strike the balance between appropriate thick description whilst avoiding directly identifying any institution.

When it came to the individual participants within the research, anonymity was a key concern as I asked practitioners to talk about their experiences and opinions which could have put them in difficult positions. Without this assurance of anonymity, the way in which participants interacted, disclosed information and provided honest views may have been compromised. In order to ensure anonymity, I have blurred the job titles of all the individuals within the study, giving them generic titles, which reflected their positions without offering too much specificity. Participants were provided with an Information Sheet, tailored to their sector (Appendices 13 and 14) before they agreed to take part in the research. I then discussed with them what participation would entail and asked them to sign a Consent Form (Appendix 15). I reminded all participants of their right to withdraw from the research, either partially or in totality, at the beginning and end of the interview.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the journey of this research, from the initial decisions to frame my study, to identifying those schools, universities and policymakers to take part and carrying out my fieldwork. I have set out the ways in which I have collected, processed and analysed my data, as well as my ethical and reflexive considerations. In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I move to examine the themes identified in my analysis in further depth.

Chapter 7 - The Influence of Regulation

Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the influence of regulatory systems on the relationships between schools and universities. It once again works at two levels in its analysis; using a sociology *of* policy lens to examine the ways in which regulation in this sphere is inherently problematic, as well a sociology *for* policy lens, highlighting how current regulation could be improved (Grace, 1995). In doing so it demonstrates the many tensions between policy and practice. Throughout this chapter I draw upon policy sociology to understand the implications of policy, not as it is created in the 'formal government apparatus of policy making' (Ozga, 2000, p. 42), but by examining what Colebatch terms 'policy activity' (2002), or as Ball et al describe it, the 'jumbled, messy, contested, creative and mundane social interactions' (2012, p. 2), which surround the processing of policy within schools and universities.

This chapter explores the ways in which the increase in formal policy and regulation related to progression to HE over recent years has been enacted in schools and universities. It argues that schools and universities enact policy in very different ways, driven by different regulatory systems and policies, which have different aims. Moreover, it argues that enactment is increasingly shaped by processes of performativity, associated with the introduction of metrics and performance measures. These divert huge amounts of resource towards reporting upon these metrics, and away from 'that which is reported on' (Ibid,. p. 56), supporting pupils to access HE.

This chapter looks first at schools, where policy is enacted within a high stakes regulatory system, as discussed in Chapter 2, whereby the judgements of the regulator, Ofsted, have a significant impact on the school community. As a result, policy enactment in schools is influenced by the extent to which any given policy is Ofsted's focus, in what Ball and colleagues describe as the differing extents to which 'some types of policy must be seen to be done, that is, reported as done and accounted for' (Ibid,. p.56). Policy accountability for progression to HE in schools primarily takes the form of Destinations Measures and the Gatsby Benchmarks, and this chapter examines these metrics, drawing on Ball's work on the ways in which schools 'perform' policy (2003). Second, this chapter considers how policy surrounding progression to HE is enacted differently in different schools; examining how schools with different progression rates to HE enact these policies, including both schools

which are 'superficially similar' (Braun et al., 2011) and atypical cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229). As part of this discussion, this chapter attempts to acknowledge and examine some of the 'nuances of local context,' which may lead to considerable differences in approach (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006).

The chapter then moves on to discuss the ways in which universities enact policy around progression to HE, applying Ball et al's concept of policy enactment to a HE context in pursuit of creating a nuanced analysis of the relationship between the two spheres involved in school-university relationships (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). My analysis draws on Rainford's work, which applies Ball's concept of policy enactment to widening participation practitioners (2019, 2021). In doing so, this chapter looks at the influence of the current HE regulator, the OfS, and the ways in which it influences how progression to HE is enacted within the university sector. Of particular interest is how the newly introduced APPs, and the national targets[26] announced by the OfS, influence the ways in which universities enact work around facilitating progression to HE, and the tensions between national, regional and institutional level policy enactment. Finally, the chapter examines how the increasing 'datafication', defined by Robert-Holmes and Bradbury as 'burgeoning data-based governance' (2016b, p. 1), and accountability regimes impact progression to HE processes, and influence how policy is understood and enacted. This includes those influences which sit outside these formal policy and accountability structures, such as the media.

Schools: An Outstanding Performance?

CIAG and Ofsted – Seen to be Done?

Following a period of little regulatory oversight after the 2012 devolution of responsibility for CIAG from LAs to schools, the publication of the 2017 Careers Strategy (Department for Education, 2017) and in particular, the introduction of the new EIF in September 2019 (Ofsted, 2019a), marked an increase in the formal regulation from government relating to CIAG (discussed further in Chapter 2). The influence of this increased regulation was reflected in the way school-based research participants spoke about enacting CIAG policy, which had changed from a low profile, internal process, to a much higher profile, 'performance', with metrics such as Destinations Measures becoming part of school accountability structures.

[26] OfS national targets can be seen here: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/our-approach-to-access-and-participation/ (Accessed 26/11/2020).

Comparing the experience of Joyce, the Head of Careers at Moore Academy (N/A), and Carl, an Assistant Head at Annersley Academy (LP), provides some interesting contrasts and similarities between two individuals in different policy actor roles in 'superficially similar' schools (Braun et al., 2011). Both schools had been rated 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted for several years, had similar pupil intake demographics, and one of the lowest rates of progression to HE in the North East.

Joyce had worked in Careers Education for several years before, in her words, 'it became trendy'. She suggested that the introduction of more specific targets through the inclusion of the Gatsby Benchmarks in the Careers Strategy gave her 'a huge drive because it became a legal requirement', raising the profile of both the policy, and those involved with its enactment within the school. Joyce's description of the Careers Strategy as a 'lever' reinforced the idea of performing policy; she described discussing CIAG with her previously uninterested Senior Leadership Team (SLT), framing all her requests in the context of, 'we have to do this otherwise Ofsted will be highly critical'. Joyce framed this in a positive way, seeing increased engagement from SLT as a benefit to her work. Carl, as a member of SLT at Annersley Academy (LP), appeared only to have begun engaging with CIAG enactment as a result of the reforms suggesting that, 'I don't think we really had to think about CIAG before last year [when the EIF was introduced].' His reflections reinforced Joyce's experiences of her SLT at Moore Academy (N/A); that the inclusion of CIAG within the EIF had increased both awareness of and performative incentives within the school.

Like Joyce, Carl felt that policy enactment was more important for Annersley Academy (LP) than other schools because of its Ofsted grading, suggesting that, 'because of where we're at, we have to dot the Is and cross the Ts to show we're doing what they [Ofsted] want.' This high level of focus on the reporting and performance of policy enactment, framed as 'ticking boxes for Ofsted', provides a single policy level example of some of the ways in which performative demands can be seen as driving some schools' focus on progression to HE.

Much of Joyce's work as a policy actor situated her as what Ball and colleagues describe as a 'transactor' (2012); she frequently highlighted the accounting, reporting and monitoring elements of her role, such as a spreadsheet which logged every CIAG activity for every child in the school, and building files of evidence for an application for a Careers Development

Institute award. However, Joyce recognised the tension between what Ball describes as 'belief and representation' (2003; Jeffrey & Woods, 1998; Sikes, 2001); she was fearful that her work would not be valued within the metrics unless she extensively documented it, but that doing so undermined the sense of purpose she felt in doing her job. Her detailed account of how she logged CIAG contrasted with her, sometimes doubtful interjections that, 'you do it for the kids, you don't just do it for Ofsted. You do it for the kids. That's what we do it for. Don't we?' in what Braun and Maguire term 'pragmatic compliance' (2018, p. 8), and Keddie describes as a blend of 'compliance and criticality' (2018, p. 210). Moore Academy's (N/A) Requires Improvement Ofsted rating added to the immediacy and prevalence surrounding accountability structures within the school, and appeared to further compound the sense of performance felt and practised by Joyce.

In contrast to Moore and Annersely Academy, Linton Academy (AP) appeared to have a far more comprehensive approach to supporting pupils to progress to HE. The school had been rated Good by Ofsted in its most recent inspection in 2017, which may have provided some 'breathing space', whereby the school was not expecting a regulatory visit imminently. The school had a very explicit policy surrounding social mobility, and supporting pupils to progress to HE was seen as a key tool for achieving the school's mission. Deputy Headteacher, Tristan, was very active in the enactment of this work, and embodied many of the traits associated with the policy 'entrepreneur', whereby he had looked for opportunities for partnership and marketisation of recent policy challenges (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Tristan was highly involved in advocacy surrounding progression to higher education, both within the school in his work with staff, but also as a member of a national commission, and as part of an elite university's admissions advisory group. Of all the school-based participants, he appeared perhaps the most aware of how his work within policy could be a career opportunity, and this was already apparent in his recent promotion from overseeing HE progression in the sixth form to a whole school role with a wider remit.

Somewhat surprisingly, given his work and the context of the school, Tristan made a very clear link between the introduction of more explicit regulation and his work on CIAG policy stating that, 'one reason we're doing it [Gatsby Benchmarks] is because Ofsted are asking for it, so there is a straightforward causal relationship there.' His comment suggests that even in schools with seemingly greater bandwidth to focus on those policies and practices most aligned with the school ethos, the influence of high stakes regulation permeates these

decisions. Ball and colleagues describe this pressure to deliver as resulting in 'no real escape from the expectations and necessities of performance for any English school', regardless of their success or focus (Ibid,. p.515). My research findings supported this ever-present sense of Ofsted; across almost all schools, participants spoke of Ofsted as a constant, and sometimes threatening, shadow whose likely perceptions seemed to influence even relatively low-level decision making.

Tracking Students - Destinations Measures

Destinations Measures were introduced as a headline accountability measure for schools in 2016. They are designed to measure the percentage of students staying in education, training or going into employment after KS4 and KS5 respectively, and are included as an accountability measure for both secondary schools and Post-16 providers. Responsibility for the logistical undertaking of collecting destinations data theoretically still sits with LAs, who have a statutory duty to report pupil data for Destinations Measures to the DfE (2016a). However, DfE guidance suggests that 'schools collect information on intended destinations and pass it on to local authorities' (2018b, p. 4), as they hold the direct relationships with pupils and carers. Many of my research participants reported that responsibility for data collection sat almost entirely with the school as a result of budget cuts to LAs, and the subsequent lack of resources available for this task.

School level Destinations Measures are publicly accessible on the DfE's website (2019a), which is intended to incentivise schools to ensure that accurate destinations data is collected for their pupils, as untracked pupils, or those incorrectly logged as NEET, reflect poorly on the school's Destinations Measures. It also ensures schools are 'visible and knowable' (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a, p. 120), allowing for comparison between schools through the building of databases as a technique of governance (Lingard et al., 2013). Since the introduction of the Gatsby Benchmarks, schools are asked to track pupils over a longer period of time. In order to meet Benchmark 3, schools must now, 'collect and maintain accurate data for each pupil on their education, training or employment destinations for at least three years after they leave the school' (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 7). The added reporting burden is not accompanied by additional funding for schools. This creates what Ball, drawing on Lyotard, terms 'the law of contradiction' (1984):

> 'Intensification - as an increase in the volume of first order activities (direct engagement with students, research, curriculum development) required by the

demands of performativity and the 'costs' in terms of time and energy of second order activities that is the work of performance monitoring and management' (Ball, 2003, p. 221).

The DfE have acknowledged in the published guidance that, 'this may be difficult for schools to do at this time. However, for now, we encourage schools to begin to put processes in place that will help them to make better use of destinations data' (2018a, p. 20). It is not made clear what these processes should be.

Schools are consistently told that collecting destinations data is useful for them, 'so that they have a better understanding of where their students go and what they do after leaving school. This can help determine if the careers provision given to students was right for that student' (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 8). Such an assertion assumes a straightforward causal relationship between CIAG intervention in schools and pupil's destinations after leaving school, despite the complexities of measuring such interventions (Hooley et al., 2014). Even accepting this, a common theme emerging from my interviews with school-based participants was the lack of usefulness of destinations data for schools, and the challenges of monitoring pupil destinations after they left the school. Collecting and recording destinations data was overwhelmingly 'performed' by participants, who understood it as an exercise in data input without the ability to retrieve information they would in theory be able to use to inform their work. This included the Post-18 destinations of pupils who left the school after Year 11 for Post-16 courses at different institutions, or the academic and employment outcomes of pupils who progressed to HE. Carl, Assistant Head at Annersley Academy (LP) expressed his frustration with the lack of data available to schools regarding medium to long term destinations; 'we track where they go next for as long as they'll stay in touch with us themselves… we can't track them beyond that.'

This is in part a result of the mismatch in regulatory systems and policies between the two spheres. Universities – as well as employers and other training providers - do not have the same regulatory incentives to ensure schools have up to date records of pupils, and there is no central database where schools can access data regarding pupils' success and progression. Despite being told that such information will improve their CIAG, schools cannot therefore use this data to self-monitor in the ways described by the DfE, and instead submit data that constitutes what Ozga describes as a 'resource through which surveillance can be exercised' (2008, p. 264). It is worth noting that much of this data already exists in

different forms, for example UCAS holds data on all those applying to HE, universities hold institutional level data on the academic outcomes of their students, and the LEO data matches HE leavers into the workforce (Department for Education, 2019d, p. 2), but individual level data is not accessible for schools. Schools therefore must continue to collect their data for the three years in which they are obliged to track pupils via self-reported updates from pupils when contacted, and individual data sharing agreements with local education providers.

The differences between reporting requirements and the sense that schools are subjected to additional monitoring compared to other sectors, without seeing any benefits, undermines school-university relationships. James, the Deputy Head of Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD) voiced his frustration with this situation, 'I know from Year 13 where I think my students have gone. I don't know how many actually dropped out from their degrees, or passed or whatever because I rarely get any information from universities.' This suggests James perceives the problem to be with universities, rather than with the requirements of the wider system. Constance, Head of Careers at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD) shared this sentiment more explicitly, 'we are reliant on them [universities] to do that stuff [communicate pupil information] and if they don't think it's worth it…'. This undermining of school-university relationships is a - perhaps unintended - consequence of the increased performativity surrounding HE progression; as the intensification of bureaucracy and associated surveillance is increased for schools (Ball, 2017), there appears a sense of frustration that universities are not subjected to the same requirements, and an expectation that this monitoring is extended across the system in order for data to be made available to schools. It is this growing expectation of audit culture and the 'self-referential and self-reinforcing' nature of these systems which Shore and Wright term a 'Frankenstein's monster' (1999, p. 570), gathering momentum for continued expansion of measuring and monitoring, in part from those who are already subjected to it. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury research into this datafication in early years settings suggests that this has become 'self-governing' with teachers buying into their own increased surveillance (2016a, 2016b). In this way they become focused only on the improvement of data collection, rather than questioning the worth of data collection in itself.

Since the introduction of Destinations Measures into school accountability measures, destinations data is one of the ways in which school quality is measured. Destinations

Measures are used by Ofsted as one of the ‘sources of evidence specific to curriculum impact’ which is used to assess the ‘quality of education’ key judgement made during an inspection. This data is taken into account alongside other nationally generated data and ‘first hand evidence’ from inspections (Ofsted, 2019b, p. 48), as part of the data-based accountability system which now shapes and dominates debates over quality (Ozga, 2009, 2013; Ozga et al., 2011). It is important to recognise that, although Destinations Measures have been included within school accountability measures, there remains a hierarchy in terms of the importance of these different measures. GCSE Attainment and Progress scores remain the defining accountability measures for schools, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Many participants questioned the knowledge and expertise of Ofsted with regard to CIAG and HE progression. Some participants framed Ofsted inspectors’ lack of knowledge regarding destinations data as an opportunity for what Ball describes as ‘creative non-implementation’ (1994, p. 20), or drawing on Foucault’s work, ‘fabrications’, whereby versions of reality are ‘produced purposefully in order 'to be accountable. Truthfulness is not the point…’(2001, p. 216). Participants shared a sense that Ofsted inspectors lacked the expertise to interpret the school’s destinations data. James, a longstanding Head of Sixth Form, and then DH at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), a school with very high levels of progression to HE suggested that;

> ‘The trouble is, the people doing the Ofsted inspections don’t necessarily know a lot about Post-16 and certainly not very much about university admissions […] I’m fairly confident that most schools could present their data in a way that’s going to look positive. I don’t know if the people looking at the destinations data would know enough to be able to pick it apart and go “yeah but…”’.

Grizel, the Head of Sixth Form at Culver Academy (HP, HPHS), a school which also had high levels of progression to HE, shared a similar experience;

> ‘when we got Ofsteded, the inspector wanted to see destinations data. We just showed him our spreadsheets of the ones who were at university and he was happy with that. We probably could’ve showed him anything to be honest.’

Despite this, neither James nor Grizel suggested that they used this perceived lack of knowledge from Ofsted as a way to fabricate their response to the policies surrounding HE progression. In contrast to Ball and colleagues’ finding that the data from participants in their study lacked ‘values talk’ (2012, p. 10), many participants in my research articulated feeling

that they were driven by a sense of purpose. They wanted to improve the outcomes for their pupils by supporting increased progression to HE, and voiced frustration that destinations data was not being, in their eyes, appropriately used by Ofsted. Gillian, Head of Sixth Form at Linton Academy (AP) expressed exasperation about the lack of focus on pupil end points;

> 'She [the Ofsted inspector] didn't ask me any questions around that at all… I think they should ask about it because the point of [the pupils] being here is that we are giving them a foundation where they can move on and the school is really keen on getting towards a percentage where upper nineties are going to university. You know the point of it is it's set up for them all to go.'

It is striking that Gillian wanted the Ofsted inspector to ask her about Destinations Measures, despite saying earlier in her interview that:

> 'we just send it [destinations data]. We keep a record of it. For schools, it's one of the things that we're checked with the Gatsby Career Benchmarks, that we have to know where all the kids are so we have a tracker from last year and going forward into this year. But historically it's just… it's not very useful for us.'

This incongruity between what Gillian felt was useful for her or her pupils, and her desire to use the data to demonstrate to Ofsted that she was meeting the performance indicators, is what Shore and Wright describe as an effect of performativity in the 'capacity to reshape their [Ofsted's] own image in the organisations they monitor' (1999, p. 570). It frequently seemed as though participants wanted the validation of being seen to meet indicators in Ofsted's regulatory framework. This sentiment was echoed by Helena, the Head of Sixth Form at Maynard School (HPHSD, HPD), which had high progression rates to HE but a Requires Improvement Ofsted rating, 'it often feels like Sixth Form and CIAG is just an add on [in an Ofsted inspection]. It's assumed kids will go somewhere and they [Ofsted] don't understand really how difficult it is to make that happen properly.'

Whereas most participants saw the datafication of progression to higher education as flawed, Tristan, Deputy Headteacher at Linton Academy (AP), described how he had used the data in a way he perceived to have significant benefit for his school. Tristan played an active role on a national level within the policy sphere of progression to HE, as well as within his school. He therefore demonstrated significant confidence in enacting progression policy in order to advocate for his school, and described 'deploying' destinations data to argue in favour of a higher grading for the school during a recent Ofsted inspection. Tristan described

using the data to demonstrate that in spite of ‘problematic KS4 data’, the destinations data suggested that the school was not Requires Improvement, but Good and that the Sixth Form should be rated Outstanding. The school was graded ‘Good’ overall in the inspection, and the Sixth Form destinations were specifically highlighted in the accompanying Ofsted report, which commented on the HE progression rates of pupils, ‘especially [for] the disadvantaged’ as a major positive for the school.[27] Whilst the report does not specifically reference destinations data, and there is no way of knowing whether the argument Tristan put forward influenced the decision, his confidence in using the data for performative purposes contrasts with the experiences of those who saw destinations data as a purely administrative exercise.

Destination… Anywhere?

Although HE progression has become increasingly high profile as a policy area over recent years, there remain many challenges in understanding whether this has increased the number of pupils progressing onto ‘appropriate’ Post-18 pathways, which are usually deemed as those which maximise the qualifications gained at A Level (or other Level 3 qualifications). These more nuanced questions around the ‘appropriateness’ of a destination are not reflected in the Destinations Measures, and the influences exerted by the current policy appear to conflict with the discourses of individualised pathways articulated by many of my research participants, which would only be captured in qualitative data. In an attempt to discover some of this nuance quantitatively, destinations data is collected in categories including NEET, overall progression to HE and then, as a sub group, progression to both the Russell Group and Oxbridge are reported (Department for Education, 2019b). These categories are discussed in Chapter 6 and problematised further in Chapter 10. However, several participants highlighted that collecting and publishing the data in this way exerted perverse incentives over school behaviour.

Constance, the Head of Careers at Maynard School (HPHSD, HPD), suggested that the historic policy focus on NEET - particularly prevalent under New Labour and continuing throughout the Coalition government - and the distinct nature of this category meant that Ofsted were, ‘obsessed with not having NEETs’ but this created a false binary, whereby there was little interest as to whether students were taking appropriate pathways once they were over this threshold. Amy, the Head of Careers at Dene School (LP), which had very low progression rates to HE described a similar experience with Ofsted inspectors who

[27] Linton Academy Ofsted Report (2017).

‘asked us about NEET figures rather than those who were actually in education and training [and], where did they end up… I thought they would want to look at more, make sure pupils were ending up in the right places. But it wasn’t something they asked.’

James, the Deputy Headteacher at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), which had very few NEET pupils and a reputation for sending pupils to elite institutions, highlighted the perverse incentives Destinations Measures have at the opposite end of the spectrum. Regarding pupils who were applying for Oxbridge he described how;

> ‘Some of our students, we could’ve said “yeah go to Newcastle”, but actually they’ve got their three A*s and they’re going “errgh, maybe I’ll go again [reapplying to Oxbridge]” and going with three A*s in the bag they’re much more likely to get an offer second time round [which would not be counted in the school’s Destinations Measures]. So, for us, it’s obviously about the final destination of the kid, not can we tick those boxes [for progression to HE] or whatever.’

James articulated supporting pupils to make these decisions as it was deemed to be in their best interest, despite the incentives to the contrary.

Much has been written on the issue of the ‘appropriateness’ of pathways within the academic literature (McCaig, 2015; Murphy & Wyness, 2020; Tomlinson, 2018). However, research participants consistently defined ‘appropriate’ pathways in a far less nuanced and more practical manner, demonstrating a ‘common sense’ approach based on the stratified nature of Post-18 options. Amy, the Head of Carers at Dene School (LP), described ‘appropriate’ pathways as, ‘the best place and course for them, with the grades they have and what they want to do.’ School-based participants gave consistent responses when it came to defining what ‘best’ was, focusing on university league tables, traditional academic subjects and courses with higher graduate earnings. Several participants specifically referred to the Russell Group and Oxbridge as targets for their pupils. Many participants seemed surprised when asked to define what they felt a ‘high value’, ‘good’ or ‘best’ course and institution was, and their answers were far more homogenous than discussions in the academic literature. This could be a result of teachers accepting the ‘common sense’ discourse around the value of different educational pathways, and the hierarchy of universities and Post-18 options in general. Thus, rather than attempting to challenge dominant discourses over the status of various Post-18 options, the respondents instead work to successfully define these pathways in the ways they perceive to offer maximum benefit to their pupils.

University Regulation – A Changing APProach?

In contrast to schools, universities have only relatively recently been subject to any regulation with regards to supporting the progression of school leavers to HE, primarily through policy surrounding access and participation. Unlike schools, universities enjoy a much greater degree of autonomy, including over admissions as enshrined within the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act[28]. Such autonomy has been jealously guarded by universities whenever efforts have been made to change access and participation policy. In their responses to the *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice for Higher Education* Green Paper (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015), universities cited institutional autonomy as a key concern regarding the expansion of access targets (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 25). However, access and participation has become increasingly high profile over the last two decades, with universities increasingly held accountable for admitting a diverse range of students.

Collective or Institutional Accountability?

A significant difference from school regulation was the way in which my university research participants spoke about not only institutional accountability, but sector-wide accountability for improving access to HE. Unlike Ofsted, which focuses on schools as individual units, the university regulator, the OfS, has set national level targets for the sector in the form of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), alongside institutional level monitoring. The national targets for access and participation are based on:

1. The gap in participation between most and least represented groups.
2. The gap in participation at higher-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups (Office for Students, 2018c).

In addition to the national targets, institutional level targets in the form of APPs agreed directly with the regulator, are intended to incentivise each institution to act in ways to ensure they meet their own targets, as well as contributing to the national targets. The OfS includes a list of groups that must be analysed 'as a minimum' and assessed as part of an institution's APP: those with lower household income or socioeconomic status backgrounds, BAME

[28] HERA (2017), Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted (Accessed 02/11/2020).

(Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) students, mature students, disabled students and care leavers (2018a, p. 20). The metric used for measuring the two KPIs is POLAR4, an area-based measure of youth participation which has received widespread criticism, discussed further below (Boliver et al., 2019). The OfS guidance also includes carers, estranged students, people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, refugees and children from military families within the definition of under-represented groups. However, under the OfS' regulatory guidance, these groups are not required to be discussed in an institution's APP (2018a, p. 20).

The focus on specific under-represented groups, in tandem with the increased accountability associated with the OfS, appeared to have influenced the behaviour of university-based practitioners. Participants suggested that the emphasis on institutional contributions as measured by the number of students in these designated under-represented groups attending the institution had led them to concentrate their work narrowly on the groups measured in the APPs. This reduced their work supporting non-targeted but still under-represented groups, or sector wide activity. This focus on certain students who are 'objectified' by the technologies of policy (Ball, Maguire, Braun, et al., 2012, p. 520) leads to what Gillborn and Youdell describe as the systematic neglect of others (1999). Guy, an Access Manager at Carey University, a Post-92 institution described the targeting of his institution's work:

> 'We also do quite a bit of work with SEND [Special Education Needs and Disability] and young carers. However, they don't feature on the Access and Participation Plan so although we do still work with them, we don't have like a set of these different activities and events that we normally offer care leavers or BAME. And we still kind of do work with them, but just not as much.'

Particularly noticeable amongst participants in my research was the concern around recruiting BAME students. Participants were nearly all based in the North East, which has less ethnic diversity than any other region in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Kit, the Head of Access at Carey University highlighted how the targets had changed how his institution worked; 'there is a limited number of [people], within the specialist groups [locally], so we will perhaps look elsewhere [in the UK] to increase, say the BAME intakes.' Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University, a Pre-92 institution in the region voiced a similar approach. He explained that, in order to meet their BAME target agreed with the OfS,

the university was - rather than recruiting from the local population - focusing on, ‘offering travel bursaries and things like that to get students from the South East who might be BAME for example, that wouldn't normally leave the South East,’ in an attempt to increase ethnic diversity at the institution.

Another research participant, Elsie, was a Policy Manager at Lambert University, a different Post-92 institution in the North East which has historically recruited high proportions of students from predominantly White ethnic backgrounds from under-represented groups, reflecting the communities immediately surrounding the institution. She spoke of a change in her team’s focus; ‘what we are just recognising is that we need to go out of region […] and for the university as a business we need to look elsewhere for those BAME groups.’ It is notable that Elsie framed the decision being made as driven by economic, rather than social justice considerations. Although this contrasts with many of the other participants, who articulated their work within the context of social justice, Elsie’s comment reflects the consequences of the establishment of a quasi-market within the education sector more broadly (Ball, 2017), and the increasing treatment of universities as business, described by Collini as ‘HiEdbizUK’ (2012, p. 132).

Elsie also linked the new APP targets to the work the university was undertaking with schools in the region, suggesting that ‘if schools in the region don’t have those demographics, we’ll need to find a way of working with schools that do.’ Although this research was carried out in the same period that APPs were being published, and therefore the implications of this new regulation were still unclear, the potential consequence of the requirement for North East universities to recruit more BAME students may be a reduction in the activity undertaken with their local communities. Given that the North East has some of the lowest HE progression rates in the country (UCAS, 2019, p. 2), with many pupils from under-represented groups, this appears to be an unintended consequence (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 5) of narrow performative targets, or as Ball suggests, policies which ‘contradict and confuse’ (1994, p. 12). Smith attributes this specifically to the ‘tunnel vision’ phenomenon (1995) whereby institutions focus only on meeting their ascribed criteria, or to use Riseborough’s terms, the enactment of ‘secondary adjustments’ in order to ‘win space’ in an overcrowded policy sphere (1993, p. 171).

A POLARising Problem

The increasing regulation regarding access and participation has seen a commensurate growth in concern over how success in this area should be measured. The publication of the OfS' KPIs based on POLAR4 has given rise to significant disagreement over how under-representation should be measured, and, specifically, whether institutions should be held accountable primarily using this metric. The measure has been termed by Harrison and McCaig as an 'ecological fallacy' (2015), where the typical or normal characteristics of individuals living in a particular area do not necessarily reflect the characteristics of every individual. Boliver and colleagues assert therefore that there is a 'high risk of error' in identifying disadvantaged individuals within areas classified as low participation neighbourhoods by the index (Boliver et al., 2019). POLAR4 is less accurate in areas with diverse housing within a single postcode, meaning urban areas are more likely to have disadvantaged individuals who are not identified using an area measurement, although concerns still remain for less urban or diverse neighborhoods. Madge, Head of Access at Rutherford University, voiced her concern that the metric 'just doesn't map effectively onto people', exposing the gap between policy as it is 'written' by government and how it is enacted on the ground (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Interestingly, although university-based participants raised several concerns regarding POLAR4, nobody highlighted the fact that POLAR4 has little currency in schools, who use FSM data to identify disadvantage (Social Mobility Advisory Group, 2016). As a result, schools are largely unfamiliar with, and their performance is not assessed by, the POLAR4 metric.

The lack of credibility POLAR4 has with practitioners in universities mirrors the concerns raised by my school-based research participants regarding Destinations Measures. However, the relationship between the OfS and universities differs significantly from that of Ofsted and schools, and the lower stakes environment in which university access and participation operates is reflected in dialogue with, rather than dictation from, the OfS about POLAR4. Although the OfS have strongly endorsed POLAR4 and describe it as a 'robust and widely used measure of under-representation in higher education' (2018d), it has responded to sector concerns by conceding that 'where there is clear evidence that POLAR4 does not reliably reflect disadvantage in a provider's specific location, providers may choose to use other measures identified in the access and participation dataset' (Ibi,. p. 22). This suggests that the bandwidth for universities to enact policy in this sphere is significantly greater than that of schools, as universities are able to create a 'range of options' in which

the outcomes of policy are set (Ball, 1994, p. 19). Ball refers to such examples as 'writerly policies' (1994) or 'exhortative / developmental policies' (2011), which enable policy actors a greater degree of agency in their enacting, rather than 'readerly' policies where policies are 'products rather than productions', with minimal scope for freedom within their enactment (Ibid,. p. 612).

Regulatory Relationships

As already seen, there is a huge contrast between how school and university participants describe the relationship between their institution and the regulator. Many university-based participants highlighted the recent change in regulator from the OFFA to the OfS, discussed further in Chapter 2. Nick, Access Manager at Lovell University, described the changes as having, 'put all unis on their toes' by replacing Access Agreements with APPs, agreeing increasingly ambitious targets with institutions, and increasing the capacity for additional regulation for those institutions who are not seen to move quickly enough to meet them (Kernohan, 2018). Despite this, university participants who described interactions with the regulator perceived a far more equal balance of power than school-based participants. In contrast to the high stakes, judgement-based relationship between Ofsted and schools, universities appear to have far more direct relationships with the OfS, and several university-based participants at different levels of seniority within their organisations described directly communicating with the regulator. For example, Madge, Head of Access at Rutherford University, noted that in a meeting with the Director for Fair Access and Participation on new institutional targets in the APPs, 'we said this is disappointing that this is the direction it is going.'

Madge is a senior member of staff at a very highly selective institution with significant influence in the sector, and thus her sense of entitlement to enter into discussion with the OfS may be exceptional. However, she was not alone in describing direct interactions between the OfS and an individual institution. Elsie held a more junior role with responsibility for overseeing the submission of Lambert University's - a Post-92 institution – APP. She described the process of agreeing her institution's APP as a 'back and forth' conversation between the regulator and the university, framing it as a two way process where the 'options available' for the enactment of policy remained relatively broad (Ball, 1994). This dialogue between the regulator and the regulated was not experienced by any of the school participants, where Ofsted was seen as a largely faceless body, and the regulated party had

little input into its priorities or processes. Elsie did suggest, however, that this idea of a dialogue was more superficial than she had initially thought:

> 'They've implied they've left it up to universities to make their decisions about where they should invest and what the most impact is, but then they turn around and say, "actually I don't agree with that, we're going to actually not approve it in totality"… so in terms of autonomy it is a bit like "yeah, okay," but we are autonomous in terms of what we say we're going to do to address those gaps. I think they just wanted to make sure we were meeting the right gaps.'

Elsie's comment suggests that although universities experience greater autonomy in their policy enactment than schools, this experience may depend on how disruptive the new access and participation policy is to an institution's current enactment. Where institutions have not returned APPs aligned to the policy, they have perhaps experienced greater challenge or sanctions in the form of the increased performativity that Elsie has mentioned.

Deliverology?

In contrast to the increased accountability in terms of target setting introduced by the OfS, the regulator has reduced the financial constraints around how individual universities fund the achievement of these targets. This move is consistent with the ideology of its founding Chair, Sir Michael Barber.[29] Barber's approach to reform, termed 'deliverology', emphasises 'establishing a small team focused on performance, gathering performance data to set targets and trajectories, and having routines to drive and ensure a focus on performance' (2011); monitoring outputs rather than inputs. The approach was established during Barber's tenure as Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit under New Labour, and has been applied in different policy areas including health, policing, transport and compulsory education. Bottery and Wright criticise this method as an outcomes based notion of what counts as effectiveness (2000). Ball et al describe this as working, 'within a disciplinary infrastructure of targets, benchmarks, league tables, averages and inspections that work to overwhelm or displace values and principles, and to subvert social relations' (2012, pp. 10–11). Ball and colleagues' words serve as a reminder that the deliverology discourse sits firmly within system improvement, without questioning the problematic nature of the system itself.

[29] Sir Michael Barber left his post in March 2021 after one term of four years as Chair of the OfS. Lord James Wharton has succeeded him.

The shift from OFFA's monitoring of inputs to the OfS' output-based assessments was noted by several university practitioners with varying degrees of confidence in how the removal of financial targets and shift towards the achievement of access and participation targets within their APPs would impact their day to day work. Those in more senior roles often welcomed the flexibility, such as Madge, Head of Access at Rutherford University who said, 'I'd much rather money was spent effectively and efficiently, and get good outcomes, and be evaluated properly. So, I don't mind at all that the emphasis [is] on evaluation and making sure that the investment that you put in has sensible outcomes.' Elsie, Policy Manager at Lambert University, also welcomed the move, seeing it – in contrast to Ball and colleagues – as a move away from a numbers based system; 'it's very much a shift, and that's a good thing, it [impact] should be our focus because we were always bothered about numbers before, and yes numbers, you need to have people participating, but it's not having any impact, compared to having an impact on them.' On this Elsie suggests that the 'sharp focus' on performance priorities (rather than purposes) is a positive move, taking on the role of an 'enthusiast' (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), and arguably exemplifying what Foucault describes as one of the neoliberal 'subjected and practiced bodies' subjected to the 'tyranny' of 'governance by numbers' (Ball, 2015). In this sense, both school and university-based participants demonstrated an increasing subservience (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a, p. 127) to the datafication of their work, although they did not necessarily see it in these terms, but rather spoke of 'impact' through the meeting of APP targets.

Trial by Media?

Whilst formal policymaking and accountability structures were consistently highlighted by both school and university participants as a significant influence, a small number of participants working in the most highly selective universities cited the issue of 'regulation by media' as a further, and sometimes contradictory, form of accountability. Mainstream headlines such as 'number of state school pupils attending university drops despite efforts to widen access' (Busby, 2019), 'Oxbridge 'over-recruits' from eight schools' (Coughlan, 2018) and 'figures show England's top universities taking lower proportion of state pupils' (Sohrabi-Shiraz, 2017), as well as ongoing political pressure from members of parliament, such as David Lammy, through social media and the press (Busby, 2018), create a very public form of accountability over the most selective admissions. This is complicated by the fact that whilst the OfS have increasingly focused upon metrics such as POLAR4, the media

interest has concentrated on the proportions of state school pupils, and those from particular ethnic backgrounds, notably Black pupils, progressing to highly selective institutions.

Madge, the Head of Access at Rutherford University, describes the focus of the media; 'the things that do get taken up are anything to do with ethnicity and anything to do with state schools, and never anything to do with POLAR or with IMD [Index of Multiple Deprivation].' This creates a conflict for those institutions who are held accountable in the media – and by the wider public – on one metric, and by the regulator on another. The high-profile nature of news stories associated with those institutions, and the public backlash that has ensued following negative press attention surrounding their admissions, makes them unwilling to relinquish efforts on measures which are reported in the mainstream press and are more easily accessible to a general audience. This is made explicit in one institution's APP which states that:

> 'we recognise that school type is not a characteristic used by the OfS or contained within its Access and Participation dataset; we recognise too that the state versus independent binary masks a range of educational experiences. It is however a measure published annually by HESA to allow comparison between HEIs, and is of high interest to the public, politicians and the media' (University of Cambridge, 2019, p. 19).

Polly, the Head of Access at a college at Woodward University, reinforced the drive to improve those statistics that the media focus on, 'we really, really need to address that independent-state sector ratio because that is what has been picked up in the press.' This means some of the most highly selective universities are keen to retain these measures despite the lack of support for them from the OfS, and therefore divide their efforts between meeting the targets in their APPs - notably POLAR4 - and those used by the media - state vs independent school admissions.

An Accountability Conundrum?

A key theme emerging from my interviews is the different ways in which accountability was understood and practiced both between the school and university sectors, and within them, as well as different views on who is, and who should be, accountable for pupils progressing to HE. Few participants from either sector held a clear view on where accountability currently lay, with most suggesting some level of joint responsibility between schools and universities.

However, the significant variations between participants suggests that the enactment of policy surrounding the progression to HE occupies an ambiguous space with what Ozga terms, ‘negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups’ (2000, p. 113).

A majority of university-based participants felt that schools should have greater accountability for progression than universities as they had much greater access to - and relationships with – pupils, and their parents and carers. Robyn, the Head of Access at Barras University expressed that, ‘I think it’s both [schools and universities’ responsibility], but I think if I had to weight it, it would be weighted slightly more towards the school, because the school have got that relationship with the parents and with the pupils as well.’ Another participant, Mary, the Head of Access at Howell University, was clear that accountability currently sat with universities, but felt that this should be more evenly distributed between schools and universities, suggesting that, ‘when you look at government policy, the responsibility does seem to be with the universities, but I think it's a shared responsibility.’ Neither Robyn nor Mary spoke of how this responsibility should be measured in schools, or referenced, for example, the possible use of the Destinations Measures. University-based participants were focused predominantly on the OfS regulation for universities through APPs in defining their responsibilities. Madge specifically noted the difference in accountability structures between schools and universities stating that ‘there’s certainly no government incentivisation [in state schools]’ to meet access and participation targets in HE, in contrast to her sense of university regulation.

In contrast, Elsie, a Policy Manager at Lambert University felt that schools did already have some accountability for progression to HE, but that this lay in the academic attainment of pupils, rather than in Destinations Measures; ‘they’ve got responsibility around outcomes of their students, and that’s not just about progression to HE.’ Although Elsie, like other university-based participants, felt that schools should be more accountable for progression to HE, she also raised concerns around the high-stakes nature of school accountability in other areas, expressing that, ‘I just don’t know if schools have the capacity to take on any [more responsibility].’ Elsie also questioned whether increased accountability would improve access to HE stating that; ‘I’m just not sure what that would do, or whether it would actually support students any more.’ Elsie did not necessarily see an increase in school accountability as reducing the accountability burden on universities, or believe it would increase the number of students progressing to HE. In raising the stakes of other

accountability measures, it is possible that an unintended consequence (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 5) has been the lack of focus on what policy actors in schools perceive to be the relatively lower stakes accountability for HE progression.

Neither school nor university-based participants in my research expressed any sense that the regulation within one sphere would impact upon the other. This feeling that universities and schools orbited in completely different regulatory spheres may contribute to challenges in school-university relationships, given the lack of shared investment or understanding between them. This sense of a mismatch in regulatory priorities between schools and universities was highlighted in responses to the *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* consultation, where an anonymised HE sector body called for 'a closer dialogue between the Department of Education and BIS [Department for Business Innovation and Skills] to assist in positioning widening access work higher up the strategic agenda of schools' (2016, p. 24). This sentiment was reflected in many of the responses from university-based participants in my research, who felt that schools did not consider progression to HE to be a priority.

Differences in how accountability was understood and enacted was not just inter-sector but intra-sector, with several university-based staff highlighting the differences between schools they worked with. Robyn, Head of Access at Barras University, highlighted the different prioritisation of HE progression in schools in relation to Ofsted gradings, suggesting that;

> 'I think for some schools, they see it as higher priority than others. I mean we have got some schools in the region that are struggling in terms of Ofsted, that have much bigger issues and more urgent issues than thinking about higher aspirations at that present time. I think then it's [HE progression] at risk of getting lost'.

HE progression is not seen in schools as a policy that carries the same degree of 'compulsion to act' (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 142), as other policies such as raising attainment. As a result, less time is given to the enactment of these policies, particularly in those schools where scrutiny is intensely acute. For the most part, school-based participants were highly focused upon their own accountability measures with little awareness of the accountability measures driving universities in this sphere, despite their overlap. In my research, only two school-based participants said they had heard of an APP or its predecessor, Access Agreements, and only one participant, Tristan the Deputy

Headteacher at Linton Academy (AP), described where he had used an APP in his work. This (lack of) inter-sector understanding is explored in more depth in Chapter 7.

Given their separate regulatory spheres discussed above, it is perhaps unsurprising that school regulation was not fully appreciated by university-based participants in my research. Few were clear on the role Ofsted played in monitoring progression to HE in schools, although some, such as Kit, the Head of Access at Carey University, suggested that, 'I don't think they [Ofsted] can be very bothered because schools never mention it when they talk to us.' Others were more specific in asserting the policy focus of schools lay elsewhere, such as Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University's understanding that, 'Ofsted are much more bothered about GCSEs, right? I don't think they look at where kids go to university.' None of the university-based participants mentioned school-based regulation such as Destinations Measures or Ofsted's requirements influencing how they delivered their work with schools. However, several institutions highlighted that they had recently mapped their activities to the Gatsby Benchmarks, as part of their involvement in NECOP. Robyn, Head of Access at Barras University, described this process;

> 'We were asked to match up all of our outreach provision across Pre and Post-16 to the Gatsby Benchmarks and to the NERUPI [Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions] framework[30] as well, but we did that as a region, so with the other four universities.'

Only one university-based participant, Robyn, had been explicitly involved in supporting a school to articulate their HE progression work to Ofsted. She outlined her experience;

> 'where they have had Ofsted come in there have been times where they've asked me to provide information, or if they've known they've got an Ofsted coming up they'll just say "can you provide an outline of what we've done this year?" or "can we get copies of programmes?" and things, and they've presented that as part of their inspection. It's certainly not frequent but when it does come up they've always had positive feedback about how well it's been received.'

[30] The NERUPI framework is described as a praxis-based framework for designing and capturing the impact of widening participation activities. It is used by many access and participation teams at universities across the UK. http://www.nerupi.co.uk/about/nerupi-framework-overview

Raising Attainment – Changing Policies

Although the policy and regulatory spheres of schools and universities remain overwhelmingly distinct, policy surrounding 'raising attainment' created a relatively brief overlap between the two sectors in 2016.[31] Attainment-raising became a specific focus of Theresa May's government, directly referenced in her 'Britain, The Great Meritocracy' speech where she announced that, 'the government will reform university fair access requirements and say that universities should actively strengthen state school attainment' (2016). This drive to raise attainment and progression to HE from state schools was part of how May's government conceived social mobility, defined in the same speech to be, 'where we help the brightest among the poor' (Ibid,.). This focus was seen in the accompanying *Schools That Work For Everyone Green Paper* (Department for Education, 2016b), where May's rhetoric was expanded into more specific policies, including the involvement of universities in curriculum design in schools, support with the delivery of teaching and, most controversially, the sponsoring of state schools by universities (Ibid,. pp. 18-20). It was proposed that school sponsorship specifically should become a condition of charging higher fees, and universities should be held accountable to OFFA through Access Agreements (Ibid,. p. 19).

The announcement was met by significant criticism from the university sector, who felt that raising attainment in schools fell outside the reasonable expectations of a university. This sentiment was expressed at the time by the University of Oxford's Vice Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson who said, 'I think it's frankly insulting to them [schools] to suggest that a university can come in and do what they are working very hard to do and in many cases doing exceptionally well' (Whittaker, 2016). Several university-based participants in my research appeared to share this sentiment, including Madge, Head of Access at Rutherford University, who positioned the responsibility for HE progression as a joint one but with emphasis on, 'schools preparing them [pupils] and making sure they are attaining, and us then making sure that the schools have the right information.'

May's raising attainment policy highlighted the challenges of two different regulatory systems, and particularly the difficulties for a university regulator – initially OFFA and latterly

[31] The role of universities in raising attainment in schools has recently been revived by Michelle Donelan in her 'reboot of widening participation', announced in November 2021 (2021) and by John Blake, in his first speech as Director of Access and Participation (2022). There remains little clarity as to what this will mean in practice for schools and universities.

the OfS – in holding universities accountable for such a policy. Whilst the 'formal' policy intention appeared to be to raise GCSE and A Level attainment (Office for Students, 2020), the reality of this policy was a more 'writerly' (Bowe et al., 1992) approach than the headlines suggested. Universities successfully argued that raising attainment was difficult to define, and employed a more holistic classification than test results at GCSE and A Level (Bellaera, 2019). This was acknowledged by the OfS in its guidance when it stated, 'attainment in academic or specialist skills can be influenced by a variety of factors, which may form the basis of your short-term aims: improved subject knowledge, student confidence, learning environment [and] teaching quality' (2018b, p. 32). This meant that whilst schools defined 'raising attainment' as directly and demonstrably impacting upon GCSE and A Level attainment, universities had greater freedom for interpretation within their own institutional context.

The enactment of this policy saw universities make a wide range of 'secondary adjustments' (Riseborough, 1993) in order to fit the policy into their institutional culture around the role of universities within raising attainment. A small number of universities – none in the North East - sponsored schools in some form, whilst many others performed what Ball describes as 'creative non-implementation' (1994), whereby they articulated their work within their APPs as attainment raising, without necessarily making significant changes to their practice. For example, Elsie, a Policy Manager at Lambert University, spoke about the influence this had on their APP, suggesting that although the document discusses attainment raising, '…it doesn't happen the way it's worded in that [the APP].' Elsie also made clear that after 2019, their raising attainment work was 'realigned, because there's been no mention of it since [from government]'. Her comments make clear the relatively superficial influence the policy focus on raising attainment had on universities, and the quick dismissal of this work once it was perceived to no longer be the forefront of accountability measures. This lack of shared sense of what attainment raising means, and how it is measured, undermined school-university relationships.

University Practitioners - Performativity or Personal Mission?

Much has been written on teacher professionalism and the tensions caused by external accountability regimes on professional teacher identities (Ball, 2003; Braun & Maguire, 2018; Keddie, 2017; Vincent, 2019), discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter. However, little has been written on the professional identities of university-based

practitioners. Rainford suggests this is in part because of the lack of formal training and structure within this relatively new profession, and the number of 'accidental practitioners' who had rarely planned it as a career path (2019, p. 175). However, the practitioners in Rainford's study all indicated a concern for social justice as a motivation for undertaking their roles (Ibid,. p. 193), a finding which my own research echoes. In the same way in which Ball and colleagues describe the influence of personal experiences shaping how teachers enact policy, many university-based participants cited similar personal social justice missions, which were often in tension with the regulatory systems which monitored their work (2012).

Robyn, who had worked in her role as Head of Access at Barras University for several years, rejected the idea of regulation defining the access and participation work undertaken by her team, instead suggesting that, 'we're not doing it because the OfS want us to do it. We're doing it because it's the right thing, for society and for the institution.' Kit, the Director of Access at Carey University, shared a similar sentiment; 'I think you'll find that our team feel quite passionate about the work that we do. And it's important too. It sounds awful. It's targets, it's targets, it's targets but it's not targets, it's people we are talking about and it's about providing people with the opportunity.' This tension appeared to be lesser in younger practitioners such as Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University, who felt that defining his work through accountability measures was less problematic because, 'those targets are there to help the students do well.' This reflected what Wilkins describes as a 'post-performative professional' identity, where Nick did not see accountability as competing with his professional autonomy in the same way that Robyn and Kit suggest. This conflict echoes that found by Keddie in their work on teachers experience of 'compliance and criticality' (2018, p. 210). Taking pride in meeting the targets set by regulatory bodies in relation to the access and participation agenda can, but does not always, sit in tension with the narrative around the access and participation practitioner as motivated by social justice.

Some university-based participants such as Robyn may have managed this tension by suggesting that the targets and increased accountability were for 'other institutions'; those who she believed had not demonstrated a strong enough commitment to social justice previously. She believed the new OfS targets were positive because, 'it probably has got other universities who maybe haven't got such a WP agenda, it's got them thinking that they need to have that…I would hope.' Mary who was Head of Access at Howell University, an

institution which has historically taken low numbers of students from under-represented groups appeared to validate this perspective when she said that the new OfS regime was;

> ‘Driving a lot... it's probably focused things. I wouldn't want you to go away with the impression that we haven't done anything previously but there is, I would say there is a real shift, in terms of... the target is very challenging over the five year period but there is a shift in the institution that recognises, this is not just a nice thing to do, this is a really, really important thing to do.’

However, Mary did not want to attribute the work being done to increased accountability, stating that it’s ‘not just because we're being measured by the OfS, but because it's actually really important for the university as well.’ Mary’s apparent defensiveness suggests that she thought it important for work to be seen to be motivated by social justice, even where it appeared to be driven by regulatory conditions.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have sought to use policy enactment theory to examine how the external accountability regimes to which schools and universities are subject influence how they ‘do’ policy. I elaborate on processes of policy enactment as, ‘sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable’ (Ball, 1994, pp. 10–11), rarely practiced in the ‘best possible environments’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 41), nor are those enacting it rational, robotic policy agents (Spillane et al., 2002). In examining how policy surrounding the progression of pupils from school to HE is enacted, it is also important to recognise that there are many other policies circulating, in both schools and universities, as well as the wider context of each institution which is both created and influenced by policy (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012).

I argue that the introduction of increased regulation since the publication of the 2017 Careers Strategy (Department for Education, 2017) has not necessarily led to an increase in schools’ engagement with HE progression but instead to the datafication of this policy, whereby increased data has been collected to demonstrate and monitor its enactment. This can be understood in part by the high stakes nature of school accountability, where regulation is focused on other policy areas such as attainment, and monitoring and enforcement of HE progression is perceived to be less stringent. This means that some policy actors in schools see HE progression as a policy which must be ‘seen to be done’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 56). This is exemplified through the focus on the

Destinations Measures and the Gatsby Benchmarks as driving, 'intensification' of monitoring activities, as much as what Ball describes as 'first order activities' e.g. increasing CIAG activities (2003, p. 221). School-based participants questioned the rhetoric that the collection of this data aided their work to support pupils to progress to HE, and some saw it instead as an additional form of surveillance (Ball, 2017). Others engaged with the narrative, however, and voiced frustration that the metrics were not a higher priority for the regulator. An unintended consequence of this could be seen in the tension between the requirements for schools to feed into this system of tracking destinations, whilst universities are not mandated to provide information and feedback to them, fuelling a feeling of frustration in schools. Moreover, school-based participants suggested that accountability measures did not identify nuances within the data that were seen to be important, such as the 'appropriateness' of pupil destinations.

Universities have historically been subjected to less regulation than schools, and this has included progression to HE. However, with the introduction of OFFA and more recently the OfS, the regulatory burden has increased, along with a greater regulatory burden across the HE landscape more widely. This chapter seeks to compare some of the regulatory structures in place between schools and universities. This can be seen in two key differences; first, the contrast between the sense of collective accountability in HE, rather than the individualised nature of regulation in schools. Second, in the more personal, equally balanced relationships with the regulator experienced by universities, in comparison to the far more dictatorial approach applied by Ofsted to schools. Although there has been a datafication of university regulation, universities have far greater autonomy and ability to negotiate with the regulator, which can be seen in the concessions surrounding the use of POLAR4. Notably there appeared to be little cross-sector awareness or engagement regarding the regulatory systems surrounding schools and universities, particularly from school-based participants who appeared focused on their own regulatory requirements. This seems to undermine the process of progression to HE, which inherently requires a degree of collaboration between the two sectors.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that the current separate regulatory systems undermine school-university relationships by creating different – and sometimes conflicting – policies which are enacted upon the same shared field of progression into higher education. In the

next chapter I examine further both the characteristics of these relationships, and the barriers.

Chapter 8 - School-University… Partnerships?

Introduction

Although the concept of progression to HE for under-represented groups is a relatively recent one, other spheres of school-university partnerships, such as initial teacher education (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007; Smedley, 2001), CPD (Miller, 2001; Sandholtz, 2002; Thomas et al., 2010), consultancy (Cordingley & Buckler, 2014), and collaborative research (Arhar et al., 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2004) have much longer histories. This chapter draws on the theories of school-university partnerships developed and applied in all these spheres however, it argues that the term 'partnership' as conceived in these literatures is an outdated one. It argues that a new analytical framework is needed to understand the ways in which schools and universities interact within progression to HE.

The first part of this chapter examines Goodlad's enduring concept of partnership as a 'deliberately designed, collaborative arrangement between different institutions, working together to advance self-interest and solve common problems' (1988, p. 13), which has formed the bedrock of much of the subsequent literature. It goes on to examine the characteristics associated with partnership work as defined by Sirotnik and Goodlad in their seminal work (1988) and shaped by others, including Klein and Dunlap (1993), and more recently by Day and colleagues (2010), and Greany and colleagues (2014), in the context of progression to HE. This chapter argues that Goodlad's definition and the subsequent characteristics associated with partnership working do not reflect the current marketised environment in which schools and universities interact. Moreover, existing understandings of partnership predate significant shifts in the education landscape over the last ten years (as outlined in Chapter 2).

Instead of partnership, I suggest that the term 'relationship' provides a more useful analytical frame, which is inclusive of the wide spectrum of interactions between universities and schools within this sphere. In using the term 'relationship' rather than partnership, I seek to mark two key changes from the previous literature. First, to recognise that interactions between schools and universities span a broad range; from positive and productive, to problematic or negative in their nature, and that the latter has hitherto been missing from partnership theory. Second, to acknowledge that the criteria associated with partnership working as defined in the literature are impossible to meet within the sphere of progression to HE because of the wider environment in which schools and universities operate. As a

result, interactions between schools and universities in this area risk being characterised by a deficit narrative, where a tension exists between the ideal set out in the partnership literature and the reality of the activity being undertaken.

By analysing school-university interactions through the lens of relationships, this chapter examines some of the challenges experienced by both school and university-based participants within this research. It takes a thematic approach, drawing upon the criteria set out in the literature, and those areas highlighted by participants within my data. It first looks at what participants identified as the material resources required to create and sustain collaborative working, and argues that they represent a physical manifestation of the unequal power dynamics between schools and universities. It goes onto examine the ability - on both sides - to navigate the complex organisational structures involved in building and sustaining relationships, and finds that the difficulties in doing so are compounded by the competing and contradictory needs of the different institutions. The last theme I examine is the ways in which school-university relationships are monitored and evaluated. I look at how a historic lack of monitoring and evaluation of progression to HE has undermined confidence in the relationship between schools and universities, and how recent changes have begun to reshape this.

Throughout this chapter I draw on literature specifically focused upon school-university partnerships. However, I consider this in the context of my broader theoretical frame of policy sociology.

Partnership in Policy

Partnership working has long been proffered as the solution to many complex policy issues, which is perhaps because in a period of neoliberal rolling back of the state and austerity measures, ‘partnerships’ are seen as, ‘a means of delivering more with less by making better use of existing resources and adding value by bringing together complementary services; they can also foster innovation and synergy and be emancipatory in the formation of new relationships and systems of working’ (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007, pp. 415–416).

Policy focusing on progression to HE has consistently identified partnership working as an important way of achieving policy goals. The 1997 Dearing Report stated that;

> ‘we endorse such [widening participation] initiatives, the most successful of which recognise the need for institutions to collaborate with schools, colleges and other local agencies; that improvement will require a long term investment of commitment and resources; and that funding needs to be focused in order to be effective’ (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997, p. 108).

Gordon Brown shortly before he became Prime Minister set out his vision for education, which included the assertion that ‘every secondary school should have a university or college partner’ (2007). More recently, the DfE published guidance on partnership working between schools and universities, which suggested that partnerships should be ‘mutually beneficial, sustainable and have a measurable effect on pupils’ (2018c), and the OfS released a *Creating Successful Strategic Partnerships* guide for universities which focused on building partnerships with schools (2019d).

The dominant, positive framing of partnership theory across the literature makes it appealing as a policy solution. This is perhaps especially the case in more recent times, where policymakers are explicitly pursuing a ‘value for money’ agenda within HE. This can be seen in the focus of the new regulator, the OfS, which states that ‘almost everything the OfS does seeks to ensure value for money in English higher education’ (2020). Furthermore, in its *Value for Money Strategy* the OfS apply this specifically to progression to HE stating that, ‘by regulating to improve student participation, experience and outcomes, we secure value in return for the contributions made by both individual students and the wider public’ (2019e, p. 5). That said, the parallel discussion regarding the challenges which occur in the practical enactment of partnership working are frequently under-acknowledged in policy within HE progression.

Terminology Challenges – A Return to Emic and Etic

Across the literature, collaborations between schools and universities occur in different spheres and take different forms. However, identifying the nature of these collaborations is hindered by what Clark describes as the plethora of different terminology used to explain ‘similar activities’ on the one hand, and on the other, ‘different meanings attached to the same term’ (1988, p. 33). This is a consequence of differences in emic language (language internal to a culture) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2010) used by schools and universities. The result is that it ‘is virtually impossible to tell from the name given a particular relationship, what the characteristics are’ (Clark, 1988, p. 40). Although the theoretical literature has

defined conceptions of partnership, in practice collaborations exist under the terms: partnership, network, programme, relationship, and others, which are used synonymously and interchangeably. This can be seen in the data collected for this research, where many of my research participants did not recognise the term 'school-university partnerships' when describing their experiences, and used a raft of different expressions to explain their work surrounding progression to HE.

Drawing upon the emic and etic approach outlined in Chapter 1, I have retained the emic terminology used by individual participants in quotations as representative of the internal language and meanings commonly found within their school 'culture' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I also deploy etic terminology (language applied externally from a culture) from the literature, contrasting the emic and etic terms used. I argue that the differences in terms between what is used in the literature and on the ground is symptomatic of the divide between the theory of partnership, and the reality of how school-university interactions are understood by practitioners. The danger of evaluating school-university relationships against the current theoretical framework of partnership theory is that, in its existing state, it does not offer a relevant framework which enables school-university interactions to be discussed or evaluated.

The Concept of Partnership

Defining Partnership

School-university partnership literature has spawned a multitude of definitions for the work it seeks to examine. Much of it is underpinned by Goodlad's early framing, which conceives of partnership working as, 'a deliberately designed, collaborative arrangement between different institutions, working together to advance self-interest and solve common problems' (1988, p. 13). This definition has been reaffirmed in subsequent work across the wider literature (Klein & Dunlap, 1993; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). More recently, the definition has been drawn upon by those working on progression to HE, including by Wiggans who suggested that, 'partnership working requires a structured approach in which institutions plan a common approach and deliver a programme of work to meet agreed objectives' (2012, p. 3). In doing so, Wiggans makes an important shift in the emphasis from the sharing of aims between schools and universities to merely agreeing aims. This is useful in terms of more accurately describing what is happening in school-university relationships within

progression to HE, however, no further discussion is offered as to how such a shift might enable a more useful analytical lens to be used.

Partnership – An Unattainable Idea?

Although there has been a broad consensus over the conception of partnership over the last three decades, there is equally widespread agreement that this represents what Sirotkin and Goodlad termed a 'commitment to a rather deviant idea' (1988, p. vii); a model which departs from the accepted norms of each institution, and one which has always remained mostly unfulfilled in practice. Wiggans suggests that this is due to a sense of over-promising and under-delivering; 'over the years there has been much expected of school-university partnerships, which in turn has increased the sense of frustration and disappointment when they are perceived not to have delivered' (2012, p. 12).

The framing across much of the literature as inherently beneficial for all parties means there are very few detractors from the concept of partnership working. However, there is an increasing body of literature examining the complexities and challenges of school-university partnerships in practice. Smedley acknowledges that, 'praise for measures that promote increased and meaningful interaction between the key players is now almost universal. Ironically, simultaneously, [research] reveals the challenges as well as the promises of partnership' (2001, p. 189). Bartholomew and Sandholtz suggest that, whilst in theory school-university partnerships 'offer significant benefits, the task of establishing and sustaining successful partnerships is challenging' (2009, p. 156). One of the few explicit critiques can be found in Gorard and colleagues' review of progression to HE research, which stated that;

> 'Partnerships are a key strategy to both promote access to higher education and to change the structure and contents of HE provision, but collaboration poses practical, organisational and cultural challenges. The review found no evidence that partnership provision of new programmes and/or in new locations increases the number of students from under-represented groups entering HE' (Gorard et al., 2006, p. 85).

Throughout my research a sense of frustration between the perceived potential of partnership working and the reality was articulated by many of my interview participants within both schools and universities. These frustrations spanned ontological understandings

of what a school-university partnership could or should be, such as Tristan, Deputy Head at Linton Academy (AP), who suggested that universities, 'just weren't on the same page [as schools]', to the logistical manifestations of these partnerships, discussed later in this chapter, where pressures on material resources took precedence over more theoretical considerations of partnership working. Sirotnik and Goodlad recognise that, 'although we propose an ideal paradigm for collaboration between schools and universities, this paradigm will only be approximated in practice' (1988, p. viii), yet the idea of partnership working - if enacted properly – is often held up as some kind of utopia. This 'ideal collaborative state' (Ibid,. p. viii) positions school-university partnerships as an example of what Ball terms an 'enlightenment concept,' which he suggests focuses on the idea of linear policymaking, 'from the inadequacies of the present to some future state of perfection where everything works well and works as it should' (2017, p. 11).

Narrating partnership working in this way risks developing a deficit approach to all school-university relationships which do not meet these 'ideals', and embedding a sense of failure amongst those responsible for translating abstract concepts into rarely realised actions. Moreover, accepting this notion of partnership working as an inherent positive, and focusing solely on the challenges of enacting partnership, risks placing the onus for success upon the individuals engaged with specific partnerships, and ignoring the wider policy and material contexts in which they operate. Such an approach risks excluding all schools-university interactions within the sphere of progression to HE as being outside of the definition of 'partnership', rather than engaging with the nuance of the interactions as they are.

Partnership and Power

Koop suggests that 'to believe in partnerships is one thing. To make them really happen takes time, great skill and above all great courage and generosity on the part of those who currently hold the power' (1995, p. 9). Koop highlights power – and explicitly its unequal distribution – as a key dynamic underpinning all partnership work. In doing so, they highlight that the reality of the power dynamics between schools and universities contrasts with one of Klein and Dunlap's key criteria for successful partnerships: 'parity' between partners (1993).

I have found particularly helpful Seddon and colleagues' work on power within social partnerships, which considers partnership working within the 'centralisation, deregulation and privatisation' of the neoliberal state (2005, p. 570). They echo Ball et al's focus on the importance of context (2012), suggesting that, 'participants within social partnerships carry the history, traditions and cultures within particular social contexts with them into partnership work. These structural and cultural differences create tensions and interest group conflicts that reach back into wider social struggles' (Seddon et al., 2005, p.572). Moreover, they highlight the ways in which power within these partnerships is shaped, structured, and ordered by the state, as well as the differing characteristics, aims and resources of the partners.

The issue of power was consistently raised by both school and university-based participants in my research and is discussed later in this chapter. Some made explicit references, such as James, the Deputy Head at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), who described universities as being on 'the heavy end of the power seesaw [in school-university relationships]'. Felicity, the Deputy Head of Sixth Form at Ferrars Community High School (AP, HPHSD), implied that there was a mismatch in the power balance between schools and universities when she described universities as being the institutions which were able to 'make the decisions'. On the other side of the divide, Mary, the Head of Access at Howell University, acknowledged this perception, stating that, 'schools feel like we have all the power… but it's not that simple.' Power appeared to manifest itself in three key ways in school-university relationships: in the desire or motivation to engage in the defining of what an interaction looks like, and in the material resources each party brings to the relationship. I also acknowledge that power manifests itself in many unseen, often insidious, ways which may not have been perceived and/or discussed by participants within this research.

This thesis also acknowledges the ways in which regulation in progression to HE alters or even rebalances the 'power seesaw' James describes (discussed further in Chapter 7). In regulatory terms, schools gain from being less regulated, as the policies governing school activity around progression to HE are more 'writerly' (Bowe et al., 1992) than those applied to universities, offering schools greater opportunity to practise 'creative non-implementation' should they choose to do so (Ball, 1994, p. 20). In this way, it could be argued that schools are not dependent on universities to embark on any kind of interaction or relationship and, in this sense, are in the powerful position of having agency. Perhaps counterintuitively,

schools do not perceive themselves to have significant power within school-university interactions, especially once the initial decision to interact has been taken. Throughout my research, both school and university participants highlighted how the concentration within universities of the material resources needed for partnership resulted in a perception that universities held the power in school-university interactions. This is discussed in the following section.

Finally, questions about who holds the balance of power in the school-university relationship must also focus on who defines the shape of the interactions between schools and universities. This is highlighted in the monitoring and evaluation section towards the end of this chapter, whereby school-based participants voiced criticism of the activities undertaken by universities, which focus on fulfilling their definitions of success, rather than that of the school. Seddon et al suggest that ‘partners have their own expectations and ideas about what counts as 'success'' (2005, p. 581). However, where one side holds more power, their definition of success becomes critical for the continuation of the partnership.

Schools and universities have a complex and multifaceted understanding of where power exists within progression to HE, and how this influences their interactions. This is explored further in this chapter, and the two following chapters, where I consider how this balance of power varies by the age of the pupils involved, and the desirability of the schools and universities.

Partnership Criteria

Beyond a definition, there have been several attempts to quantify what is required to both establish and sustain successful school-university partnerships, and to explain the frequent difficulties experienced by those attempting to pursue this work. Goodlad’s work established the idea of ‘minimum essentials’ around how school-university partnerships should be conceived; their purpose, agenda and structure (1988, pp. 25–28). Subsequent work has produced a number of different frameworks and criteria, albeit with many commonalities. This section examines some of these criteria for partnership work, which I apply throughout this chapter to evaluate the differences between the theoretical conditions for partnership, and the reality of school-university relationships experienced by the participants within my study. I do so in order to suggest that these frameworks do not appropriately reflect the

reality of interactions between schools and universities within progression to HE, and that a new framework is needed.

Klein and Dunlap draw heavily upon Goodlad's work to suggest four criteria for partnership: '(a) mutuality of concern, (b) reciprocity of services, (c) an ongoingness, and (d) a belief in partnership parity' (1993, p. 56). Thorkildsen and Stein identify 'leadership, clearly defined objectives and goals, specific deliverables and sufficient resources' (1996, p. 82). Shive identifies key criteria to be, 'clearly defined and specific goals, systems of rewards and benefits for both parties, resources, ownership, fixed responsibility and times' (1984, p. 121). More recently these partnership criteria have been applied to work within progression to HE. Handscomb and colleagues suggested four key conditions for successful partnerships within progression to HE: material resources (time, energy and resources); strategic fitness and relevance (joined up coherence and supporting the missions of those involved in a targeted way); ownership, power and control (ensuring all voices are heard and differences are valued), and monitoring and evaluation (understanding what works and is generated in local contexts) (2014). These definitions strongly resonate with Ball's notion of 'linear policy making' (2017, p. 11), which downplays the complexities of the situations being described. Runz and Eyre take a contrasting approach, identifying key barriers to partnership working - rather than conditions for success - within access to HE, including teacher awareness, time and logistics, cost, teacher confidence and variations between school needs and capacities (2019).

From these different criteria I have identified three common areas of discussion, if not agreement, which I have used to structure the rest of this chapter: material resources, understanding and navigating institutional structures, and monitoring and evaluation.

Material Resources

All About the Pound?

Although material resources feature relatively briefly in the academic literature, which is focused more upon abstract challenges, participants within my research consistently identified material resources as a key barrier to building and sustaining relationships between universities and schools. These material resources include not just physical resources such as space, equipment and transportation, but staff time from both universities and schools. These were discussed by participants from both schools and universities as

directly associated with monetary resources. This appeared consistent across schools with varying rates of progression to HE. Helena, the Head of Sixth Form at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD), who reported good relationships with universities, asserted, 'it all [working with universities] comes down to cost', a sentiment which was echoed by Amy, the Head of Careers at Dene School (LP), and who concurred that 'funding is a barrier for everything. It stops everything.' This lack of financial resources within schools flouts the notion that partnership working must be built upon 'sufficient resources' (Shive, 1984), and undermines subsequent ideas of 'partnership parity' (Klein & Dunlap, 1993) in other aspects of the relationship.

Access to financial resources exposed a major imbalance of power between schools and universities, which was highlighted by participants in both institutions. There was a shared sense that schools were, as Polly, Head of Access at Woodwood University, described it, 'cash strapped' and therefore lacked the financial resources to dedicate to support progression to HE in a way that universities did not experience. Several participants spoke of this worsening over recent years due to widely reported austerity cuts to school funding (Britton et al., 2019). Ernest, a Head of Year at Dene School (LP), described how, 'we used to do stuff but there's no way we can afford it now, everything has had to be stripped back.' Handscomb and colleagues recognise these as 'transaction costs', not only to build relationships but to sustain them, suggesting that, 'funding is a crucial contributor to partnership success… without sufficient funding school-university partnerships struggle to survive' (2014, p. 6).

This lack of financial resources in schools was compounded by a feeling amongst school staff that, in the words of Tristan, Deputy Headteacher at Linton Academy (AP), 'universities have pots of money and we have to try and find the right person who will let us spend them.' Although university participants did not report being under the same financial constraints as schools, some did push back against what they saw to be an unfair perception that money was no object within universities. Mary, Head of Access at Howell University, summed up this sentiment:

> 'the funding for schools is not there, but it's not there for universities either. I think there's perhaps a perception from schools that the universities are awash with money, because of the income from fees, and that's not the case. It makes our lives

really difficult because we can't fund all the things the schools think we can and should.'

Although Mary's assertion is fair in that funding within universities for progression to HE work is not infinite, there is a significant budget for this within HE of over 800 million annually for fair access (Millward, 2019) and 176 million allocated specifically to outreach activities in 2019-2020 (Office for Students, 2019a, p. 28). My analysis of APPs found that nearly 22 million pounds of funding was ringfenced for access and participation work in North East universities for 2024-25 academic year.[32]

The fact that funding for access and participation has historically been overseen by the university regulator - first by OFFA and more recently the OfS (2018a) - has compounded the sense that universities are both responsible for, and the financial backers of, this work. However, this poses significant challenges to building relationships as it undermines the idea of equality within partnership, which is central to much of the literature (Goodlad, 1988; Handscomb et al., 2014; Kruger et al., 2009). As Clark suggests, 'it is not just a question of whether there are adequate funds. If these funds are controlled by one of the parties in the collaboration rather than shared, adverse relationships may develop' (1988, p. 60). This interaction between power and material resource plays a significant role in undermining the 'partnership parity' (Klein & Dunlap, 1993) in school-university relationships and can be seen clearly in the two examples below - transport and staff costs.

Transport – A Manifestation of Material Resources

Transport represented the most frequently cited example of a material resource which posed a barrier to schools and universities working together. Transport underpins a significant element of current HE progression work, which is premised on pupils visiting university campuses in order to take part in a range of activities. Not only do these visits form a major part of many HE progression programmes, they are often held up as a gold standard of access work, with campus visits the focal point of a wider programme (Mccaig et al., 2006, p. 10). Transport to allow pupils to visit universities represents access to the core of activities which sit at the heart of school-university interactions in this sphere.

[32] Financial projections taken from the most recently submitted APPs from each institution (2020-21).

The vast majority of school-based participants saw the costs associated with transporting pupils to universities to take part in these events as a significant barrier to their work. Many participants gave examples of the cost of the journeys they had made with pupils, citing coach hire and train tickets worth several hundreds of pounds for each trip. For example, Grizel the Head of Sixth Form at Culver Academy (HP, HPHS), suggested that a key barrier for these visits was the 'couple of hundred pounds [per trip] for a bus, easily.' Several participants pointed out the specific challenges of transport in their schools which were rural or coastal - and sometimes both - citing poor public transport infrastructure in and around the North East region. Bill, the Deputy Head of Sixth Form at Ferrars Community High School (AP, HPHSD), a rural school in the region, compared the challenges he faced in transporting pupils to that of London schools; 'it's not like [London], we don't have free transport that can take the kids everywhere in the region, door to door and running twenty-four seven. We just don't have the options.'

A small number of universities offered financial support for transport, something which was flagged by several school-based participants as a huge benefit to working with an institution. Notably, Lovell University had systematised the process of allocating transport funding for schools, setting out clear guidelines on its website and reimbursing schools for 100% of the transport cost up to a particular (substantial) limit. Access to these funds were cited by several school-based participants, including Mary-Lou, the University Progression Coordinator at Linton Academy (AP), who described the impact of this funding: 'the travel bursary from Lovell University makes a big difference. Any trip that we want to run […] they're our first port of call because they will pay for transport.' This was reinforced by Constance, the Head of Careers at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD), who agreed that she would 'prioritise Lovell University visits because I know we can reduce the costs with the [transport] bursary.' The imbalance in financial resources available across different universities had a narrowing effect on the choices school-based participants felt they could make. Rather than engaging with the programmes they felt would be most beneficial to pupils, they prioritised universities which offered financial support for transport.

Although a small number of participants from universities other than Lovell discussed providing transport, they only offered this option to particular groups and this varied between institutions. From my documentary analysis of university websites, and communication regarding these activities it was not clear which groups this applied to at each institution.

Robyn, the Head of Access at Lambert University, said that she had a small amount of money to offer schools 'if they let us know they're really struggling [with transport costs].' This appeared to advantage schools who were proactive in communicating challenges, rather than identifying schools actually experiencing the greatest barriers. Such an approach compounded the sense in schools that universities were difficult to navigate and lacked transparency, an issue explored in more depth later in this chapter.

Despite regulatory conditions outlined in Chapter 7, not all institutions funded schools or groups identified as under-represented by the OfS (2018b), or schools in areas of low HE participation. Hilda, an Access Manager at Carey University, described providing financial support for schools with whom they were trying to engage as part of a 'widening footprint budget'. These were not schools incentivised by the regulatory conditions, for example in the OfS targets in Carey University's APP, but by market forces. This seemed to be focused on recruiting students with higher grade profiles, which the university had identified as being concentrated in particular schools and specifically in high performing school sixth forms. This further complicated the power dynamics within school-university relationships, as some schools and groups of pupils were offered more support than others. This is explored further in Chapter 10.

Some universities had responded to the increasing difficulties surrounding pupils visiting campuses by offering a greater number of school-based sessions, where university staff went into schools to deliver progression to HE activities. Hilda, who works in Pre-16 Access at Carey University, described the shift in their provision over recent years; 'we go into schools because a lot of the stuff that we have is transportable, we can take it out […] And it's great if people want to come and do it, but if they can't come in, we changed that to make everything more accessible.' This appeared to work well for some activities, although Hilda went on to point out that not everything could be done off campus, and most activities 'have to be done here to get the full experience,' suggesting that school-based activities were not comparable to bringing pupils onto campus, and created a hierarchy of experience.

Staff Time

A second material resource identified by school-based participants were the costs associated with staff time, which took several forms. Most frequently spoken about was the staff time associated with organising and supervising university visits; both taking pupils onto

campus and hosting university sessions within school. This element of staff time dominated the concerns of the majority of school-based participants, although a few participants who occupied more senior roles also highlighted the costs of staff time for overseeing HE progression work at a higher, more strategic level. An even smaller number identified the idea of explicitly 'building relationships' as a time commitment, notably Tristan, Deputy Headteacher at Linton Academy (AP), for whom this was a focus, and Maria, Deputy Head of Sixth Form at Stewart Academy (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), and Geoff, Head of Sixth Form at Wilson School (HPD), who talked about it as an aspiration.

Focus also lay in using staff time to 'action' new CIAG policies, which were more 'readerly'; 'imperative or disciplinary policies' (Ball et al., 2011, p. 612), and required more specific activities to be undertaken than previous policy in this space. In particular, the statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2018a), despite having little money attached to it, provided far more detailed requirements for CIAG than had previously been experienced by schools. University-based participants also frequently cited a lack of staff time within schools as a major barrier to their work. This contrasted with the small number; Mary, Head of Access at Howell University and Hilda, Access Manager at Carey University, who highlighted their own university-based teams as being limited in this way.

Although almost all school-based staff highlighted the cost of directly staffing trips, this formed only one part of the time-burden associated with organising events both in and outside of school. High staff-pupil ratios for external trips, the limitations on covering the absence of teaching staff during lesson time, and the often highly bureaucratic internal processes required to plan an external trip, were all cited as drains on staff time. Kurt, the University Progression Lead at Moore Academy (N/A), outlined the staffing requirements needed in his school to take out a trip: 'if I take 150 kids out, I need eight staff, therefore there's eight amounts of cover. Cover costs around £250 per day [per member of staff].' However, Kurt's colleague Joyce, the Head of Careers, also highlighted the time taken to organise such a trip, 'a lot of extra hours go on behind this [trip]. To do Evolve [online risk assessment] and the health and safety, you've got all that layer to put on and your letters [of parental consent] to write.' This was echoed by Mary-Lou, the University Progression Coordinator at Linton Academy (AP), who outlined the disincentives these requirements created for staff considering organising trips; 'filling out a trip pack is literally like the worst thing ever, they're about twenty pages long and horrible […] so nobody wants to run trips.'

For the vast majority of staff, as Joyce pointed out, ‘this is on top of our teaching as well.’ The fact that many of those responsible for HE progression also held significant teaching timetables presents both time challenges and flexibility issues when attempting to build relationships with universities. The lack of time inhibited both the ‘ongoingness’ and ‘parity’ held as essential criteria for partnership working (Klein & Dunlap, 1993). Lack of time also compounded issues such as the challenges of navigating organisations highlighted later in this chapter.

The lack of time school staff had to undertake work on progression created frustrations between schools and universities that were articulated by participants in both institutions; many school-based participants felt that the logistical burden of organising events and trips was under appreciated by universities, whereas university-based participants expressed frustration – often alongside sympathy – that communication was frequently inhibited by this lack of time. James, Deputy Headteacher at Bettany (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), shared his frustration that:

> ‘The view from HE seems to be that there are people in schools who have nothing else to do other than set this stuff up. The reality is that it’s probably going to get given to the Head of Careers who is likely to be teaching twenty hours a week, so the Careers Programme in the school is probably running on a couple of hours of staff time a week.’

James’ perception was in contrast with the university-based participants in my research, who all highlighted the lack of time within schools as a challenge, albeit one that they felt unable to solve. Kit, Head of Access at Carey University, identified school staff time as the single biggest barrier to working with schools, despite his impression that ‘we try to make it as easy as possible for them.’ Polly, the Head of Access at a college at Woodward University, who had previously been a secondary school teacher herself, spoke of the need for ‘patience, because they [teachers] don't have the time in the teaching day.’ This mismatch between how school and university-based participants felt the time pressures to be understood undermined the trust that Kruger and colleagues deem to be essential to school-university partnerships (2009). It appeared that although university-based participants were attempting to offer ‘a high level of flexibility’ and a ‘commitment to spending time on fostering and sustaining the personal relationships that enable the partnership to prosper’ (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007, p. 414), this was inhibited by the lack of time their

school-based colleagues were able to offer. Interestingly, none of my university-based participants spoke of paying for the cost of school-based staff time, either through cover for staff out on trips, or funding direct posts in schools. The latter has been introduced by NECOP, who fund Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) in schools they work with, dedicated to HE progression. This provision was cited by several eligible schools as being of benefit, albeit in a relatively limited way as the TLR was restricted to one relatively junior member of staff per school.

Very few school-based participants spoke about having a wider strategy behind the activities and events in which they participated, although a small number expressed a desire to do so. This may in part be attributed to the lack of responsibility school-based participants felt for driving this work (as explored in Chapter 7). Maria, the Deputy Head of Sixth Form at Stewart College (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), who was keen to develop relationships with universities felt that, 'the limitation on relationships comes down to time and being able to create those links. It's been on my top five things to do on my To Do List for years – make better links [with universities]'. Ball and colleagues in their policy enactment work highlight the way in which the need to perform in relation to high stakes 'readerly' policies leaves little time for work outside of these areas. They suggest that 'in the mundane, in relation to the pressures of performance, in response to constant change, there is little space, time or opportunity to think differently or 'against'' (2012, pp. 138–139). This lack of both perceived and actual time inhibits the growth of partnership working or thinking more holistically, even where school-based participants express a desire to do so.

Of the school-based participants, only Tristan and Mary-Lou at Linton Academy (AP) gave a sense of forming more strategic links with universities, whereby HE activities fitted into a wider school plan. This could be seen in the systems they had set up to log university interactions, the strategy document they had for progression to HE and the integration of HE progression within the School Improvement Plan. Tristan articulated this as a process which had changed over the five years he had been at the school; 'it just used to be me driving it and contacting people directly, but slowly we've established an ethos whereby the whole sixth form is connected in with different institutions.' Mary-Lou, who was responsible for the day to day work with universities echoed this when she explained her approach; 'we explicitly try and work with different types of universities across the spectrum', whereby she targeted universities with different admissions criteria. Although this strategising appeared

to be the most advanced of the schools within my research, it was focused on how the school would engage with different institutions in order to maximise the ‘services’ on offer, and to meet their own regulatory requirements.

In contrast, all the universities involved in my research described a highly developed strategy of engaging with schools which was referred to by almost all university-based participants, regardless of seniority. This included targeting specific schools which had high numbers of pupils which were desirable to the institution for different reasons; sometimes to meet the terms of their APPs, sometimes to recruit a type of student that was felt to be particularly beneficial to the institution. When asked whether they had consulted or worked with schools to frame these strategies, none of my research participants was aware of any examples of collaboration on the creation of their institutions’ APP, or the activities they had developed. This suggested that universities did not see school-university partnerships as an integral part of achieving their targets in relation to their APPs. Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University, was clear that,

> ‘If you have the brochure, if you look online at the brochure, everything, everything you could possibly think of to do with outreach is in that brochure. So schools would never have to ask for anything tailored because if they can't find it in there, we can't do it basically.’

This reinforced the idea of universities as a service provider, with schools picking from a predetermined list to solve a problem or need that the university has defined, rather than working with the university on a mutually identified need. When asked if schools ever requested anything specific, Nick wasn’t aware of any examples; ‘I don't think we get requests.’ This does not fulfil the criteria of planning a ‘common approach’ (Wiggans, 2012) or ensure a ‘mutuality of concern’ (Klein & Dunlap, 1993) as highlighted in the literature, nor does it reflect the guidance provided by the DfE and OfS (2018c; 2019d). Instead, it risks becoming the ‘customer-supplier service relationships’ which is decried in both the literature and policy (Day et al., 2010; Greany et al., 2014).

Although universities have significant financial resources relative to schools, this does not mean they had access to staff time across the institution. Hilda, an Access Manager at Carey University, highlighted in particular her lack of access to academics stressing that they were, ‘like gold dust because they already have so many other commitments’. Whereas Nick, who had recently joined Lovell University from another institution within the region, highlighted

the difference that at Lovell University ‘academics [were] really, really engaged and happy to invest time in outreach activity, which is so important to us.’ School-based participants also voiced frustration at the engagement, or lack thereof, from academic staff members within the university which meant that activities were predominantly delivered by non-academic staff from central access teams. Felix, the Deputy Head of Sixth Form at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), stressed that ‘the key I think to any successful relationship is allowing us access to academics. Instead we get people from Recruitment who are lovely but they don’t know about the subjects, they can’t inspire the kids.’

The engagement of staff more broadly than those directly working on a partnership has long been highlighted as a problem in the wider literature. Over 30 years ago Lieberman wrote that, ‘working on problems in collaboration with school people has not usually been seen as respectable faculty work’ (1988, p. 84). This was echoed in a recent article by a widening participation practitioner who stated that, ‘the popular assumption [within the university] is that well-intentioned work with schools and colleges and young people outside of the KS5 recruitment age bracket is the role of the outreach teams’ (Avery 2020). The enactment of access and participation work within the university is not therefore a holistic, whole institution activity, but rather heterogenous and disjointed. The way in which staff resources are deployed over different ages and key stages is examined further in Chapter 9.

Navigating Organisational Structures

Power and Navigation

An enduring challenge within all school-university partnerships is that of power and control, and particularly the sense that universities dictate such partnerships. Lieberman described partnership working three decades ago as,

> ‘Administrators (school leaders), predominantly male, went to meetings with university people to learn about new ideas to improve their schools; the teachers, predominantly female, were to receive what knowledge was thought appropriate. While we initially bought into this “trickle-down” theory of change, we soon realized that, if we wanted real reform, teachers would have to be directly involved’ (1992, p. 6).

Although partnership working has evolved since this description, issues of where power lies and how control is exerted in partnership remains a significant thread throughout the more recent literature, which Handscomb et al suggests is still perceived as university dominated,

‘despite often good intentions’ (2014, p. 6). This perception is reflected by some of my school-based participants such as Charles, the Head of Sixth Form at Stewart College (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), who felt that, ‘we are the junior party because universities have all the power - we don’t.’ This sense of universities working ‘on’ rather than ‘with’ schools is explicitly cautioned against within the literature (Trubowitz et al., 1984) and reflected in the aim for mutuality, for ‘all voices to be heard’ (Greany et al., 2014) and ‘valuing differences’ (Handscomb et al., 2014, p. 7). However, throughout this study both school and university-based participants suggested that in practice these interactions remain defined by universities.

Such concerns are exacerbated by the imbalance in the material resources which each side brings to a partnership, as discussed above. However, unlike other school-university relationships, these relationships differ in terms of the power derived from the need to achieve regulatory or commercial outcomes, which are far more acute for universities than schools. Seeley defines a chief characteristic of partnership working as a common effort towards common goal (1981), however school-based participants within my research were frequently seen and saw themselves as clients or customers of universities rather than partners. This perception shifted the relationship away from partnership and towards a transactional, business like interaction. Few schools (with the exception of Tristan at Linton Academy, (AP)) articulated having power derived from universities’ regulatory requirements in this relationship. This was reinforced by the belief held by many school-based participants that university progression to HE work was indeed driven by business concerns rather than shared aims. Margo, the Sixth Form Careers Advisor at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD), felt that universities were highly engaged with the school, but this was ‘because they were a business’ rather than because they were working towards a shared aim. Joyce, the Head of Careers at Moore Academy (N/A), elaborated on this stating that, ’I’m cynical and see it as bums on seats for the uni because they want the money. Even if I don’t see it as recruitment on the day [of the HE activities], I know stuff goes on behind the scenes.’

Several other school-based participants framed all their work with universities as ‘recruitment’ from the school, despite almost all universities attempting to separate out recruitment from access and participation activity, by having different teams and departments. Such relationships sit in contradiction to Clark’s definition of partnership whereby, ‘partners may help one another in general or specific ways, but none is ever a

client because the relationship is mutual… the concept of service delivery, unlike that of partnership, leads to conflict-producing ambiguities about whether provider or client wields more power in the relationship' (1988, pp. 56–57). However, the greater need for universities to achieve outcomes in relation to progression to HE changes the power balance between some schools and universities working in this sphere. This changing power balance is explored more in Chapters 9 and 10 where I examine the differences in school-university relationships over pupil age, and the desirability of both schools and universities.

A significant challenge to both school and university-based participants was the ability to 'navigate' through the organisational structures, bureaucratic systems and, importantly, the other's culture. Both sides appeared to find the other unreachable, whilst acknowledging their own organisations posed similar problems for 'outsiders' attempting to navigate through. Most frequently cited as a challenge was identifying the person within the organisation who could help achieve a desired outcome and, related to this, the high turnover of staff in these roles. Tristan, the Deputy Headteacher at Linton Academy (AP), who appeared to be among the most successful of school participants at navigating university systems, stated that his biggest barrier was, 'finding the person to talk to'. James, who held the same role at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD) stated that 'the single biggest barrier is the internal structure of some universities. People move on so quickly and it doesn't seem to be systematic.'. Both participants also held other relevant roles, James on a national HE advisory board and Tristan on an elite institution Access Committee, suggesting they were more equipped to navigate university systems than most school-based participants.

This difficulty in navigating systems was not a one-way process. University-based participants also reported finding school systems challenging to navigate. For example, Carola, an Access Manager at Lambert University, stated that 'it's sometimes hard to find the right person to speak to first of all… actually it's always difficult to find the right person to speak to!' The lack of coherence within school structures around HE progression meant responsibility was commonly distributed amongst different staff members in what Day and colleagues describe as a 'dispersed partnership' model (2010, p. 21). Hilda, an Access Manager at Carey University, spoke of the difficulties in identifying the best person to speak to; 'they have all kinds of names these days; we try to liaise with the careers people, Careers Lead, Raising Aspirations Coordinator, Careers Tutor, whatever they're called in school but

first we have to figure that out!' Here, Hilda highlights the difficulties in identifying the emic language of each school context. Moreover, what she describes demonstrates how individual institutional policy enactment plays out. Nick echoed this difficulty in both finding and maintaining contacts within schools:

> 'You could have five different contacts for Pre-16. Depending on the setup, could be the Head of Year, could be the pastoral lead, could be the English teacher. Could be anybody. And they probably change every year. Just keeping track is a nightmare.'

The high number of school staff who play some part in the interactions between a school and any individual university, coupled with the fact that each school may have interactions with several universities, creates a complex web of interactions between individuals which make up the umbrella school-university relationship.

Challenges of bridging organisational calendars and customs was frequently cited as an ongoing barrier for both schools and universities. Ball et al suggest this is complicated in part because 'schools are also different places at different times of year or day or different parts of term,' (2012, p. 145), a reflection which holds true for universities, albeit their timetable is mismatched with schools. Several participants highlighted the frustrations of incompatible calendars, such as James, Deputy Headteacher at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), who described his frustration with the timelines of outreach programmes, who 'always want sign ups by the end of September [only a few weeks after pupils will have joined the sixth form].'

School-based participants were not alone in expressing frustration regarding the incompatibility of school-university calendars. Polly, Head of Access at a college at Woodward University, described the desire of schools to visit during times of the year that work in the school diary, without considering the university calendar, 'schools love to just come on any old trip to Woodward, partly because they don't understand […] so they really want to come at any time of the year. So in the dead of the first week of January or in July [outside of term time].' The differences across the two sectors seen in their organisational calendars undoubtedly offers challenges in partnership working. This appears to be compounded by the ongoing challenges in communicating and navigating these differences, and highlights the differing expectations for each institution.

Competition and Navigation

A further challenge to the relationship between any single school and university is the wider context in which they operate. University-based participants frequently spoke of the competition between institutions to work with schools, such as Nick, Access Manager at Lovell University, who described outreach work since he began his career, 'there's a lot of competition. Universities in the past three to four years have just kind of exploded with outreach opportunities, so it's just very intense.' This appeared to be felt even more acutely in Post-92 institutions such as Carey University where Hilda, an Access Manager, described her frustration that some schools, 'cherry pick, they're only interested in working with us on stuff other places won't do for them.' This made an interesting contrast to the perception of many school-based participants, who felt that they were also competing for university resources. Ernest, Head of Year at Dene School (LP), one of the largest schools in the region, spoke of the challenges of providing HE experiences to large cohorts of children; 'there just seems to be a limit of places and numbers available and in a big school, that's only a fraction of our kids in each year group. They don't take into account the size of the school when they say ten places per school.' This sense of competition was compounded when it came to more highly selective universities and as pupils progressed through the school.

Several university-based participants spoke of the challenges of avoiding a small number of schools 'capturing' the outreach programmes and monopolising the resources available by positioning themselves as 'good schools' to form relationships with. Polly, the Head of Access at a college at Woodward University shared her concerns that,

> 'Some schools are just in a better place in terms of where they are in relation to maybe Ofsted or their School Improvement Plan. So they know what they want. And those schools are amazing and we want to work with them but sometimes it can be too easy to focus on them and forget there are lots of other pupils out there in other schools, who aren't good at working with us and we have to remember them.'

I found Polly's description interesting; the explicit recognition that some schools were easier to work with and asked her if she could define what made these schools 'good':

> 'I think aggressive sounds negative but it isn't - a bit more aggressive in winning our attention, are schools like Linton Academy, for example. They're good, the teachers are empowered to ask for things, they know that this is going to be accommodated in the timetable if they bring students. So, I think the schools where there's a

Head[teacher] down approach to empowering the teachers to engage [are the effective ones].'

Much of what Polly describes sounds relatively simplistic; that teachers ask, that they understand the logistics and they have the support of SLT. However, this was not common across the schools in my sample. Moreover, the definition of 'good' schools, appeared closely correlated with schools where staff were able to better navigate university systems; they already knew what they wanted (and what would be seen as appropriate), and who to ask.

Competition can also be seen directly in the unwillingness of some schools to work collaboratively with each other when it comes to HE progression work. The quasi market (Ball et al., 1994; Boyles, 2005; Gorard, 2003), performance tables (Ball, 2017; Smith, 1995; Wilson, 2007) and parent choice (Gibbons et al., 2006) which surrounds modern state schooling has created an atmosphere of competition between local schools. Ball and colleagues describe these as 'situated contexts' (2012). This manifests itself in a reluctance for schools to cooperate across academy chains or between rival schools in local geographic areas, which may be competing for pupils at both Year 7 and for sixth form pupils in Year 12. Many of the Heads of Sixth Form I interviewed spoke of the role of recruitment in driving competition, rather than government accountability (explored in Chapter 7). This was particularly acute around highly selective admissions, whereby schools would use the number of pupils progressing to Oxbridge, Russell Group and 'highly selective' institutions as part of the recruitment material for Post-16. Recruitment flyers and prospectuses I collected from different schools included references to 'record numbers of pupils going on to Russell Group institutions' and '94% of pupils receive a place at their first-choice university.'

This focus on progression statistics in Post-16 marketing campaigns undermines school-university relationships by creating a culture of suspicion if an institution is seen to work with a particular school. Polly, Head of Access at a college at Woodward University, described schools who refused to attend events which were located in one 'hub' school for a local area as they were 'direct competitors', and instead she had to run two identical events to facilitate both schools attending. This was particularly problematic for the most highly selective institutions who were not located in the region, but who offered outreach programmes. Gillian, the Head of Sixth Form at Linton Academy (AP), acknowledged these challenges

when discussing university relationships: ‘it would be useful for us to have more joint events probably with [local school], but they won’t work with us because there’s lots of politics, going back decades.’ These relationships between schools are geographically specific and can be difficult for universities to identify and navigate. They create additional layers of complexity to multi-school-university working, although multiple school involvement would make more viable subject specific work where numbers are small within each school.

The challenges of navigating through different structures and the perception of schools and universities as ‘chalk and cheese’ (Handscomb et al., 2014, p. 20) has been discussed extensively throughout the literature, and it appears little changed from Glaser and colleagues’ description of ‘a tendency to live in two different professional communities, or ‘worlds’’ (1983, p. 1). Where Richmond argues that it is important for school-university partnerships to ‘understand the cultures of the various players and to foster a sense of belonging, regardless of the cultures involved’ (1996, p. 217), this is made more difficult by the lack of material resources afforded to relationship building. Moreover, in an environment whereby the power dynamics are complex and shifting, the responsibility for this navigation is unclear.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A significant challenge in school-university relationships is the disparity between the ‘often ambitious’ aims or desired outcomes (Handscomb et al., 2014, p. 23) and the complexities of understanding and measuring the impact of the work undertaken. Within progression to HE, this is set in the context of Destinations Measures (Department for Education, 2018b) for schools and APPs (Office for Students, 2018a) for universities, which set the terms of the desired outcomes from both regulators. The success of partnership working within progression to HE is defined narrowly by these accountability measures.

Several studies, such as Day et al’s report on partnerships, have identified a huge range of benefits for both schools and universities from their partnership work. For example, raising aspirations and achievement, external expertise, access to enrichment activities and learning resources, research collaborations, and professional and personal development (2010, p. X). However, in contrast to the performance measures set out by the DfE and OfS, Handscomb et al suggest that the gains associated with partnership working are frequently ‘loosely characterised in terms of broad benefits, rather than specific outcomes’ (2014, p.

23). This sentiment is echoed by Gorard and colleagues who find a lack of evidence of successful partnership working, and criticised the causal conclusions drawn by some researchers regarding partnership based interventions (2006). It could be argued that the benefits of partnership working are not measured within the current constraints of the success criteria set out by the regulator, however my research participants all framed their interactions within the scope of progression to HE, suggesting that their own measure of success was mapped against the regulatory requirements, rather than external or additional to them.

The lack of robust evaluation for progression to HE work has long been a criticism of the sector (Gorard, 2002, 2008), and there has been much dispute as to how such interventions should and can be measured between those advocating for (Hume, 2019), and those more sceptical of a 'what works' agenda within progression to HE (Crockford, 2019; Harrison & McCaig, 2017). However, the lack of sector wide robust evaluation has been recognised as an issue by regulators; firstly by OFFA (Nursaw, 2018), and more recently by the OfS, who sought to offer additional guidance on the 'standards of evidence' required for evaluation (2019b, 2019c), and commissioned research of the evaluation of interventions (Harrison et al., 2018). The need to provide evidence that progression to HE rates meet the expectations of the regulator has resulted in an increased focus, and shift in how access and participation is evaluated.

Such a shift has had a significant impact upon the ways in which universities run activities. The change to an outcomes-based framework, whereby all activities should be underpinned by a linear model, which would result in increased progression rates to HE from under-represented groups, received a mixed reaction from university-based participants. Many, such as Madge, the Head of Access at Rutherford University, endorsed the idea of ensuring they understood the impact of an intervention stating that, 'I'd much rather money was spent effectively and efficiently, and get good outcomes, and be evaluated properly. So I don't mind at all that the emphasis on evaluation and making sure that the investment that you put in has sensible outcomes.' However, the practicalities of evaluating outreach work posed significant difficulties for many university-based practitioners, several of whom shared doubts that the evaluation strategies they had in place were sufficient to understand the impact. Elsie, a Policy Manager at Lambert University, felt that much of their evaluation work was 'still in the beginning stages – it's not where we need it to be and it's a focus going

forward.' Mary, the Head of Access at Howell University, echoed Elsie's concerns suggesting that, 'sometimes it's really hard to come up with a way of evaluating that isn't really burdensome for schools and the pupils who take part.' This ongoing tension between providing evidence of effective interventions driven by the regulatory demands of the OfS, and avoiding additional bureaucratic burdens on schools, places universities in a difficult position.

Although regulatory focus on monitoring and evaluation is increasing, there appeared to be a lack of confidence from school-based participants that what was being offered by universities 'worked' – although this was often poorly defined - and many participants questioned the value of the activities undertaken, such as online mentoring, one-off introductions to specific subjects or visits to university campuses. In their definition of partnership working Coles and Smith define 'results orientated procedures' as one of three factors critical for the success of partnerships (1999), a suggestion which appears to strongly endorse a 'what works' approach. The lack of definition around the focus of HE progression activity has undoubtedly contributed to the confusion or lack of clear aims surrounding this work. Hargreaves observes that without sharp focus, 'partnership can easily become a soft, warm and cuddly process of unchallenging relationships between professionals to achieve some modest outcome' (2011, p. 6). Such 'modest outcomes' sit in contrast with the increasing demands from the OfS to demonstrate rapid change.

The notion that activities were still pilots (rather than permanent programmes) or unevaluated was seen by school-based participants as a source of frustration. They frequently articulated fatigue regarding the constantly evolving programmes, evaluation methods, and the ongoing call for schools to take part in pilot programmes. Constance, Head of Careers at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD), described her frustration that, 'we never really know if it works because everything changes all the time, with new programmes and new forms and new people. I don't know how they can possibly know if stuff is working.' James, Deputy Head of Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), described his experience over the last two decades of working with universities in this space as 'short term, blue sky projects', driven by a sense that 'this is what OFFA [or OfS] says we should be doing so let's think that we understand what that means and just launch something and throw some money at it.' This is exacerbated by the frequently changing definitions of success criteria as a result

of policy churn from the regulator, and from the mismatch between how universities and schools understand success as a result.

The recent upheaval caused by the new regulatory framework (Office for Students, 2018b) appeared to have compounded the sense of constant change in the way in which HE progression activities are run. James described the impact of the perpetual changes;

> 'if you're working in the office where it's going on, it probably all looks entirely logical, but if you're on the receiving end, you see a project and then either that just disappears or it entirely changes without changing its name, so you think you know what you're involved with until you suddenly find out that your target students or the ones that you think you're going to be channelling as target students are no longer the target.'

This sense of constantly shifting goalposts not only undermined the trust in the logistics of the programmes, but in how schools understood the work to be evaluated.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn upon the literature on school-university partnerships in order to consider partnership working within the sphere of progression to HE. It argues that Goodlad's definition of 'a deliberately designed, collaborative arrangement between different institutions, working together to advance self-interest and solve common problems' (1988, p. 13), and the subsequent characteristics associated with partnership working outlined in the literature: material resources; ongoingness; strategic fitness and relevance; ownership, power and control; and monitoring and evaluation (Greany et al., 2014; Handscomb et al., 2014; Klein & Dunlap, 1993), do not reflect the interactions between schools and universities within progression to HE. Instead of partnerships, I suggest that the term 'relationship' offers a more useful description of the interactions between schools and universities. Whereas partnership presumes a deliberate, positive and defined series of interactions, the term 'relationship' is more inclusive of a wide spectrum of interactions, which include the positive and productive, as well as the negative or problematic.

Throughout the chapter I consider the characteristics of partnership laid out in the literature. First, I look at the material resources required to create and sustain collaborative working and suggest that they are highly imbalanced between schools and universities, with the financial and staff resources concentrated in the latter institutions. These material resources,

I argue, represent a physical manifestation of how the power dynamics between schools and universities are understood within these relationships, whereby the aims of activities are set out and defined by universities. Schools are positioned as consumers, rather than partners, and this manifests itself in all other aspects of these relationships.

This chapter goes onto examine ways in which the differences in goals between schools and universities further complicates the balance of power between schools and universities. As discussed in Chapter 7, universities' goals, derived from the OfS' regulatory requirements, compel them to work with schools, but this is perceived by schools as a service provision rather than a partnership. Such a feeling is heightened due to the lack of shared aims, as schools are not regulated in the same way. Some schools do compete with each other for universities' resources, particularly where their situated contexts (Ball et al., 2012) such as their history, create intra-institutional tension and this provides further challenge for universities attempting to engage multiple schools. Schools-based participants find universities challenging to work with and even those with longstanding experience working in the sector report logistical challenges in doing so. These challenges are often compounded by the desirability of the institution (Chapter 10) and the age of the pupils involved (Chapter 9).

I then discuss the final theme of this chapter, which focuses on the ways in which school-university relationships are monitored and evaluated. I argue that a historic lack of monitoring and evaluation of progression to HE has undermined confidence in the relationship between schools and universities, and how the recent increase in attempting to measure impact has highlighted their differing aims. The additional material resources required from schools to undertake monitoring and evaluation has often been met with antipathy from schools who are resource strapped, and do not necessarily have confidence in value of activities undertaken.

The lack of school-university interactions which meet the criteria for partnership suggests that the criteria set out in the literature are not helpful in providing an analytical framework for discussing HE progression. I suggest instead of partnership, we acknowledge that school-university 'relationships' are piecemeal rather than 'deliberately designed' (Goodlad, 1988), and often fractured by the differing – sometimes contradictory – aims of the different sectors rather than 'solving common problems' (Ibid,.). They can be positive, but are not

inherently so, and frequently lack many or any of the characteristics traditionally associated with partnership working.

Chapter 9 – The Influence of Age and Key Stage

Introduction

School-university relationships are often conceived as a whole entity within the literature, where a partnership would encompass all of the work undertaken between a school and a university (Bernay et al., 2020; Goodlad, 1988; Miller, 2001). However, most school-university relationships in relation to progression to HE appear fragmented, with activities focused on smaller subsections of schools, such as KS and year groups. This chapter examines the ways in which schools and universities interact across these different ages and KSs of pupils. It argues that the contradictory regulatory priorities of schools - who are focused on progress and attainment, primarily at GCSE - and universities - who are incentivised by regulatory requirements as well as direct recruitment - drive different decisions for different age groups, and causes conflict which undermines school-university relationships.

This chapter uses the theoretical concepts of partnership working explored in Chapter 8 and examines these ideas in the context of different age groups. It draws upon the theory of 'possible selves' first articulated by psychologists Markus and Nurius (1986), and more recently applied to access to HE by Harrison (2018) – discussed in Chapter 4 - to argue that the perverse incentives for schools and universities to work only with specific ages and KSs undermines efforts to increase progression to HE. I argue that this occurs in two ways. First, universities are incentivised to delay the start of progression to HE activities until pupils are older, a decision which is contradictory to the literature, which suggests early engagement with these activities is optimal (Cheung, 2017; Chowdry et al., 2013; Croll & Attwood, 2013; MacBeath, 2012; Salvestrini & Robinson, 2020; Sutton Trust, 2008; UCAS, 2016). In contrast, secondary schools are required to run CIAG programmes from Year 8-13 (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 9). High stakes accountability measures for schools as pupils near GCSEs increases time pressure on the curriculum, and reduces flexibility for engagement with CIAG activities. In doing so, the window available for pupils to 'envisage and assess new or developing possible selves' (Harrison, 2018, p. 6) in relation to HE is both shortened and delayed, which may have implications for both their expectations and attainment during their schooling.

The second way in which these perverse incentives manifest is in the piecemeal and disjointed way in which CIAG is undertaken. Neither schools, nor universities, are

incentivised to offer continuous longitudinal CIAG. The lack of ongoing CIAG means pupils are not supported to 'elaborate' (Cross & Markus, 1991) on their possible selves, or to develop 'cognitive bridges' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) between their present and future selves in order to create a 'roadmap connecting the present to the future' (Oyserman et al., 2004, p. 131). This contrasts with the existing literature which suggests the benefit 'ongoing' activity to support progression to HE (Anders, 2017; Crawford et al., 2015; Cummings et al., 2012; Holman, 2014). Instead, pupils experience one-off or unstructured activities which are driven by the requirements of schools and universities to fulfil their regulatory priorities, rather than set out to maximise the benefit to pupils.

Throughout this chapter I focus primarily on the theory of possible selves however, I consider this in the context of my broader theoretical frame of policy sociology, which includes ideas of policy enactment, and in particular the importance of different contexts in how policy travels. I have expanded Ball and colleagues' work in this area (2012) by examining sub-school level contexts in relation to particular year groups and key stages. Additionally, in setting out the differences in how policy surrounding progression to HE is enacted over different age groups, I highlight the gap between how policy is published and how this is understood and practiced daily within schools and universities. Although this chapter takes a chronological approach, it does not seek to take a positivist view by implying that pupils are progressing through an education system which inevitably leads to progression to HE. Instead I seek to serve both levels of my thesis. I offer a critique of the system as it currently is, as well as setting out how a multifaceted approach to progression to HE could look.

This chapter first discusses the literature on both 'early' and 'ongoing' HE progression activity through the lens of 'possible selves'. Using this as a frame, it then works chronologically, looking first at primary schools before discussing secondary education - divided into KS3 (Years 7,8 and 9), KS4 (Years 10 and 11), and KS5 (Post-16) to understand the impact of how schools and universities deliver HE progression activity on pupils' sense of 'possible selves.' It takes a sub-school, systematic approach to understanding progression to HE from primary to KS5. In this way, it makes an original contribution to the knowledge base within this field, whilst highlighting areas for further research.

Possible Selves

The theory of possible selves suggests that that for each individual there are many 'possible future representations of the self' including 'the ideal selves that we would very much like to become […] the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming' (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 956). The use of a possible selves framing gives us the opportunity, although this is not guaranteed, to move away from the deficit narrative surrounding a 'raising aspirations' framing of progression to HE. As discussed in Chapter 4, possible selves are shaped by both structural influences; social, economic, cultural and geographic, as well as individual agency. Whilst I set out the benefits of a possible selves framing in Chapter 4, I also heed Lumb's warning that such a framing still risks positioning young people as in deficit (2018), and use it as Henderson suggests, 'to identify where there are inequalities of available resources, and the analysis therefore focuses on systemic inequalities, rather than on individual lack' (2018, p. 32).

Cross and Markus highlight that individuals can 'define and redefine their significant possible selves' (1991, p. 233), a concept Harrison describes as in 'flux' (2018, p. 209). This means that how a young person envisages their future is open to constant influence and change throughout their day-to-day experiences. Harrison uses two dimensions of 'desirability' and 'probability', arguing that self-concept lies at the intersection of these two components (Ibid,.). Within the broader framework of possible selves - all the conceivable selves an individual could become - there are overlapping subcategories. The first of these, desirability, is the notion of 'like-to-be selves'; those which are more desirable to an individual (as well as 'like-to-avoid selves'). The second subcategory can be seen on a spectrum, from highly improbably to highly probable. The intersection of these categories gives rise to 'probable selves'. Although many selves are 'possible', some are more desirable and probable than others. This is demonstrated visually in Figure 1 in Chapter 4 (p. 95).

Possible Selves and Early Activity

Although there is broad consensus in the literature that 'early intervention' is desirable, the term itself has been widely used within progression to HE to describe activity targeted at all age groups from Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Year 11, and is sometimes associated with all activity that is not 'direct recruitment' of Post-16 pupils. There is little consensus on what age 'early intervention' might refer to, and suggestions vary from

primary (Action on Access, 2009; Blanden & Machin, 2007; Cheung, 2017; MacBeath, 2012), to early secondary (Cheung, 2017; UCAS, 2016, p. 33, 2016), and 'throughout secondary school' (Crawford et al., 2015, p. 26), with 'periods of transition' frequently highlighted as important windows for intervention (Moore et al., 2013). In this thesis, I do not set out to define early intervention, but reflect the emic use of the definition in different institutions and sectors, highlighting the discrepancies.

A lack of research into, or evaluation of, activities targeted at younger pupils compounds this issue, with much of the current literature suggesting that not enough is known about the long term impact of early interventions, and highlighting the difficulties of evaluation for programmes where the desired outcome may not be realised for a decade (Bellaera, 2019; Harrison et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2013). Gorard mounts a significant critique of the evidence base as it stands, recommending that, 'the evidence in most areas is generally too immature at present to estimate the effect sizes or the costs of any type of intervention' (2012, p. 9). The breadth of use of the term 'early intervention' also obscures a more nuanced understanding of school-university relationships, which span in differing ways and to differing extents, the full range of age groups and KSs.

The use of a possible selves lens provides a more compelling argument that the work currently undertaken appears to be occurring too late to be successful, when measured by attainment at GCSE and progression to HE. Interventions to both 'widen the initial palette of possible selves' (Harrison, 2018, p. 10) to include those selves which progress to HE and, 'engaging with the young person's beliefs about their ability to exercise control over their future and their ability to succeed at tasks that are important to them' (Ibid,. p. 13), can be introduced early in pupils' schooling experience, and built upon as pupils progress through education. Such an approach would aim to develop academically successful possible selves which contribute to what Cunha and colleagues term 'the multiplier effect', that 'early investment facilitates the productivity of later investment' (2006, p. 698).

Possible Selves and Ongoing Activity

As well as the desire for earlier activity to develop HE-progressing 'possible selves', there is increasing literature on what Moore and colleagues term 'consistent and sustained interventions,' (2013), in contrast to the singular activities which have historically characterised HE progression work. This is reflected in the drive for more coherent

frameworks of progression within both school and university policy surrounding CIAG (Department for Education, 2018a), and HE progression (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014; Office for Students, 2019), which outline the concept of coherent, stable and sustained programmes, designed to map the experience of pupils over multiple years. The inception of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT)[33] as a national log of activities, and the far greater focus from the OfS on evaluation within access and participation, has also led to further discussion on when and how longitudinal interventions should be delivered.

Possible selves conceptualises ongoing activity as 'elaboration', suggesting that the conceptions of the self which have been explored in greater detail, over a period of time, assert more influence than those which are less developed (Cross & Markus, 1991). The correlation between stronger imaginings of particular future selves and academic attainment (Hock et al., 2003; Oyserman et al., 2004, 2011) suggests that when attempting to increase progression to HE these possible selves need reinforcing over time – rather than merely introduced as a single event - in order to ensure that within the 'flux' of possible selves, HE is retained as both a desirable and probable option. Harrison and colleagues (2018) suggest that this elaboration includes both metacognitive and self-efficacy based interventions (Bellaera, 2020; Watkins, 2010), as well as what could be seen as more traditional CIAG. Oyserman et al go further, suggesting that young people should be active in elaborating their possible selves, rather than passive recipients of predesigned non-individualised roadmaps (2002). Moreover, Harrison suggests that whilst traditional HE progression activities such as campus visits, summer schools and careers fairs have a place within the possible selves framework, they only form 'part of the process of elaboration and reinforcement' and are 'unlikely to be transformational for disadvantaged young people without the wider context and individualised strategies provided by the earlier interventions' (2018, p. 14). This echoes Cunha and colleagues caveat that 'early investments are not productive if they are not followed up by later investments' (2006, p. 698).

Possible Selves in Policy

Over the last decade policy recommendations have included both early and cumulative intervention, such as the 2014 National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher

[33] HEAT Tracker: www.heat.ac.uk (Accessed 04/04/2022)

Education, which stated that ‘institutions should nurture early and sustained outreach activity’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p. 94). However, much of the recent HE progression policy remains framed by ‘raising aspirations’ rather than attainment, and the theory of possible selves remains firmly outside of the mainstream discourse. Despite the academic critique of raising aspirations (as discussed in Chapter 4), many of the recently approved APPs, which span activities taking place between 2020-2025, foreground efforts to ‘raise aspirations’ rather than attainment. The recent publication of the OfS’ Phase 2 guidance for Uni Connect includes a requirement for each consortium to devise progression frameworks that provide ‘a progressive, sustained programme of activity and thorough engagement over time’ (2019, p. 9), although the viability of Uni Connect in the long term remains subject to government funding. The ongoing policy churn surrounding progression to HE has reinforced the desire in many institutions to focus on short-term activities which can demonstrate immediate impact. It was also apparent that this constant change had led to a widening between what Ball describes as ‘first order effects’ - changes in practice or structure - and ‘second order effects’ - the impact of these changes on existing problems or inequalities (2006, p. 51). Practitioners in HE have begun to view changes in policy as described by Daisy, an Access Manager at Barras University, as ‘yet another new idea.’

With reference to schools, the introduction of the Gatsby Benchmarks into the new statutory guidance for CIAG in 2018 has stated a ‘stable programme of careers’ is the first step towards meeting the requirements set out (Department for Education 2018a). However, much of the recent policy is framed in terms of ‘raising aspirations’, including the most recent careers guidance which suggests that a, ‘school careers programme should raise the aspirations of all pupils’ (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 15), as well as identifying specific groups who should be specifically targeted for raising aspirations work, such as those with SEND and pupils attending Alternative Provision. Much of the guidance requires schools to deliver programmes of information to pupils, rather than the individualised roadmaps suggested by Oyserman and colleagues (2002), although Benchmark 3 does suggest that ‘opportunities for advice and support need to be tailored to the needs of each student’ (Department for Education, 2018b, p. 9). The requirement for schools to have met the Gatsby Benchmarks by the end of 2020 has the potential to exert some change over a longitudinal approach to CIAG; however, it was too early to see the manifestations of this at the time of this study. The limitations of CIAG policy are explored further in Chapter 7.

The prevalence of Destinations Measures as a way of measuring the success of CIAG in schools has incentivised the targeting of particular age groups, and intensified the datafication of progression to HE (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). Most obviously, this can be seen in the lack of longer term linked reporting between those secondary schools without any Post-16 provision (where all pupils leave after Year 11), or for pupils who do not attend the Post-16 provision at their secondary. Destinations data tracks these pupils for the first two terms of their pathway after leaving the school, after which point the pupil is counted as having successfully transitioned. This short-term measure means that, where a pupil leaves their secondary school after GCSE, accountability with regard to their Post-18 progression is focused entirely on their Post-16 provider. Through destinations data, schools are incentivised only to focus on the immediate transition, rather than widening the 'palette' and elaborating on longer term possible selves with pupils. Collecting data in this way fails to reflect the influence of secondary schooling on the progression pathways which lead to appropriate Post-16 pathways for Post-18 destinations, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Primary – EFYS, KS1 and KS2 (EYFS -Year 6)

Despite the growing evidence that work surrounding progression to HE should begin early, only a small fraction of progression to HE activity has historically taken place in primary schools (Sutton Trust, 2008, p. 48). Many universities cite the difficulties of evaluating early intervention as a key barrier to increasing activities in primary schools, including the difficulties associated with gathering data from younger pupils (Harrison et al., 2018), as well as the long term nature of any such intervention (Cheung, 2017), which runs contrary to the desire to demonstrate more immediate impact in the sector. Logistically, working with primary schools presents challenges to universities, as the small size and large number of primary schools (relative to secondary) prevents universities from running larger scale activities, increasing the costs of interventions (Ibid,.)

Recent guidance from the OfS on university APPs promotes a 'whole lifecycle approach to access and participation' being adopted, one 'that starts with primary school outreach, through to progression into employment and further study' (2018b, p. 24). Although this mandate explicitly includes primary schools, the existing poor quality of evaluation within the sector (Gorard et al., 2006; Harrison et al., 2018) - particularly acute in so called early intervention - means the increased regulatory focus on working with primary school pupils

currently runs contrary to the focus on achieving demonstrable impact (Office for Students, 2018a). During my documentary analysis there appeared to be limited evidence of primary provision within institutional APPs. Of the five universities in the region, three websites included specific primary activities which schools could book onto, one asked primary teachers to make contact with them to discuss 'how they could work together' but did not provide any detail as to what this could look like, and a final website did not make any reference to primary schools. The OfS' centrally funded programme, Uni Connect, explicitly excludes primary provision.

Throughout my interviews, many university-based participants referred to North East Raising Aspirations Partnership (NERAP) as the commonly used and desirable mode of delivery for activities for primary schools in the region. NERAP describes itself as a 'collaboration of the five universities in the North East of England', which focuses on 'outreach activity where added value can be achieved collaboratively' (2021). Its work appeared to focus on two areas. The first was targeted groups which comprised small pupil numbers across the region, for example, care experienced students. The second was younger pupils, particularly primary and KS3 pupils, where direct recruitment of pupils to a particular institution was still a significant distance away.

University-based participants spoke in positive terms about NERAP. It was universally viewed as a capacity increasing organisation, whereby individual institutions who did not have the ability to meet the needs of some schools could outsource the requests. Although NERAP's remit included working with pupils from primary to KS5, university-based participants spoke about it exclusively for outsourcing requests from schools for younger pupils. Robyn, the Head of Access at Barras University, which appeared to have the most comprehensive institutional approach to primary provision suggested:

> 'Where the partnership [NERAP] comes into its own is for any pre-sixteen events. We have what we call joint reps, so we have student ambassadors at each of the five universities that are trained to represent all five of them […]. So yes, it might not be ideal because we'd prefer a member of our team to be there, but we try and do what we can to sort of fit what the schools are asking from us.'

Despite her positivity regarding NERAP's work, Robyn clearly preferred to send a member of her team directly and sought NERAP's support only when her team was unable to meet the demand. Where demand exceeded capacity, events with younger pupils were passed

over to NERAP, and those with older pupils who were close to making university applications were retained by the individual institutions.

Participants at other institutions across the region echoed Robyn's praise of NERAP, such as Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University, who termed it a 'brilliant partnership'. University-based participants all agreed that NERAP 'saved a lot of time' for individual institutions, which freed up time to deliver what Carola, an Access Manager at Lambert University, termed 'more focused sessions.' When I asked what she meant by 'more focused', Carola defined this as 'work with older pupils who are closer to making an application to us.' Robyn perceived NERAP to deliver 'more general aspiration and attainment raising', in contrast to information giving regarding a specific university. There appeared to be a clear hierarchy with all university-based participants that older pupils were to be prioritised, and sessions for younger pupils outsourced if necessary to ensure capacity for this. I asked participants whether there were other reasons, such as the expertise of NERAP, which drove the decision to hand over requests for sessions with younger pupils. None of the participants saw this as a significant factor in their decision to prioritise older pupils. Nick's response encapsulated the consensus that, 'we could deliver the sessions to the primary kids and Pre-16 but we just don't have the staff time – we need to focus that on older pupils.'

The demand from primary schools appeared to significantly outstrip the capacity of university outreach teams. Robyn described the desire of primary schools to work with her team suggesting that, 'with primary we have significantly more demand than we can deal with'. This was in part a consequence of the higher numbers of primary schools in relation to secondaries (Cheung, 2017), but also reflected the significantly lower budgets for Pre-16 work in all the institutional APPs in the region. The budget for Pre-16 work varied from 16% to 46% of the size of the Post-16 budget, despite covering activity spanning KS1-KS4.[34] Moreover, despite demand, the capacity for working with younger pupils appeared to be shrinking rather than growing. Mary, the Head of Access at Howell University, described a shift in her institution's focus away from younger pupils, which she saw as aligning further with the access and participation agenda of the OfS. This was clear from her description of one of the teams within the university which:

[34] Figures calculated using figures from APPs from the five NE universities spanning the period 2019-20 to 2024-2025

> ‘Work in the majority, or have done up until this year with younger student groups. But they've come on board with the access and widening participation agenda so […] they are doing much more targeted work and they're doing more work with secondary schools.’

It is notable that Mary articulated this shift away from working with younger groups as aligning further with the access agenda, in contrast to the OfS’ promotion of primary school as the beginning of the ‘whole lifecycle approach’ suggested in its guidance (2018b). Such a response does not reflect the ‘imagining and reimagining’ of possible selves which Harrison and colleagues argues should begin as early as possible if the attainment gap is to be closed (2018).

Interviewing primary-based school participants was out of the scope of this research (discussed further in Chapter 6), although their absence within my data limits the explanatory power of this research in relation to the experiences and motivations of primary school staff. However, one of the secondary schools within my research, Linton Academy (AP), had worked with primary schools as part of a longitudinal programme of HE progression work that they had created. Mary-Lou, the University Progression Coordinator at Linton Academy, described how the programme worked;

> ‘It’s introducing them to the idea that universities are a thing and when they come and do the Star Programme here, they’re doing things like linguistics or sociology that they will never have done before and they don’t know if they’ll like it or not but they’re trying something new and learning something.’

Mary-Lou’s positioning of the programme as ‘introducing universities’ and ‘trying something new’ strongly reflects the theory of possible selves, and in particular Harrison’s first intervention point to ‘expand the pool of possible selves available that have a relationship to higher education’ (2018, p. 13). Mary-Lou was clear, however, that this ran contrary to the wider pressure the school was under;

> ‘We have spent school money on the primary outreach, we have worked with primary schools that are not our feeder schools, so really it’s got no value to us whatsoever, but [the Headteacher] will, to an extent, let us try it because he does believe in the bigger picture, and he does believe it’s going to go somewhere.’

This prioritisation of working with younger pupils rather than confining activities to those who met accountability measures was unusual within my research. Linton Academy was the only school in the study working with primary schools with the explicit aim to support access to

HE, although James, Deputy Head at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), also spoke of the need to engage primary pupils.

Whilst James was aware of the limitations for universities in working with primary schools, such as his concern that 'the universities couldn't go to all the primary schools – there are too many of them', he advocated for universities playing a larger role in the transition between primary and secondary education. This focus is supported by the literature, which suggests transitions between different schools and KSs as a time when young people's attitudes around HE are likely to be in flux, and therefore more open to change (Moore et al., 2013; Sutton Trust, 2008). James explained his understanding of the importance of parents in terms of what Harrison describes as 'transmitting sociocultural expectations', which expand or limit possible selves (2018). James suggested that parental engagement was easier to achieve in primary schools;

> 'If you work with primary schools, there's a pretty good chance parents will be there because that's the culture and you can walk to the primary school to collect your children usually. So parents, there is a school gate thing, and so parents will go in to stuff. Now they might not go into an event that's badged purely as "come and hear from a top university" because they might not think that's for their kids, or they might think it is for their kid but it's so far down the line that they won't actually bother going. But as part of a transition process [to secondary school] thing, that might work.'

James' understanding that parental engagement formed an important part of work to increase progression to HE is reflected in the literature, where parental aspirations and expectations had a significant influence on their child's perceptions (Action on Access, 2009; Allen & Prendergast, 2009; Archer et al., 2014). This desire to involve parents within outreach, engaging them from when their children are relatively young, and seeking to convince them of the benefits of HE, exemplifies how the discourse of progression to HE seeks to change not only pupils, but their families, as part of interventions.

Beginning HE progression activities in primary school in order to increase progression to HE is aligned with the notion of developing as broad a palette of possible selves as possible for all pupils (Harrison, 2018). Research into possible selves (Oyserman et al., 2002, 2006) suggests that doing so could positively impact upon attainment, which Crawford and colleagues suggest is the main barrier to HE progression (2015), and which becomes

apparent from primary age (discussed in Chapter 3) (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Beginning outreach in primary schools is explicitly included in the OfS' guidance (2018b, p. 24), however the sense that this conflicts with the drive from the regulator to quantify the impact of access and participation work undermines this directive. In addition, all HE progression work is undertaken by universities in a wider environment of concern over recruitment, inherent within a marketised HE system. Primary school pupils who are at least six years away from applying to university are less appealing than older pupils due to make applications more imminently. Whilst no university-based participants decried the notion of working with primary pupils, the frequent outsourcing to NERAP, and the hierarchy of capacity that seemed ubiquitous across institutions, made clear that primary pupils were not a priority.

Secondary – KS3 (Year 7, 8 and 9)

Although division between primary and secondary schools is seen as a significant transition point within schools, HE progression activity does not delineate in the same way, with much of the distinction between Pre-16 and Post-16. The structure of this chapter retains a 'school centric' format, whilst acknowledging the similarities which characterise primary work and work with KS3 pupils.

Logistically, the consolidating of pupils in secondary schools means pupils from KS3 onwards are (across most of England) henceforth grouped into larger, more easily accessible numbers. However, in contrast to the literature, practitioners in both schools and universities often overlook KS3 as being too far away from the decision-making point of Post-16 to warrant targeted work. Geoff, the Head of Sixth Form at Wilson School (HPD), shared that there 'was nothing in Year 7-9 about universities', a finding echoed by several other school-based participants. Failing to introduce information regarding HE progression by the end of KS3 appears to miss the opportunity to 'expand the pool of possible selves that have a relationship with higher education' (Harrison et al., 2018, p. 13). Anders finds that pupils who consider themselves unlikely to progress to university at age 14 rarely say they are likely to do so at age 16 (2017). He suggests that 'while it's never too late to decide against making an application to university, it can get too late for individuals to start thinking that they will' (Ibid,. p. 17). This means that, far from this period being too far away from the point of decision making, pupils in KS3 are in the crux of this choice. Primary and KS3 mark the period where the initial palette of 'possible selves' can be expanded to include being a

university student as both a more probable (likely) and desirable (something they would like to happen) self (Harrison, 2018) but this does not appear to be reflected in the targeting of activities.

Several school-based participants spoke of their aim to move from focusing all HE progression activities on KS4 and KS5 to include younger year groups. This is perhaps a result of the Gatsby Benchmarks providing a clearer mandate for CIAG provision from Year 8 onwards, which some participants spoke about in more general terms. Amy, the Head of Careers at Dene School (LP), shared her aim to broaden out HE progression activities to engage pupils:

> 'Especially younger down the school, before they've started making decisions and are really sure what they want. I would like them to have exposure and see it's [university] something for everyone. Might not mean you want to do it, but it's an option for you.'

This was echoed to differing extents by other school-based participants such as Geoff, Head of Sixth Form at Wilson School (HPD), who said such activity was 'nonexistent' in KS3 currently, but that there were plans to begin to include these. Both Geoff and Amy spoke of 'expanding horizons' and 'exposure to new ideas', strongly echoing 'widening the palette' of possible selves.

There was no clear correlation between the progression rates at particular schools and the embedding of progression to HE in KS3. For example, Stewart College (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), sent high numbers of pupils to HE but both Charles and Maria, who worked as Head and Deputy Head of Sixth Form at the school, were clear that HE progression activities only began at KS5. However, Stewart College had a selective sixth form, and due to the limitations of the destinations data, as discussed in Chapter 6, there is no way of knowing the progression rates of pupils who attended Stewart College for Year 7-11, but progressed to Post-16 at another institution. Given the academically selective nature of Stewart College's sixth form, the progression rates of the pupils in KS5 at the school are not representative of the school's intake. This gap in the data makes it impossible for the school to identify whether the lack of activities before KS5 are influencing pupils' progression rates.

Very few university-based participants talked about KS3 pupils specifically, instead focusing upon a more binary division of Pre-16 and Post-16. Pre-16 encompassed all activities from

KS3 and KS4.[35] Some universities, such as Lovell University and Barras University, set their programmes of activity online, or in printed booklets, which included targeted age groups, alongside other criteria for identifying appropriate sessions, such as the specific Gatsby Benchmarks the activities met. Within this, year groups were mostly bracketed broadly, e.g. Year 7-9 or 7-11, rather than individual year groups. Neither Howell University nor Carey University had any specific activities for KS3 pupils, but suggested that schools contact them. This exacerbated the sense that universities were difficult to navigate and favoured those schools who had greater experience and capacity to do so, as described in Chapter 8. Only Lambert University appeared to have sessions deliberately designed for KS3 and set out chronologically, suggesting that these activities should be delivered in an ongoing manner, rather than as standalone events. Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University, suggested that schools could 'pick whichever activities work for them' from the 'menu of options' the university offered. Whilst this offers a high degree of flexibility to schools, it does not frame the activities offered as ongoing or cumulative, but reinforces the sense that individual events at any point are of comparative value. This is at odds with the benefit of 'ongoing' progression to HE activity suggested in the literature (Moore et al., 2013) and in policy (Department for Education, 2018b; Office for Students, 2018b).

School-based participants consistently reported that they wanted subject-specific activities run by academic members of staff at all age groups. Felix, the Deputy Head of Sixth Form at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), expressed frustration at the generic sessions offered by universities, suggesting:

> 'The key I think to any successful relationship is allowing us access to academics, and academics that have a genuine interest in helping transitions; helping kids come to their university. So you know, the very best people to sell a university are academics that can talk to young people.'

Tristan, the Deputy Head at Linton Academy (AP), equated the lack of academic staff involvement in lower years with how universities valued these interventions when he commented, 'there rarely seems to be a problem with subject specialists coming in for Sixth Form, but when it comes to asking them to deliver a Physics session to Year 9…' Other school-based participants felt that subject based sessions would allow schools to integrate such activities more meaningfully into the curriculum, and that these would pose fewer

[35] Although Pre-16 could also include activities in primary schools, this was almost always identified separately by universities.

logistical barriers as pupils wouldn't need to be 'taken off timetable' to facilitate sessions. This strongly echoed my findings in Chapter 8, suggesting that the desire for subject-based sessions was driven by both resource and pedagogical needs. This contrast between the amount of exposure to academics, and the relative value and prestige associated, was underpinned by not only a belief amongst school staff that subject-specific, academic-led sessions were more meaningful for pupils, but also that the reason universities were not offering these was due to younger age pupils not being prioritised for these resources.

Work with KS3 on progression to HE appeared to be characterised by a lack of urgency or interest from both schools and universities. Despite having less pressure on their curriculum time than in older year groups, schools did not appear to consider KS3 a priority for HE progression activities, although some school-based participants planned to introduce this. Universities understood the need to, as Mary put it, 'build the pipeline', but with limited resources and a drive to demonstrate impact were more interested in working with older pupils, closer to making the transition into HE.

Secondary – Key Stage 4 (Year 10 and 11)

KS4 represented a significant shift in the attitude of both school and university participants regarding progression to HE activity. Entry into Year 10, which marks the beginning of GCSEs for most pupils, corresponded with a greater sense of immediacy concerning the upcoming transition to Post-16 pathways at the end of Year 11. Although many school-based staff reported that HE progression activities began in KS4, this corresponded with a feeling of increasing pressure on the school timetable as high stakes external exams neared. CIAG was described as competing with curriculum subjects for additional time. Many school-based participants spoke of the tension between being aware of the need for CIAG for pupils during this period, whilst acknowledging that GCSE attainment was important both for the individual pupil, and the school's performance in league tables (discussed further in Chapter 7).

Although this was often the first formal exposure pupils would have to HE, what was described by school-based participants usually fell into what Harrison defines as the fourth and final of his suggested intervention points (2018), where pupils are given more specific HE information on particular institutions, courses and processes. Such activities, Harrison suggests 'are unlikely to be transformational for disadvantaged young people without the

wider context and individualised strategies provided by the earlier interventions' (Ibid,. p. 14). This undermines the notion that such outreach activities are designed to increase progression to HE by convincing pupils who were not already considering this pathway to do so. Instead, they risk reinforcing the divide, whereby pupils whose possible selves include progression to HE engage with the session, and those for whom it appears irrelevant do not.

Tension between prioritising time within the timetable for the GCSE curriculum and running HE progression activities was common amongst school-based participants. This was compounded by a feeling that schools did not benefit from these activities, which came at the cost of curriculum time which could be dedicated to improving attainment. The theory of possible selves suggests that this should not be the case. Outreach activity should be designed to support attainment raising by expanding the selves which are seen to be desirable, and increasing the self-efficacy of pupils to achieve academically in order to ensure these selves remain 'probable'. However, the late introduction of idea of HE, and the information-giving nature of activity targeted at KS4 pupils, does not successfully meet these aims. As a result, many school-based participants felt that outreach activities at this stage were not effective. Tristan, the Deputy Headteacher at Linton Academy (AP), expressed a desire for universities to fund schools to work on aims that benefited attainment raising directly, suggesting that, 'if a university funded something like [attainment raising in maths and English], it would have demonstrable, definable effect on school achievement in a way that coming in and doing some random untested event just isn't.' This comment echoes the discussion in Chapter 8, regarding the separate success criteria for HE progression activities and the lack of trust between schools and universities.

Tristan saw university and school aims as separate, rather than HE progression activities contributing to school attainment goals. His suggestion instead focused on recalibrating the aims of programmes funded by universities to reflect school-centric concerns and performance measures. In this sense, Tristan was not arguing for a reduction in these measures but had started to 'self-govern' his own surveillance (Ball, 2003; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). Tristan encapsulated why activities perceived not to contribute to raising attainment were seen so negatively by schools:

> 'There's this vast tranche of schools in the NE that cannot get their heads above water, they cannot recruit good people, they cannot focus on anything other than trying to get their maths results up. And if you're coming into that as a university

saying “oh look, we’re trying to get people to go to university”, unless you can say concretely, “I have a programme to get you better GCSEs, and by the way it might also help them to get into university”, then they’re just going to tell you where to go.’

Tristan’s description highlights the unintended conflict between school and university policy, despite both claiming to align on raising attainment in schools. High stakes attainment-based accountability measures focus schools on GCSE results, and participants did not perceive progression to HE activities to support this aim.

Some school-based participants, mainly those who occupied Heads of Sixth Form, roles suggested that they used activities surrounding progression to HE as a recruitment tool to incentivise Year 11 pupils to progress to the school’s Sixth Form. Geoff, the Head of Sixth Form at Wilson School (HPD), discussed the Unifrog online CIAG tool which was used by several of the schools in the study. Unifrog describes itself as a ‘destinations platform’ which helps students compare opportunities and then apply to them.[36] Geoff described how he used Unifrog with KS4 pupils to ‘identify students in Year 10 who are potential sixth formers’, suggesting that whilst pupils were encouraged to engage with Unifrog as a way of elaborating their possible selves, this data was used by the sixth form team as a sorting mechanism for pupils who identified HE as their aim. Here it seemed that activities around progression to HE was performative and being subjected to aims of a neoliberal quasi market of Post-16 recruitment. Grizel, the Head of Sixth Form at Culver Academy (HP, HPHS), echoed Geoff’s focus on KS4 HE progression activity as a marketing tool for her Sixth Form. Although Grizel was clear that KS4 CIAG was not within her official remit, she wanted to ‘oversee what I can of Year 11 CIAG to market us [the Sixth Form] and to help us pick up the students that we need and get them coming here.’ Framing CIAG and particularly progression to HE activity as a marketing tool adds an additional layer of complexity to what is delivered, when, and to whom.

Several Heads of Sixth Form told me that although they did not have an official remit outside of KS5, all HE progression activity was deemed to be their responsibility. Grizel shared the difficulties that, ‘the awareness we are trying to give to Year 11 should ideally happen lower down the school […]. I guess it would be expected of me, but there’s a limit in my job and my teaching commitment to what I can do.’ She described feeling that she was the sole driver of HE progression within the school, but despite acknowledging that such work should

[36] Unifrog website: https://www.unifrog.org/ (Accessed 03042022).

start before KS5, her limited time and resources prevented her from running these activities. The exception to this was anything related to recruitment for the Sixth Form, which was deemed a priority. This was driven by the need to, as Grizel termed it, 'get the numbers' in order to make the sixth form financially viable for the school. The need to recruit a minimum number of students appeared to distort the ways in which CIAG was delivered. Opportunities to elaborate on possible selves were focused upon a self which included progressing to the school sixth form, and this was reinforced by the interactions with adults in positions of influence such as Grizel and Geoff (Hardgrove et al., 2015).

Although still classed as 'Pre-16', some university-based participants spoke of an increased focus on Year 10 and 11 pupils, as there was a shorter 'lag time' between activities undertaken, and demonstrable impact of successful (or not) transition to HE. Although most Pre-16 work was described as 'general', Nick, an Access Manager at Lovell University, spoke of the shift between KS3 and KS4: 'Year 10, 11, 12, we want them to really pick up on the brand and start becoming aware of what the university has to offer for them rather than higher education in general.' Daisy, an Access Manager from Barras University, spoke of her desire to ensure that pupils had 'brand awareness' of Barras University through their work at Pre-16, describing the cumulative effect they aspired to:

> 'We want students to think, "I remember when Barras came, when I was in Year 8, and they told us about thinking about GCSEs, and then they came in again at Year 10 and told us about the A-Levels, and then they came in again at Year 12 and told us what we could do with the A-Levels that we were choosing." It's kind of marrying those things together, that Pre-16 work turns into Post-16 recruitment but they have that memory of us'.

Daisy's framing of Pre-16 work as useful for laying the ground work for direct recruitment aligns early and ongoing progression activities with Post-16 recruitment, in a way that was not expressed by other university-based participants. Nick and Daisy's framing of their progression work in the context of brand building and marketisation also draws into question the ethical foundations of HE progression programmes. Although universities have attempted in recent years to create a superficial division between their 'access and participation' and 'direct recruitment' work, Nick and Daisy's responses suggest that this separation is only skin deep. It also echoes the concerns of school-based participants in the previous chapter that attempts to work with schools were based upon primarily business concerns.

The increasing pressure on attainment at GCSE meant that several university-based participants described Year 11 pupils as being 'off limits', a description that school-based participants agreed with. There was very limited scope for Year 11 to take part in any progression to HE activities, which meant KS4 was in reality focused on Year 10. Some universities attempted to align their work with school priorities, such as by offering sessions on revision techniques for pupils in advance of GCSEs. However, Carola, an Access Manager at Lambert University, felt this was of limited use as, 'we can never really tailor it to be detailed enough for the schools, I don't think, and we can't offer subject-specific sessions at this stage so it's all wide-ranging skills.' Some school-based participants also pushed back against what they felt was an encroachment by universities into the core purpose of the school. For example, James, the Deputy Head at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), who had turned down these revision sessions when offered, stated that 'I've been running this sort of thing for years and frankly, I think I do a much better job as someone who knows the pupils, knows what they've covered and knows where they're at.' James felt these types of sessions when delivered by universities were 'well-intentioned but […] of limited value', suggesting they were more about 'keeping their foot in the door', than offering anything valuable to pupils. Although continuous outreach is seen as a positive concept within the literature, this is complicated on the ground both by the different and competing pressures regarding what should be delivered and by whom, which appears particularly acute at Year 11, where the performativity demands of high stakes testing is seen most clearly.

Post-16 – Key Stage 5 (Years 12 and 13)

Post-16 pupils presented the most straightforward relationships between schools and universities. This was partly explained by the fact that the vast majority of pupils within school Sixth Forms progress onto HE (Department for Education, 2019). Both school and university-based participants were comfortable in describing their interactions as explicit direct recruitment of pupils to individual institutions. Heads of Sixth Form were clear in articulating themselves as consumers of university products, depending on what they understood to be the needs of their pupils. University-based participants also spoke of recruitment, rather than widening participation or outreach activities for Post-16. Daisy, Access Manager at Barras University, was clear that, 'Post-16 will be to do with recruitment and income, and that is purely what that will be.' Both university and school-based

participants were clear that, as the majority of lower attaining pupils do not progress onto school sixth forms, outreach work was focused on the selectivity of the HEI a pupil would attend, rather than whether students would apply for HE at all. Pupils by this stage are highly likely to be those who have elaborated their probable and desirable selves to include HE, and therefore interactions between schools and universities at this stage were a sorting and recruitment tool.

At Post-16, many of the barriers experienced in earlier KSs no longer posed a problem. Here, school and university accountability measures align to a far greater extent than in younger year groups. Post-16 pupils were prioritised for HE progression activities by both schools and universities and, as such, the barriers around material resources were far lessened. In schools, accountability measures for Post-18 include progression to HE, and this is broken down into further sub groups such as Russell Group and Oxbridge, as discussed in Chapter 3. For universities, the dual incentive of direct recruitment to the specific institution, and the ability to demonstrate more immediate impact - as measured by progression to HE - of interventions in Post-16 makes such work more appealing. This can be seen in the material resources, including financial incentives and funding, and the amount and type of staff time dedicated to these activities. This was particularly clear in the way in which academic staff were deployed to Post-16 activities. Hilda, an Access Manager at Carey University, outlined that, ‘for our academics, their priority is to work with Post-16 for direct recruitment. So when we get requests in from schools for subject-specific stuff [for Pre-16], we've got student ambassadors we can ask to deliver it, but we can’t use our academics’ time for that.’ Robyn, the Head of Access at Barras University, echoed this suggesting that, ‘due to capacity we have very few interventions that are subject-specific for Pre-16 […] we don’t have enough academics’ time to be able to offer anything specific before Post-16.’ None of the universities regularly used academic staff to deliver sessions for pupils before Year 12. Instead, as discussed in Chapter 8, staff from the outreach teams would deliver activities, and these were mostly designed to be non-subject-specific.

Across the study, only one of the schools [in the pilot study] did not have a sixth form, Moore Academy (N/A), although Annersley Academy’s sixth form was in the process of closing during the study. Both Kurt and Joyce who worked at Moore Academy (N/A), spoke of the challenges of working with universities when their school did not have a sixth form. Joyce, the Head of Careers, described her concern that, ‘it’s such a long time until our kids will be

applying that I think they're not that interested in us. We can't give them any Year 12 pupils who are going to be applying to them next year. That long term element makes it harder.' Although there is no explicit reference to preferential treatment on university websites or documentation, Hilda at Carey University was clear that this was a policy within her institution;

> 'We kind of work with anybody who asks us to work with them but to be honest, what we offer may be different, depending on the school. So we're just starting this year because of demand to be honest, and because we kind of operated a pilot programme with Humphrey School [not in the study], which is a very high achieving school. But the reason we did it, because we're all in it to recruit students, is because we find it hard to get into their sixth form. So if you do something in Pre-16 [with a school], we hope to get into Post-16 and it's really helped with applications. The numbers have shot up over the last couple of years so we continued with this programme.'

Hilda was clear that pupils in younger year groups were treated different in 11-16 schools than 11-18 schools. Moreover, this had been something that had been piloted in the preceding year and was now being rolled out as a wider policy:

> 'It was quite a heavy programme for Pre-16 and was academic-led. We wouldn't normally do that but they were 11 to 18, so what we've decided to do on the back of that - because it's worked - is to now have different levels of what we will offer. So, 11 to 16 schools will have one offer and 11 to 18 schools, who've got the sixth form attached, will have another offer, with a view to us getting into the sixth form.'

Hilda's comments echo the marketised approach discussed by Elsie and Nick earlier in this chapter and raises similar ethical concerns in the blurring of recruitment work and progression activities by universities. These concerns sit within wider ethical concerns surrounding the ethics engendered by neoliberal policy priorities (Ball, 2017; Olssen, 2009; Pillai, 2013). The ways in which universities and schools without sixth forms interact is an area which needs further research in order to better understand the nuances of school-university relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that whilst school-university relationships are often conceived as a whole entity within the literature, the reality is that schools and universities interact very differently depending on the age and KS of the pupils. It makes a contribution to existing

knowledge by taking a systematic, chronological approach to understand progression to HE. It highlights the often conflicting priorities of schools and universities which mean that activities are often piecemeal and disjointed. Although schools have greater capacity within the curriculum for progression to HE activities for younger pupils – in primary and KS3 - there is a lack of urgency surrounding interventions during this period. Universities are incentivised by direct recruitment, and demonstrating the impact of interventions, which results in a preference for working with older pupils, and especially Post-16. Such an approach contradicts the research base, which finds that both early and ongoing activity supports progression to HE.

I articulate this conflict using the theory of 'possible selves', which suggests that the reason for early and sustained activity is to first support the expansion of the palette of possible selves and second, the process of elaborating on these possible selves to make them desirable and probable (Harrison, 2018). The way in which progression to HE activities are currently delivered is shaped by the accountability measures schools and universities are subject to, and the desire of universities to recruit adequate students in a marketised HE sector. This means pupils do not generally access interventions until later in their schooling experience. HE progression activities at this stage become a sorting mechanism for pupils who engage with them to decide which university to attend, rather than whether to attend HE, and misses pupils who have closed off this pathway.

Chapter 10 - Desirability and Choice

Introduction

The way in which schools and universities interact is influenced by the extent to which each institution meets the needs of the other. Some schools and universities are seen as more desirable to work with than others, creating a hierarchy across both types of institutions. This desirability is driven by a range of factors, which differ between the school and university sectors. Criteria influencing the desirability of a university includes league table rankings, mission groups and UCAS tariff scores, as well as logistical considerations such as geography, transport and funding. Factors influencing school desirability include pupil attainment, the demographics of their intake, whether they have a sixth form as part of the school, and logistical issues such as geography and staff relationships. Schools and universities undergo a constant, almost always informal 'matching process', by which both parties assess whether a particular institution meets enough of their criteria to be desirable to work with. Such criteria vary between each individual organisation, as well as fluctuating over time. This creates a web of constantly changing inter-sector interactions and relationships. Within this web, some universities and schools are considered more desirable to form relationships with than others.

This chapter draws upon ideas of choice and the neoliberal, marketised landscape across education (discussed in Chapter 2), but particularly in HE, to examine the differences between the desirability of different schools and universities, and how this influences school-university relationships. It argues that traditional definitions of selectivity, reflected in league tables, UCAS tariff scores, and mission groups explains part, but not all of the desirability for schools of different universities. School-university relationships are also influenced by the institutional habitus of both schools and universities (Reay et al., 2001), although in this chapter I focus predominantely on that of schools. The institutional habitus of schools and its influence on HE progression has been explored in several studies (Donnelly, 2015b; Ingram, 2009; Pugsley, 1998, 2004; Reay et al., 2005), and in this chapter I seek to examine this specifically from the perspective of school-university relationships. Donnelly defines institutional habitus as the 'set of dispositions and behaviours that are the product of a school's past experiences, staff and pupils' (2015b, p. 1076), an understanding which I apply to both schools and universities, whilst recognising that universities are much larger, more heterogenous organisations than schools. Whereas the marketised environment of choice across both schools and HE is premised on the notion of rational choices - whereby each

individual selects an institution which maximises their personal, economic benefit - rational choice cannot fully explain school-university relationships, where 'matching' is influenced by wider factors.

School desirability in this context is driven by a different range of factors. Historically, universities have focused on attainment as the key driver of both individual and school engagement, with higher attaining schools and individuals being most desirable. Stratification of attainment saw schools and universities informally 'mapped', whereby schools where mapped onto similarly 'achieving' institutions. Although this research found that attainment remains a highly important factor, university-based participants suggested that regulatory pressures have incentivised working with schools whose pupils meet particular demographic characteristics, and this has increased the desirability for universities of previously unattractive schools. In addition, the ability to demonstrate short term impact has increased the desirability of engaging with secondary schools with sixth forms, creating a two-tier system whereby schools with Post-16 pupils are more desirable to work with than their 11-16 counterparts.

This chapter first examines the policy context in which choice has been prioritised in HE. It moves on to set out how Ball and others have considered choice within the compulsory schooling system, and the ways in which it acts as an inhibiting influence on social mobility (Bagley et al., 2001; Ball et al., 1994; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Gibbons et al., 2006; Gorard, 2003). It then looks at the role of the school and its institutional habitus in choice making around progression to HE and school-university relationships. The rest of this chapter examines the ways in which my participants viewed the choices available. It first looks at university desirability from a school perspective, using some of the common categorisations to do so: position in league tables, mission groups with particular focus on the Russell Group, and Oxbridge. It also looks at what are often described as 'local universities' in contrast to the other groups. I then examine university perspectives on school desirability, discussing the ways in which my participants framed their choices around which schools they work with, and how this has changed.

Choice in Policy

Progression to HE is not a homogenous experience, and the HE sector is deeply stratified across many factors including status, research activity, income and demographics. Since

the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act there has been a significant increase in the number of institutions defined as ‘universities’, as well as a rise in the number of providers of HE, such as FE colleges, where HE courses are often validated or franchised by an awarding university, but delivered in local colleges. The 2017 Higher Education and Research Act significantly simplified the way in which degree awarding powers were granted to providers, with the aim of encouraging further growth, and allowing new ‘challenger institutions’ (Department for Business, 2016, p. 6) to enter the HE market. This diversity of provision has been promoted by government as ensuring competition within the market, and offering students’ choice. The new sector regulator, the OfS, was created with the intention to ‘promote choice and competition’, which was explicitly cast as ‘a means of promoting student interest’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 9). The White Paper underpinning these changes, *Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice,* stated that, ‘the new OfS will have a statutory duty to cover equality of opportunity across the whole lifecycle for disadvantaged students […] alongside its duty to promote choice’ (Department for Business, 2016, p. 56). The proliferation of heterogeneous institutions, and the focus on individual student choice, places significant onus on the individual to rationally choose, namely to select an institution which meets their needs, without addressing the many structural barriers which may influence this choice.

The rest of this chapter explores the tension which exists between the two requirements inherent in a system which prioritises individual choice within a marketplace, but attempts to use this same system to also achieve greater social mobility. Such choice assumes, ‘a kind of formal equality’ (Ball et al., 2002, p. 70), both across the education system up until the point of application to university and across wider society. In doing so, choice in fact both legitimises and disguises ‘the effects of real inequality’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 76). Ball and colleagues draw upon Bourdieu’s work to suggests that, the ‘operation of choice, or decision-making within higher education, ‘imposes the same demands’ on all ‘without any concern for universally distributing the means of satisfying them’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p.70 quoted in Ball et al., 2002, p. 70). Choice in itself becomes a social justice issue when the choices individual students make perpetuate and reproduce the existing divisions and hierarchies within HE, rather than reducing them. This undermines the claim that education is a force for social mobility rather than of social reproduction.

Social Mobility and Choice

As participation in HE has increased, and the number of students from historically under-represented groups has grown, middle-class families who have traditionally reproduced their social advantages through HE have increasingly focused upon the type of institution as a means of protecting their children from 'social demotion' (Peugny, 2007). Brown describes this as 'credential inflation' (2001). Although there remains an economic premium to HE as a whole, the expansion of HE, coupled with the significant variation in the outcomes associated with different institutions and courses (Sullivan et al., 2018), has compounded the desire from middle-class pupils to choose a particular type of institution. Ehrenreich suggests that the middle-classes increasingly see themselves as assailed by 'intruders from below', and address their 'fear of falling' through the capture of highly selective higher education (1990). Rather than understanding the expansion of HE as societal benefit, Collins suggests that the expansion of HE has not changed the way in which different social classes 'take advantage of these opportunities' (2019, p. 4), and instead increased the complexity in how the system is navigated. Working-class students are more likely to progress to lower ranked universities, which have poorer graduate outcomes as measured by earnings.

Ball and colleagues have suggested that the 'capacity for choice is unevenly distributed across the social classes' (2002, p. 66), and that a 'discourse of choice' (Baker & Brown, 2007) masks the real inequalities experienced by those making such choices. Moreover, Brown and Scase argue that through 'credentialism' (Collins, 2019), 'the expansion of higher education represents a conflict between social groups for scarce credentials' (P. Brown & Scase, 1994, p. 18), rather than a genuine expansion of opportunity. Although HE progression is seen as a crucial site of social reproduction within education, choice is also imbued across many other areas of education, notably school selection (Ball et al., 1994; David et al., 1994; Gewirtz, 1995), parental involvement (Reay, 2002), and extracurricular activities (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018a). In each case the same veneer of equality disguising inequalities in decision making exists. In their research into the way in which students choose between Post-16 education, Ball and colleagues identify different type of 'choosers'; those for whom HE was an embedded choice, often seen as automatic or taken for granted, and those for whom the choice was contingent on overcoming logistical, financial and cultural barriers (2002). Baker and Brown suggest that this backdrop has made

the interrogating of the question of choice, ‘particularly crucial’ for understanding social mobility in HE (2007, p. 378).

As a result of this opportunity for choice, Reay suggests that the concept of widening access in HE is something of a false promise (2012; 2009); highly selective universities offer symbolic capital in the form of highly valuable social and cultural capital, precisely as a result of their exclusivity and demographic of students from middle and elite classes. Thus, any decrease in students from these backgrounds undermines the very reason highly selective institutions are seen as desirable by middle-class families. She argues that this mismatch between the institutional habitus of the university, and the habitus of the individual, deters students from under-represented groups from applying, as they do not feel they possess the appropriate cultural capital to fit into the field of a highly selective institution (Reay, 1998). This is echoed by Archer and Hutching’s work which suggests that ‘non-traditional’ students often find ‘elite’ and ‘traditional’ universities alienating, hostile or unwelcoming’ (2000). Instead, they choose not to progress to university, or opt for a less selective establishment, which is both less prestigious and offers fewer opportunities for the development of elite social networks and high status cultural capital, which may enable social mobility.

The very fact that university is seen as a place of significant potential mobility is often a concern for working-class families. Although Ball and colleagues find that pupils from middle-class backgrounds are more like to feel the status of universities is important in their HE selection (2002), Donnelly suggests that this does not mean that those from low social groups are unaware of these status differences (2015b). Indeed, Bradley and colleagues find that students across social backgrounds are knowledgeable about the hierarchies across HE (2013). This knowledge may exert different influences on different students, mediated by different and complex factors, as well as their own individual experiences (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Brooks, 2003). Thomas and Quinn suggest a fear found amongst working-class parents that university may result in students ‘abandoning the family and its norms and values’ (2006, p. 63). Reay’s work on students who do progress to highly selective institutions suggests that working-class students feel a ‘habitus tug’ as they have to adapt their habitus to institutions dominated by the middle and upper classes (2009).

‘The School Effect’ – The Role of Institutional Habitus

Although choice around HEI is usually framed as an individual endeavour, Ball and colleagues suggest that the so called ‘school effect’ (2002, p. 58) is an independent variable which can otherwise be understood as the institutional habitus of the school. Institutional habitus extends Bourdieu’s theory of individual habitus, which is understood as a ‘system of lasting, transposable dispositions’ (1977, p. 82). Archer and colleagues understand it as:

> ‘An amalgamation of the past and present that mediates current and future engagement with the social world, shaping what is perceived as ab/nor-mal, un/desirable and im/possible. It encompasses both the body and mind, the individual and the collective, such that personal and collective experiences, histories and ways of thinking combine to inflect an individual’s understanding of what is normal or appropriate for ‘people like me’’ (2007, p. 220).

The notion of habitus has been criticised for its deterministic nature (Brooks, 2003; Jenkins, 2002; Lane, 2000; Reay, 2004; D. Robbins, 1991), however, Bourdieu himself rejected this, suggesting instead that habitus was ‘durable but not eternal’ (1992, p. 133).

The institutional habitus of schools and its influence on HE progression has been explored in several studies (Donnelly, 2015b; Ingram, 2009; Pugsley, 1998, 2004; Reay et al., 2005), and is defined as, a ‘set of dispositions and behaviours that are the product of a school’s past experiences, staff and pupils’ (Donnelly, 2015b, p. 1076). In the same way as with individual habitus, institutional habitus has a history and is established over time by the influence of the pupils and teachers which make up the institution. Thrupp offers a detailed description of how this plays out in the day-to-day practices of a school thus:

> ‘Schools develop processes that reflect their SES mix. Solidly middle-class schools have strongly supportive student cultures which allow them to teach an academic, school-based curriculum and to organise and manage themselves relatively smoothly. Working-class students who attend a working-class school may often fail not only because of their own background but also because they are attending working-class schools which cannot offer middle-class types of school resources and processes. Conversely working-class students who attend a middle-class school are more likely to succeed because they are exposed, despite their individual class backgrounds, to the contextual benefits of a middle-class school mix’ (1999, p. 125).

Like individual habitus, institutional habitus is not fixed and is open to constant influence. However, Reay cautions the speed at which change can occur suggesting that, 'institutional

habituses are capable of change but through dint of their collective nature are less fluid than individual habitus' (1998, p. 521).

Institutional habitus influences the ways in which the expectations and perceptions entrenched within the institution frame what is thinkable and what is desirable (Reay et al., 2001); for some schools progressing to HE will be an inevitability expected for their students, and progressing to a highly selective institution will be desirable, whereas in others, the expectation may not be as clear. Moreover, Reay suggests that 'institutional habitus could be mobilised differentially for different groups of students' (2001, p. 6). This can be seen later in this chapter as we explore the different ways in which schools view categorisations. Notably that some schools, such as Stewart College (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), where staff feel confident in supporting certain types of applications, do not have the same sense of confidence when helping students to apply to Oxbridge.

Selectivity and Choice

This chapter thus far is premised on the assertion that universities are not homogenous institutions, and that the differences in prestige, ranking and selectivity between institutions influences the choices young people make regarding which institution they progress to. The institutional habitus of schools also varies, and where some schools have high levels of awareness of the selectivity of different universities and how this might impact their pupils in the future, this understanding appears to vary between schools. Moreover, some school-based participants voiced an awareness of the selectivity of different institutions but felt that their pupils would be, as Bourdieu suggests, 'a fish out of water' (1992) in certain universities. This chapter posits that school-university relationships are influenced by these differences, whereby schools' institutional habitus frames their 'capacity for choice' (Ball et al., 2002), and that this capacity is not evenly distributed across schools.

League Tables

Universities are ranked across many and varied metrics and league tables, the nature and problems of which are discussed in Chapter 3. The most frequently used for undergraduate admissions in the UK are The Guardian University Guide (The Guardian, 2021), The Complete University Guide (Oliver et al., 2020) and the Times Good Universities Guide (O'Leary, 2020). Participants in all schools within the study had a good awareness of the relative position of the five universities within the North East as reflected in the league tables.

Then, when asked to rank the universities in the region from most academically selective to least (using UCAS tariff points which are a key component common across the league tables), almost all school-based participants did so correctly, although some participants raised the issue of particular outlier courses within particular institutions which may buck the overall trend.

When asked whether they thought league tables were useful, almost all participants agreed that these rankings were useful to be able to access. James, the Deputy Head of Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), suggested that league tables, 'have a part to play…mainly in offering some easily quantifiable information for our students. I don't know how much it influences their final decisions but it's a useful part of the process.' A small number of school-based participants described using league tables with pupils to help them make decisions regarding their university choices. Bill, the Assistant Head of Sixth Form at Ferrars Community High School (AP, HPHSD), talked about the way pupils engaged with league tables, 'they compare and contrast the different ones [rankings] […]. I think they like to know that their subject is doing well at a particular university. But we try and get them to look at the overall ranking as well because really that's what matters.' More commonly, participants reported that pupils made fairly limited use of league tables, and instead focused upon other factors, predominantly geographic and cultural. Constance, the Head of Careers at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD), described the approach of her pupils: 'mostly they are only looking at a really small number of unis anyhow because they want to stay really local, but we try and talk to them about the pros and cons of other places that might be a bit further away, but might be better in the rankings.' It appeared from these discussions that school staff were more engaged with rankings than their pupils.

Although many school-based participants had a strong sense of university rankings, and used these to try inform individual pupil choices, and improve the 'matching' of students to opportunities (Campbell et al., 2020), there was some evidence to suggest that a smaller number of schools were also using rankings to inform the ways in which they interacted with universities. James, Deputy Head at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), suggested that, 'within the region we have universities aiming at different parts of the grade spectrum, different parts of the cohort, different sorts of provision [...] so realistically we have different ways of working with them.' Tristan, the Deputy Head at Linton Academy (AP) echoed this sentiment, suggesting that 'we have different approaches depending on who we're talking

to. Some universities that we want to increase the number of students we're sending […] like Howell University, and then we have to curate that relationship a bit more actively.' Tristan described 'curating' as reaching out to those universities, inviting them to what the school saw as the highest profile opportunities, for example, their school celebration evening, or to those with their highest attaining pupils. Bettany School had very high progression rates to HE and Linton Academy's progression rates were rising.

This approach contrasted with schools which had lower progression rates. Both Amy and Ernest who worked in CIAG roles at Dene School (LP), which had a very large number of pupils on roll, spoke of their struggle to offer enough HE related opportunities for their pupils. When asked whether she prioritised working with any particular universities, Amy responded that, 'to be honest we're not fussy on who it is, we just say yes to anything we can get.' Ernest shared a similar sentiment when he outlined his approach:

> 'I think where we're at is encouraging the kids to think of going to university in general, it doesn't really matter at this point where. And most of them won't go anywhere other than the local ones anyhow. So thinking about anything else seems a bit… well we need to take one step at a time with our kids.'

This difference in approach suggested that schools understood the power balance between themselves and universities in different ways. Whereas some school-based participants appeared to be grateful for any opportunities they were afforded, which Ball and colleagues suggests positions them as 'policy receivers' (2012), others were more able to take advantage of the opportunities available, and to make choices between different universities, acting in more 'policy entrepreneur' roles (Ibid,.). In taking a more discerning approach to school-university relationships, schools such as Bettany (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), and Linton (AP), appeared to be consciously attempting to change institutional habitus (Reay et al., 2001), to align with more selective institutions. Curtis and colleagues, in their research into schools with different progression rates, suggested that 'schools should provide information about the relative status of universities in order that students not already 'in the know' are not disadvantaged' (2008, p. 5). However, this approach does not consider the notion that not all *schools* may be 'in the know', and therefore unable to provide this information, or that this knowledge may be leveraged in very different ways.

Although some schools appeared to be more deferential than others in terms of their relationships with universities, there emerged from my study two clear groups where choices

appeared to be significantly altered by the way in which universities were classified. These were universities who were members of the Russell Group mission group, and Oxford and Cambridge, which were usually referred to as Oxbridge. The next two sections examine these two groups in greater detail.

Mission Groups – the Dominance of the Russell Group

As discussed in Chapter 3, the origins of university mission groups lie in self-identified common interests. As self-selecting groups with no formal admission criteria, it might be expected that they would have little influence over student choices. However, the success of the Russell Group in positioning itself as synonymous with prestige has led to a dichotomy in schools, with universities divided into 'Russell' or 'non Russell' by many schools, as James the Deputy Headteacher at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD) described. Throughout my research, school-based participants described how this divide manifested itself both in the CIAG they provided for pupils, and the ways in which they saw, and sought to work with, particular universities.

Geoff, the Head of Sixth Form at Wilson School (HPD), had explicitly included a target in his Sixth Form Development Plan to 'have a named contact at every Russell Group university so we can navigate their systems and work with them better.' When I asked why he focused on Russell Group institutions, he responded that, 'that's where parents and students are interested in, so working with them makes the most sense… not that I wouldn't do things with other universities but if it's a case of prioritising…'. Felicity, the Assistant Head of Sixth Form at Ferrars Community High School (AP, HPHSD), echoed Geoff's response regarding the interest of parents and students; 'there are some fantastic courses at non-Russell Group universities but our parents are very traditional around here and most of them want their children to be applying to the Russell Group, even if we explain the other options.' From this, it seemed that in some schools, perceptions of parents and pupils were a driving force in how school-university relationships were prioritised. Both Wilson School and Ferrars Community High School had a more middle-class demographic than the other schools in the study, with both schools reporting higher levels of parental experience of HE. These teachers, parents and students collectively create an institutional habitus which prioritises progression to high-prestige institutions.

In contrast, Linton Academy (AP) reported low levels of parental HE experience, but retained a strong and explicit focus on the Russell Group as a way of defining highly selective institutions. Tristan, the Deputy Head, described 'study skills' induction days that he took pupils on at the beginning of Year 12, recounting that 'we went for Howell and Lovell Universities simply because they were Russell Group, and we wanted our students to be very at home at those institutions. We wanted them to be aspirational right from the very start [of sixth form].' This explicit aligning of school-university relationships along selectivity lines was atypical of the school-based participants within the study. However, Tristan felt strongly that 'our pupils don't have the background where they will automatically apply to these [Russell Group] institutions. We're not like other schools where pupils have been going for years. For our students to do this, we need to be much more hands on with them and that's what we do.'

Reay and colleagues' work on HE choices and institutional habitus highlights the 'taken for granted disposition of the institutional habitus of a school when familial and institutional habituses are 'in symmetry'' (2001, p. 4). However, there has been no research examining schools which are explicitly attempting to remould their institutional habitus in a way which is at odds with the perceived habitus of their pupils. Oliver and Kettley's work on the influence of individual teachers finds that, 'there is room for manoeuvre' (2010, p. 750) for individual members of staff whose disposition is not aligned to that of the school to carve out their own sphere of influence. However, the study focuses on individual staff members, rather than the staff body more broadly. Tristan's explicit stance on progression is far more overt than what Donnelly terms the 'hidden messages of state schools' (2015a), which he sees as implicit, but nonetheless influential in shaping pupil choices. Donnelly makes clear that, 'schools are not conceived of as neutral transmitters of knowledge. Instead, embedded within the very fabric of them are often implicitly held norms, values, beliefs [and] expectations' (2015a, p. 86). Tristan's very explicit approach, whilst unusual, did at least make clear the beliefs he held surrounding progression to HE and the approach the school was taking.

Not all school-based participants saw progression to Russell Group institutions as beneficial for their students. Several shared their reservations regarding pupils' understanding of Russell Group universities as uncritically 'better' than other options. Theo, the Head of Sixth Form at Dene School (LP), felt that 'the Russell Group always feels outdated and it doesn't

really represent the top universities'. James, the Deputy Head at Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), described the grouping as a 'lazy flag'. Despite this, all of the participants felt compelled, to differing levels, to promote the Russell Group to their students. James gave a lengthy explanation of the problems he saw with the Russell Group, not least that, 'on our doorstep there was an example of a very selective university that wasn't in the Russell Group, although it has now given into the pressure and joined […] so we all knew that [the Russell Group] wasn't a good measure of prestige.' However, James went on to acknowledge that, 'as a school, you can't escape it. All you can do is explain to the students […] we know employers are also lazy and use it as a way of recruiting, so you can't just ignore it with students.' This tension between their concerns regarding the way in which the Russell Group was understood, and the desire to ensure students were informed about the longer-term implications of their choices, was prevalent across my school-based participants. In this sense, school-university relationships should also be understood in the context of university-employer relationships, and the recruitment practices of prestigious firms and professions (MacMillan et al., 2015; Milburn, 2009; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2012).

A further concern regarding the Russell Group was its inclusion in school accountability measures, the only mission group to be reported within this data (Department for Education, 2019). Grizel, Head of Sixth Form at Culver Academy (HP, HPHS), shared her frustration that the proportion of students who progressed to a Russell Group institution was measured by the DfE. She felt that, 'whilst that's still a separate measure, schools are going to be more interested in the Russell Group than other universities. That misses lots of excellent universities which would be good for our students.' James agreed, suggesting that the Russell Group metric further distorted school behaviour in framing potential destinations for pupils:

> 'I think if a school was to say 'we sent huge numbers, let's say three quarters went to Russell Group and they all got their first choice place' but for every single student that meant Lovell University, that would probably not get picked up, when I would argue it's highly unlikely that Lovell University was genuinely the best choice for all those students. Just because it's unlikely any one university would be… but it would look much better for schools than having pupils go to more diverse but non-Russell Group universities.'

James' disapproval of the increased datification around progression to HE resonates with his previous criticism surrounding the performativity of HE progression metrics, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Despite criticism of the Russell Group as a category from many school-based participants, there was a strong sense that this was beyond the control of any one school. Instead, school-based participants focused on working within the system, with many suggesting that interactions with Russell Group institutions were prioritised. For some schools, the focus on Russell Group institutions was reported as coming from parents and pupils. This shaping of institutional habitus suggests that schools with parents who have more experience of, and are more able to navigate HE, are shaping their school habitus in particular ways, which perpetuate this alignment with the Russell Group. This results in a greater focus on Russell Group institutions than in schools who do not have high levels of parental HE experience. This supports with Donnelly's finding that, 'schools with more disadvantaged intakes are often conceived of as constrained, and unable to provide the same high level of support, due to the social characteristics of their intake' (2015a, p. 86).

Oxbridge

The issue of differing progression rates to Oxford and Cambridge is a longstanding one, and arguably receives the greatest scrutiny regarding access to HE. As the two oldest institutions in the UK, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge dominate the highest positions in league tables both nationally, and frequently, internationally. Although there has been a long history of widening access to HE (discussed in Chapter 2), Oxford and Cambridge have frequently been unfavourably compared to the rest of the HE sector when it comes to issues of access. As early as 1852 a Royal Commission into Oxford and Cambridge highlighted issues of access by poorer students, suggesting an interest in the demographic makeup of these institutions well over a century ago. Research undertaken for the 1963 Robbins Report found that 34% of students at Oxford, and 27% of students at Cambridge, attended state secondary schools, compared to 63% across all universities (1963). Research in 2018 suggested that, despite the rhetoric surrounding increasing progression to HE from under-represented groups in the intervening years, a small number of schools still dominated Oxbridge admissions, with eight schools securing as many Oxbridge acceptances as another 2894 schools and colleges combined (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018b, p. 3). Moreover the report found that 'schools with similar exam results had very different rates of

progression to top universities and especially to Oxbridge' (Ibid,. p. 3), suggesting that when it came to Oxbridge progression there was a very significant 'school effect'.

Pupils in the North East are amongst the least likely to apply to Oxbridge (Ibid,.). In particular, FSM eligible pupils have very low progression rates: between 2012 and 2014 no pupils eligible for FSM from the North East progressed to Oxbridge (Social Mobility Commission, 2016, p. 108). Within this study, school-based participants included schools which sent the region's highest numbers of pupils to Oxbridge, as well as several schools who had not made any successful Oxbridge applications for several years. It also included schools who reported having no interactions with Oxbridge, alongside those who had established events and contacts, although as discussed below, establishing and maintaining these appeared to be fraught with difficulty.

Many of the relationships between Oxbridge and the schools within this study appeared to be characterised by confusion and uncertainty. Maria, Assistant Head of Sixth Form at Stewart College (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), which had historically high rates of progression to HE, and a small number of successful applicants to Oxbridge each year, summed up the sentiment across several schools when she said: 'we never really understand why those that get accepted, do. There's a real mismatch between our most able students and those who get offers. It's frustrating because you're never sure whether it's what you've done that's worked.' Geoff, the Head of Sixth Form at Wilson School (HPD), who similarly had a history of small numbers of pupils progressing to Oxbridge echoed this, suggesting that, 'I feel you have to be lucky or really know the system… to be honest, we don't know the system.' This sense of mystery appeared common across almost all participants in the study, including those who had successfully sent pupils to Oxbridge in recent years.

For participants in schools with very low progression rates to HE more generally, there was a sense that Oxbridge is very remote. For Simone, a Sixth Form Tutor at Annersley Academy (LP), Oxbridge was a laughable notion; 'we're a tiny sixth form and to be honest, we've not had anybody for years who would be that kind of material. I don't think they'd [Oxbridge] come all this way for the number of kids we've got.' Whilst Simone had not attempted to engage with Oxbridge, Theo, the Head of Sixth Form at Dene School (LP) which also had very low progression rates to HE, had been far more active in his attempts to interact with the two universities. Theo described having done an interview on a regional

news network criticising Oxbridge's engagement with schools in the North East. He felt this had increased the level of involvement Woodward University had had with the school, 'straight away when I did that on [the news], Woodward Outreach were straight on Twitter tagging me in stuff and being involved in the school and I think it shouldn't have taken me being on TV to do that. Think of all those other schools who aren't going on [the news].' As a result of this interaction, a senior member of admissions staff at Woodward had also visited the school the same year, however Theo felt that the long-term impact of these interactions had been negligible;

> 'We had [him] here later that year to have a look around and he asked what were the barriers [to pupils progressing to Woodward]. He told us that they were thinking of coming to [local area] with an outreach centre. They didn't. Which I guess is fine, it's their decision. But they didn't tell us. I just found out a year later that it was in [different area within the region] because I went and asked at an outreach event and they said they'd already opened it. Why as a Head of Sixth Form that they've already spoken to and I've given time up for, did they not even tell me? Sometimes it feels like you just say the same stuff to different people and wind up with nothing different.'

Several participants also shared the feeling that specific Oxbridge programmes remained too selective and were pitched at too late a stage for their pupils. Theo felt that, 'one of the challenges with any of the Oxbridge programmes is that they're always very selective. So anything they do will only have an impact on a very, very small group of our students.' This was compounded in smaller schools, and those schools where the number of pupils with the GCSE attainment profile demanded of Oxbridge in any given year is relatively low. Theo articulated this as a vicious cycle whereby:

> 'We tend not to have many Oxbridge candidates, but what it does mean is our potential ones get nothing because they won't come for just one kid. Then they're not as prepared as kids in schools where they visit regularly. If they did it with more kids, who knows, maybe it would boost all the kids, but they're only interested in the highest attainers who might go to them in the end.'

This strongly echoes the concerns raised in the previous chapter whereby outreach programmes, which are supposed to be focused on improving progression rates from under-represented groups, are in reality motivated and defined by recruitment aims.

Two schools within the study appeared to have stronger relationships with Oxbridge. The first was Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), which had high progression rates to HE more broadly and some of the highest rates of progression to Oxford and Cambridge in the region. James, the Deputy Head, was broadly positive about the relationship between the school and the two institutions, suggesting that they were 'pretty good and they [Oxbridge] try hard.' However, James was critical about the 'link college system' whereby different Oxbridge colleges take responsibility for building relationships with schools in particular regions and delivering outreach. James felt that the onus on using link colleges was inhibitive:

> 'If your link college is not particularly effective, you're absolutely knackered. So there are other colleges we have developed relationships with, to try and patch up the fact when we go down to certain colleges, it's very hard to get accommodation because they're useless and all the other colleges are saying, "your link college should be supporting you." The link college system doesn't appear particularly accountable to the central body on what they're delivering and how well they're doing their job. Every year we have a nightmare with accommodation for open days and we're a school that sends a lot of pupils year on year. If we have to have these conversations every year with the same people, I don't know what other places are doing.'

James felt particularly frustrated about the mismatch between the support he was offered as a school in the North East, and schools which were more local to each of the universities. He felt that, 'they talk the talk about wanting kids from this region but when it actually comes to it, you'll [Oxbridge] need to invest significantly more money to get the same result up here as you would from a kid who goes to school on your doorstep. But that never seems to get recognised.'

The second school which appeared to have good relationships with Oxbridge (or rather, one of the two institutions), was Linton Academy (AP). In this case, it did not stem from a tradition of sending high numbers of pupils to Oxbridge, but instead was being spearheaded by two members of staff: Tristen the Deputy Head, and Mary-Lou, the University Progression Coordinator, with the aim of increasing Oxbridge applications from a relatively low starting point. In contrast to Bettany School, Linton Academy had set up a more formal relationship between themselves and Woodward, in that the university contributed to Mary-Lou's salary, in order for her run a regional programme, as well as her school-based role. The programme itself was open to applicants from other schools from across the region. This direct and formal relationship increased the time Mary-Lou had to dedicate to the relationship, as well

as increasing her knowledge of Woodward, and her ability to navigate its systems. Tristen described the relationship as ‘very fruitful’, although he acknowledged that it remained in its infancy, and this had not translated to any increase in the progression rates at Linton at the time of this study.

As part of the study I interviewed two members of staff involved in access and admissions at both Oxbridge institutions, Woodward and Rutherford. These interviews gave remarkably contrasting insights, and highlighted very different approaches. Although Polly and Madge were interviewed from the two different institutions, I am reluctant to draw too much from their individual responses. Polly works at a collegiate level, whereas Madge has a more senior university-wide role in her institution, which may in part contribute to their different approaches. That said, their very different attitudes were of interest to me as school-based participants in my study were critical of what they saw as often inconsistent messaging emanating between and within the two institutions.

Polly, from Woodward University, was clear that her role spanned a far greater remit than recruitment to her specific university. She positioned her work as ‘about widening participation, so it isn't just about coming to Woodward. Our message has to be wider than that. It's about selling the benefits of university.’ Moreover, she countered school-based staff’s perception that Oxbridge would only work with students with the academic profile to apply suggesting that:

> ‘So, we go and we work with schools from a widening participation point of view and we will support all pupils, so when we run a workshop for personal statements, that is open to every Year 12 [….] because it gets us in the door. It busts that ‘we're just there to poach the one or two students’ mentality; we're not just interested in supporting the school for their [Oxbridge] student that they get every five years. We want to invest in schools and share our resources, share our support more widely than that and that goes a long way too, to dealing with the perceptions around the University of Woodward.’

Polly was relatively new to her role and had previously worked as a Head of Sixth Form in a school. She showed both a high degree of awareness of the perceptions that schools may have about Oxbridge, and a strong desire to counter the more negative opinions by providing wider support. Polly was also specifically focused on ‘winning the hearts and minds of staff’, as she described it to me, suggesting that, ‘without them, we’re never going to get the

chance to win the hearts and minds of the pupils.' Her approach appeared grounded in the research she cited from the Sutton Trust, which found that 43% of state secondary school teachers would rarely or never advise their bright pupils to apply to Oxbridge (2016). Oliver and Kettley's findings also support the importance of a teacher-focused approach, suggesting that, 'agency of individual teachers is an important factor in creating the right conditions for students to consider the possibility of making elite university applications' (2010, p. 750).

Polly spoke about actively countering the historic associations of the 'Woodward brand'. She appeared to directly reject the market-driven approach taken by many other institutions, although she was held accountable to the same targets, albeit in a slightly devolved form (Polly worked at an individual college, rather than university level). Although she had only been in post for a short period of time when this study was undertaken, several school-based participants cited her by name as a positive recent experience with Oxbridge. It would be particularly interesting to see whether an individual member of staff was able to significantly change school perceptions of a university in the region over time. However, it would also be a cause for concern if and when Polly left her role. Individuals who represent and champion a policy at an institution can become so closely associated with it that its implementation is contingent upon them (Braun et al., 2010). This leaves particular policies or relationships dependent upon a small number of individuals.

In contrast, Madge from Rutherford University, outlined a different approach which appeared to be more aligned with how school-based participants had historically described their experiences. Madge highlighted the key role of attainment in selecting schools for Rutherford to work with: '[we] look for schools that have a high attainment but low progression to [Oxbridge]. So that implies that they're getting the grades, but they're not then thinking about applying or [not] navigating the process successfully.' Madge saw the role of the university as primarily a recruitment one, rather than that of raising attainment and expectations more broadly. As outlined in Chapter 7, Madge did not see the role of the university as one of long-term attainment raising with pupils. Instead, she positioned university involvement as Post-16 focused suggesting that, 'if you go in and you give a school's talk and then someone asks you what your typical offers are, and the pupils in that school know that that is not something they would normally attain, then that can be counter-productive I think. So you do need to take attainment into account.' Madge was clear in her

support for targeted programmes for already high attaining pupils, but more sceptical about the role of Rutherford in raising attainment more broadly, suggesting that, 'it is not geared so much at raising attainment… we're not actually delivering teaching. We can work with The Brilliant Club and do things like that, but we're not going in and changing the way that people are going to be studying.' Madge was explicitly focused upon improving the existing processes, whereas Polly's approach appeared to be different, with a much greater focus on investing in relationships. That said, neither Polly, nor Madge, appeared to be seeking to change the wider systems underpinning admissions at their institutions.

These two different approaches may not be characteristic of either university. However, in highlighting these I seek to demonstrate that the experience of schools interacting with Oxbridge appears highly varied. The collegiate link college system provides an additional layer of complexity and variation in school-university interactions. There appears to be a lack of knowledge amongst schools in this research as to how to navigate Oxbridge systems. In addition, schools grouped the two universities together, rather than taking different approaches to navigating the two institutions. Although there has been significant discussion around access to Oxbridge in recent years, and in particular the low progression rates from the North East (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018b), the experiences of my school-based participants was that supporting progression to Oxbridge remained a challenge across all their schools, and this was exacerbated by the structural barriers they often found in their interactions. Polly's new approach, whilst in its infancy, offered the possibility that this may change in the future, although it was too early to make definitive statements about this, and would need extend beyond just one person's efforts to create a structural or systematic change.

Local Universities

Although many school-based participants spoke of prioritising engaging with universities they perceived to be more desirable, almost all spoke of their 'local university'. A local university was, it seemed, a fairly nebulous concept; it was not necessarily the university closest to the school, although relatively close geographical proximity was a factor. Often, school-based participants referred to a 'local university' as the closest recruiting university, an institution which was never highly ranked in league tables, nor part of the Russell Group, and one which had lower admissions requirements. Across the literature there is a sense of a local university being, to use Clayton and colleagues's description, 'Post-1992 universities

[…] offering relatively low entry requirements, reducing the financial implications of moving away and providing a culturally and geographically familiar learning environment' (2009, p. 158). In Reay and colleagues' research, working-class students describe these institutions as, catering for the needs of people 'like them' (2000; 2001). This suggests that local universities were not defined just by their locality, but by a sense of institutional habitus which aligned with the individual habitus within particular groups of students.

School-based participants often spoke favourably of their local university in terms of their interactions. Mary-Lou, the University Progression Coordinator at Linton Academy (AP), who spoke explicitly of nurturing relationships with highly selective universities maintained that, 'my favourite [university] is Barras University [the local university], because they will do sort of bespoke things for us'. Theo, the Head of Sixth Form at Dene School (LP), also felt that their 'local university' was useful. Interestingly, Theo's school had two universities located close to them however, he only described Lambert University as 'local', whereas Lovell University, which was geographically the same distance away, was described as a Russell Group university.

The expectations surrounding so-called local universities appeared to be different to universities deemed more desirable. Grizel, Head of Sixth Form at Culver Academy (HP, HPHS), spoke of rearranging the school timetable and making exceptions when Rutherford University (Oxbridge) offered an event, 'it's one of the few times we get involved with Year 11 and Year 10. Rutherford contacted us and so obviously we agreed. It's a great opportunity, so we just said yes and made it work.' However, she was much less accommodating when it came to her local institution, Carey University, who she asked into school 'to run Student Finance and things like that where we just need someone to come in and give information.' This pattern ran across many of my interviews, with local universities being designated as a 'back up' option if other, more desirable universities were not able to attend. There was a strong belief amongst participants that whereas the power to command school and student attention lay with highly selective universities in school-university interactions, this was reversed with local institutions, and schools were able to define the terms to a much greater extent. Some universities were never classed as 'local', despite being geographically the closest institution to some schools. James, the Deputy Head of Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), talked about 'three local universities' within the region and 'two Russell Group or selective.' Local and selective universities could not be one and

the same it appeared, with selectivity giving increased power to universities within the stratified marketplace of HE.

The preceding sections of this chapter have looked at the desirability of universities however, school-university interactions are not solely, or even predominantly determined by schools. The final section of this chapter looks at some of the ways in which schools are seen as more or less desirable to work with by universities.

School Desirability

Historically, pupils have been admitted to university predominantly on the basis of attainment at A Level and GCSE. High levels of attainment, as explored in Chapter 3, has a strong correlation with particular demographic groups, notably socioeconomic status, as well as gender and ethnicity. Schools with historically high levels of attainment have developed a stronger institutional habitus around progression to highly selective universities (Reay et al., 2001). These schools appear to have more established relationships with universities than those with lower rates of progression (Curtis et al., 2008).

However, beginning with OFFA, but far more prevalent under the new regulatory regime of the OfS, universities have been incentivised to increase participation to HE by individuals who fall into particular groups of low participation (2018, p. 8). In addition to national level targets, discussed in Chapter 7, universities are expected to analyse their own admissions data, and set targets reflective of the gaps in participation specific to their own institution as part of their five-year APPs. Schools with high numbers of pupils who meet these criteria have seen significantly increased engagement from universities as a result of this, with programmes such as NECOP specifically designed to target schools with the lowest participation rates. This changing dynamic, discussed below, was highlighted by several school-based participants. A small number of school-based participants who had previously been very involved with universities were aware that there were programmes and activities which they were not told about or invited to be part of. This appeared to cause further confusion within schools as to the eligibility of particular schools and individual pupils for different programmes and events. University participants discussed the challenges of selecting schools who met the criteria of their – differing – APPs, and of managing schools who were then seen as less desirable.

The desirability of schools appeared driven by a conflict. Schools which universities had historically worked with most frequently, usually those with high attainment at GCSE and A Level, are also those with the highest rates of progression to HE. Given that, as discussed in Chapter 3, attainment is highly correlated with socioeconomic factors, the demographics of these schools is unlikely to include high numbers of pupils from low participation backgrounds, as defined by the OfS. In her interview, Mary discussed the shift that Howell University was making as a result of the new regulatory framework;

> 'The Student Recruitment and Access Teams were separated out but actually, because there's a new APP, there's a lot of synergy between [them] […] because effectively what our targets are in terms of diversifying that student body, we can't achieve that if we deliver activities with independent schools and grammar schools etc. We have to target the same schools that [the] Access [Team] are targeting. So there is definitely blending and merging together with those activities now.'

This has led to a reduction in the amount of activity that is being undertaken with grammar and private schools, in order to increase capacity for working with schools who have high numbers of pupils who correspond to target groups set out in Howell University's APP. Mary was concerned that this would create complaints once these schools started to become aware that the change had taken place, sharing her concern that 'there may be a pushback later in the year when, you know, when they grasp the fact that we're saying no or we're not approaching them.' However, at the time of interview the new focus was still in its infancy. This study did not include grammar or private schools, so I was not able to consider the perspectives of staff within these schools. However, the study did include Bettany School (HP, HPHS, HPHSD), which had high levels of progression and a relatively low number of disadvantaged pupils. James, the Deputy Head, was aware of the increase in targeted programmes in which Bettany School was, as he described it, 'not the target market'. When asked why that was the case he replied, 'we are already getting kids into universities.' James did not appear unduly upset about this, although as a state school Bettany was still able to take part in many of the broader activities available.

Conversely, some school-based participants reported a significant upswing in the level of engagement and proactive contacts from universities they had received, demonstrating the narrowing of enactment seen in the new 'readerly policies' (Ball, 1994). Several, such as Joyce, the Head of Careers at Moore Academy (N/A) seemed unsure why this was the case, sharing that she was 'pleased it's happening but it would be useful to know what they want

from us and why all of a sudden'. As discussed in Chapter 7, the separate nature of school and university regulation, and the lack of communication between the two sectors, has exacerbated the confusion. Many school-based participants were unaware of the regulatory changes to university access and participation, and how it may have changed the desirability of engaging with particular schools.

Some school-based participants in schools who had a high number of pupils who met low participation criteria reported being overwhelmed with the number of opportunities which were now being offered to them. Constance, the Head of Careers at Maynard School (HPD, HPHSD) talked about the difficulty in, 'keeping tabs on what we're offered, and for who, and when we need to do it by.' This surge in targeted opportunities also meant that within any given school, particular pupils were being identified for multiple interventions, something Constance was frustrated by suggesting that: 'I've got kids who I don't think, and their teachers don't think, are right for a programme, who I am being told I have to put on because they're the only ones eligible and then I've got kids who don't get anything at all because they don't tick the right boxes.' In this sense, school-university relationships have become more specific, with different experiences within schools and year groups depending on the characteristics of each individual. Other school-bases staff, such as Kurt, University Progression Lead at Moore Academy (N/A), were overwhelmingly positive about this additional interest, suggesting that programmes such as NECOP, 'give us a chance to get going and find out about this stuff [events and activities being offered]'.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the way in which school and university interactions are influenced by the extent to which each institution meets the needs of the other, a state I have termed 'desirability'. Some schools and universities are seen as more desirable to work with than others, which creates a hierarchy in both sectors. The criteria for university desirability, including league table rankings, mission groups and UCAS tariff scores, all influence how schools see different institutions, whereby some universities such as those in the Russell Group, Oxbridge, and those at the top of the league tables are prioritised by schools over 'local universities', who do not fall into these groups. School desirability criteria are more fluid, and have been influenced by the recent change in regulatory processes to better incentivise work with schools who have historically had low participation rates in HE.

This chapter has drawn upon the ideas of choice within a marketised HE landscape. In doing so, it suggests that institutional habitus - the set of dispositions and behaviours that are products of a university or school's collective past experiences, staff and pupils - plays a significant role in how schools and universities form relationships, and enables some schools to build better relationships more easily than others. However, regulatory pressure has significantly increased the desirability of some schools for universities, and this appears to have begun to reverse some of these trends, with schools with historically low participation rates receiving recent increased focus from universities.

Chapter 11 - Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis has examined the relationships between schools and universities regarding progression to HE. It has questioned what the characteristics of school-university relationships in this sphere are, and how they vary. As this thesis outlines, there are key differences between the notion of 'partnership working', and the ways in which schools and universities interact. Chapters 7 to 10 have examined the regulatory environment in which schools and universities operate, the notion of partnership working and how this is enacted on the ground, and the ways in which the age of pupils and the desirability of both schools and universities influence their interactions.

This concluding chapter draws these different threads together in the context of the initial research questions. It sets out some of the limitations of this study, areas for further research, and discusses the ways in which these findings might be understood in a post-pandemic world. Finally, this thesis has problematised the ways in which schools and universities interact, but recognises that this is only the first step towards finding solutions. This chapter finishes with some initial recommendations for changes in policy and practice as a result of my findings.

Research Questions

As demonstrated in the different chapters, there are multiple overlaps between these research questions which are used as a guide to explore the wider landscape of school-university interactions.

1. How do schools and universities work together in the sphere of progression to HE?

This thesis has examined the relationships between schools and universities regarding progression to HE. However, in posing this question, I recognise that neither the school, nor university, sector is homogenous, and this is reflected in the multifaceted ways in which school-university relationships have manifested themselves across the sector. The experiences of the schools and universities who took part in this study were equally diverse.

Below, I break this overarching research question down into four sub questions in order to better capture the multiplicity of experiences.

1a) How does the regulatory landscape in which schools and universities operate influence school-university relationships?

This thesis has explored the foundational influence of their different regulatory systems on the relationships between schools and universities. Chapter 7 explored the ways in which the increase in formal policy and regulation related to progression to HE over recent years has been enacted in schools and universities. It draws upon enactment theory to argue that schools and universities enact policy related to HE progression in very different ways, driven by different regulatory systems and policies, which measure different things, and have different aims. It finds that, as policy surrounding progression to HE has become more 'readerly' (Ball, 1994) in both sectors, enactment is increasingly driven by processes of performativity, associated with the introduction of metrics and performance measures. These more readerly policies can be seen in the introduction of APPs, in national access and participation targets for universities by the OfS, and in the use of destinations data and the launch of the new Careers Strategy (Department for Education, 2017) for schools, which has created a more prescriptive framework for CIAG, notably the Gatsby Benchmarks (Department for Education, 2018).

Although policy across both sectors has become more prescriptive, this is in the context of very different wider regulatory systems. Schools operate in a high stakes accountability system where CIAG and destinations are not given the same value as GCSE (and A Level) attainment. This contrasts with the university sector, where access and participation are increasingly closely regulated within a system where institutions expect high levels of autonomy. Where universities have highly developed strategies for access and participation, in the form of APPs, mandated by the regulator, this is not reflected in schools, where performativity is focused on different policy priorities. Destinations data in particular is 'seen to be done' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 56); treated as bureaucratic exercise rather than offering a meaningful way of helping schools to support progression to HE.

The effect of this on school-university relationships is to create, at best mismatched, and at worst conflicting, aims across the two sectors, where schools are focused upon attainment

at GCSE, and universities are focused upon the progression rates of particular under-represented groups to their institution. The use of different metrics and datasets in the two sectors to set targets for progression to HE, such as the use of FSM data in schools to define disadvantage, and POLAR4 data in universities to define low participation, causes further confusion and contradictions.

Finally, those working in both sectors are not clear on who does or should hold responsibility for progression to HE, which is influenced by many factors outside of the control of schools and universities. Both suggest that more responsibility should be taken by the other sector. This sense of siloed working runs contrary to what is needed for productive collaboration. This underpins the discussion in subsequent analysis chapters, 8, 9 and 10.

1b) To what extent can the interactions between schools and universities be understood as partnership working?

Chapter 8 develops a critical discussion of partnership working to better understand how we can recognise and define the interactions between schools and universities within progression to HE. It examines partnership working in other areas where schools and universities interact to consider its key characteristics. It finds that 'partnership' as it is conceived in the literature cannot be applied to school-university interactions within the sphere of progression to HE, and instead suggests that we use the term 'relationships' as a more appropriate descriptor. This is in part due to the lack of 'common problems' (Goodlad, 1988) caused by the variations in the regulatory landscapes of both sectors. Partnership working also requires a 'reciprocity' which is not found between schools and universities, nor a sense of parity between the institutions. This study finds instead that in a neoliberal, marketised educational environment, schools are positioned as consumers, and universities as service providers, which undermines partnership working.

This study identified several further barriers to partnership working. The stark differences in the material resources available to schools and universities creates a power imbalance as the funds underpinning all activities are provided by universities. Both sectors struggle to navigate the other's organisational structures, systems and cultures. Each reported a feeling of alienation rather than alignment. Schools felt that university-run activities were often poorly designed and delivered in terms of meeting their needs, exacerbated by the shifting

regulatory goalposts which have led to a high churn in programmes. The different goals of schools and universities means that programmes rarely meet the needs of both sectors, exacerbating the sense that such activities do not have value.

1c) To what extent do school-university relationships change depending on the age of pupils?

A key variable in the interactions between schools and universities is the age of the pupils involved, as explored in Chapter 9. This is driven in part by the contradictory priorities and pressures of schools and universities, where different ages of pupils are deemed both suitable and available by schools and universities at different times, and at different points in their schooling. There is a fragmented approach to progression to HE, whereby pupils receive interventions at points in their education career which meet the regulatory requirements and logistical pressures of schools and universities. This runs contrary to the research base, which suggests that early and ongoing programmes of activity may allow pupils to widen their palette of 'possible selves', and elaborate on these conceptions of the self.

Although there appeared to be significant demand from primary schools, universities appeared reluctant to deliver activities to younger pupils as it was difficult to demonstrate impact within the constraints of the OfS' regulatory framework. In secondary schools, KS3 pupils were often overlooked by both schools and universities, where progression to HE seemed a distant prospect. As pupils entered KS4, schools increasingly focused on GCSE attainment, and time for CIAG was limited. Universities were keen to engage KS5 pupils, although this often took the form of direct recruitment and should not be seen as access and participation work.

1d) How do school and university characteristics influence the nature of school-university relationships?

The way in which schools and universities interact is influenced by the extent to which each institution is perceived to meet the needs of the other. I term this 'desirability'. Desirability is driven by a range of factors, which differ between the school and university sectors. Measures of selectivity such as league tables, mission groups, and particular

categorisations such as Oxbridge, form an important part of determining perceived desirability of universities. However, other logistical factors such as geography, transport and funding are also important to school-based staff. Factors influencing school desirability for university-based staff are less transparent but historically have focused upon high pupil attainment. More recently, regulatory pressure has begun to reverse this, with an increasing focus upon schools with historically low rates of progression to HE whose intakes are now desirable, for example if they have high numbers of pupils from low participation neighbourhoods or those from under-represented groups. This relatively recent change has caused confusion amongst schools, with some schools more able to take advantage of the new criteria for desirability.

2. What is the relevance of the findings of this study for our understanding of access and participation as an initiative to further social mobility?

This study is premised on the problematic notion of education as a vehicle for social mobility explored in Chapter 4. It sets out the limitations of the role education can play in ensuring a more socially mobile society, but suggests that ensuring more equal access to all HE remains a worthwhile aim in the pursuit of social justice. Given that schools provide the only site of mass access to pupils, including those who are currently under-represented in HE, their role remains a crucial part of any strategy for equalising progression rates to HE. Creating an environment in which all schools and universities are able to develop relationships – if not partnerships – in order to contribute to the provision of early and ongoing CIAG should be a key aim. Moreover, given the current hierarchy of HE, school-university relationships should be understood through the lens of ‘desirability’ on both sides and schools with historically low rates of progression to HE should be considered as priorities, particular for highly selective institutions. This study has highlighted the challenges these relationships face, as well as the inconsistencies both between the school and university sectors, and within them.

Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes several contributions to the existing literature. Empirically, it centres on the voices of those based in schools, whose involvement in progression to HE is under-researched. It does this alongside university voices to ensure that this study reflects both sides of what is sometimes positioned as a binary divide.

This thesis has focused on an under-researched geographical area, the North East, in order to consider how progression to HE occurs in a particular physical area outside of London. It does so in part to move away from the dominance of London-centric research to examine what are often criticised as London-centric policies. It also seeks to shine a light on the North East as a region with many particularities regarding progression to HE It is the region with the lowest numbers of students progressing to HE in England. For those who do they are the most likely to remain within their home region. In the pandemic, the North East has suffered particularly acutely in terms of learning loss (Andrews et al., 2021). These characteristics deserve specific focus, in order to make a contribution to knowledge which reflects the uniqueness of the North East region, the challenges it faces, and the ways in which some of these challenges could be addressed.

Theoretically, this thesis draws on policy sociology as an analytical toolkit, in order to understand the relationship between schools and universities in the sphere of progression to HE. In doing so, it applies policy sociology in a new space. First, I use the concept of policy enactment to understand school-university relationships not as uniform, but nuanced and individualised. I draw upon concepts of partnership in order to analyse the relationship between schools and universities in the sphere of progression to HE, and argue that we need to reconsider these 'partnerships' as 'relationships' in order to better understand interactions in this space. I consider how these interactions – and the power balance between schools and universities - changes over the age and KS of pupils by applying the theory of 'possible selves'. In doing so, I argue that the theory of possible selves, despite its limitations, offers an opportunity to move beyond a deficit model of the raising aspirations narrative, and towards a model which recognises the role of structural barriers as well as individual agency. Finally, I suggest that school-university interactions should be considered through the lens of 'desirability', a new way of understanding the ways in which institutional habitus in institutions across both sectors means that schools with historically high rates of progression to HE are better able to forge and sustain relationships with universities.

Rather than considering schools or universities as two silos, throughout this thesis I explore how they interact in what is inherently a shared space.

A Return to a Thesis on Two Levels

As I set out in Chapter 1, this thesis makes an explicit attempt to reconcile the tensions I have experienced as both a practitioner and a researcher. It takes a policy science approach in considering progression to HE activity within the framework in which it exists. I argue that there are inefficiencies, limitations, and areas for improvement within the current system, such as the provision of earlier and more consistent CIAG for pupils across their education, the alignment of regulatory priorities, and better understanding of the barriers faced by both sectors, but particularly schools, in undertaking this work. This thesis also takes a policy scholarship approach, critiquing the framework as limited and limiting, and arguing that such a system cannot achieve its professed aims of a more socially mobile society, because of the structural limitations and conflicting regulatory pressures which undermine such work. As I conclude this thesis, I return to Savage's words as a guiding light for my work; both to act as an 'agitative relationship to power', as well as to 'seek out loose threads' in order to seek 'incremental rearrangement' (2021, p. 282).

Each of my four analysis chapters suggest both the ways in which different elements of the system can be improved, and also the main challenges underpinning these issues. In the section below I draw out some of the key limitations of this study.

Limitations

The scope of this study has resulted in a number of limitations. This research had a relatively narrow focus on schools with sixth forms in the North East of England. Whilst this was important in order to retain a manageable sample size for a doctoral thesis, it ruled out several other research sites including 11-16 schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges. In addition, this study focuses only on non-academically selective schools within the state sector, and does not include any private schools or grammar schools within the sample. Each of these settings would have added richness to this study and would have enabled me to better understand the complexities of different areas of the sector. I felt this to be particularly acute in excluding 11-16 schools from the sample. As my research progressed, I increasingly felt that this group were unheard voices which would have been important to include.

Although this study examines progression to HE, it does not contain the voices of any pupils. Having explored and discontinued pupil interviews during my pilot study, I focused on

ensuring a depth and breadth of staff voices. However, exploring the work undertaken to increase progression to HE from low participation groups inherently includes groups and individuals who are often marginalised and unheard. This study risks excluding the voices of those groups and individuals once again in order to focus on structure and processes which have contributed to this under-representation and marginalisation.

It is also important to acknowledge my own positionality, and how this may have shaped the data I have collected and co-created in this study. I reflected in Chapter 6 some of the ways in which my position as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' may have influenced the way in which my participants answered my questions. In particular, those who referred to things they assumed I knew made me reflect upon the moments which they did not refer to, but their assumptions may shaped their answers. Although the selection of schools using the destinations data to frame this study limited how much I consciously influenced the schools that I approached to take part in this research, my knowledge and preconceptions of some of these schools may have subsequently prejudiced the ways in which I interacted with school participants. Whilst I felt that the benefits of my knowledge of the North East outweighed the downsides to situating the study in the region, this was a personal trade off, the ramifications of which can never be known in totality.

Post Pandemic Implications

I began this PhD in September 2018, before the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world, changing and reshaping so much of daily life. My fieldwork began in July 2019, and I had collected almost all of my interview data by the time the UK locked down in March 2020. The idea of the pandemic 'ending' or society 'learning to live with the virus' remains a complex and multifaceted debate of which the implications on education remain unclear and contested. Whilst there are an abundance of studies being undertaken to better understand the medium and long term impact of Covid-19 on all areas of education, including the COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study (Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, 2021), the full implications of the pandemic, and associated disruption to education, are only now beginning to emerge.

Whilst the fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken prior to Covid-19, the findings remain relevant to the ways in which schools and universities interact going forwards. Young people's experiences of the pandemic have vastly differed (Anders et al., 2021; Andrew et

al., 2020), and inequalities as a result have worsened (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2021; Education Endowment Foundation, 2020; Renaissance Learning & Education Policy Institute, 2021). Findings thus far suggest that learning loss has been felt most acutely by those most disadvantaged and that, as a result of this, the attainment gap between these pupils and their peers has widened (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020). Given research prior to the pandemic which suggests that attainment appears to be the most significant factor in participation in HE (Chowdry et al., 2013; Crawford, 2014; Crawford et al., 2017), I suggest that the findings of this thesis are, if anything, more relevant going forward.

Moreover, although schools and universities have suffered a period of unprecedented disruption, there has been much discussion over the opportunities afforded by the rise of online platforms, and the possibility of 'building back better' – taken to mean differently - in HE (Price, 2021; UPP Foundation, 2020; Vulliamy et al., 2021). Such discussion affords more explicit space and opportunity to 'think differently' (Ball et al., 2012) about the way in which the 'problem' of progression to HE is, as Bacchi calls on us to consider, 'represented to be' (2009), than the day-to-day grind of the education system allows. Perhaps the pandemic will give rise to new discourses, perhaps these discourses will imagine a new way of being within education.

Areas for Further Research

This study has foregrounded a number of challenges within school-university relationships. However, in order to gain a fuller understanding of school-university relationships, further fieldwork should be undertaken in Further Education Colleges. Existing research suggests that FE colleges experience similar challenges to those of schools in this regard (Bhattacharya & Norman, 2021), however, this could be developed to better understand the relationship between universities and colleges in the context of competing interests in a marketised HE environment.

One of the most pressing areas of further research is to better understand the role of primary schools within progression to higher education. This study has found that there appears to be little formal documentation as to how primary schools interact with universities, although several universities mentioned working with primary schools in some capacity. The increasing evidence base for introducing the idea of HE at an early age, and the growing

policy focus, suggests that the role of primary schools within progression to HE will increase in coming years. As of yet, there appears to be little research aimed at understanding the activity which is already taking place, or sharing of best practice across the sector.

There are a wealth of third sector organisations who work with schools and universities to deliver activities which purport to increase progression to HE. These organisations work on local, regional and national levels. These have been evaluated in a myriad of different ways and suggest varying levels of impact on rates of progression to HE as a result of their activities. This study was able only to briefly engage with the organisations which were directly referenced by school or university-based participants. Further research into the role of these organisations, and the ways in which they bridge the gap between schools and universities, may be of value in understanding more practical ways in which the barriers to school-university relationships can be overcome within the current system.

This study is grounded in the North East of England as an area under-represented in current research. Current quantitative data (UCAS, 2019) suggests that progression rates to HE are more similar across the different regions of the UK than they are in the capital. However, the reasons behind these progression rates may differ and this study has focused on one particular region. Replicating this study in another region[s] would help to determine whether school-university relationships are significantly influenced by geography, or whether there remains commonality across different places. In doing so, this would help to build a stronger case for some of the policy recommendations set out below.

Recommendations

This thesis has critically examined policy surrounding progression to HE. In this section I set out some recommendations for policy and practice as a result of this study. These recommendations place the greatest emphasis on national policy changes as, as argued in Chapter 7, such policy creates the environment in which school-university relationships operate. That said, I have included recommendations for the ways in which schools and universities could address some of these issues on a smaller, institutional scale. These recommendations are not exhaustive, and I am in discussion with some of the organisations involved in this study as to how these recommendations could be more practically distilled into accessible suggestions for universities and schools in the region.

National Policy Recommendations

Many of the issues of school-university relationships cannot be solved in isolation by individual institutions in either sector. This is as a result of both structural issues surrounding the way progression to higher education is organised and funded, and regulatory issues of mismatch between the two sectors involved.

1. Improve communication between the DfE, Ofsted and the OfS regarding the expectations surrounding progression to HE.

As discussed in Chapter 7, schools and universities are regulated by different bodies, with different aims, using different metrics for success on an area of shared policy. During my interviews with policymakers, it appeared that there was very little communication between the two regulators and none of my interviews reported any processes whereby those working day-to-day on progression to HE within the two different regulators interacted. Creating a forum for better communication between these teams could lead to greater alignment between the two regulators, and more coherent policymaking for HE progression.

2. Use common data to set targets related to progression to HE.

The use of different metrics by schools, who were monitored by Ofsted using destinations data, and universities, who were regulated using APPs by the OfS, resulted in a lack of shared aims across the two different sectors. Agreeing on shared metrics for success would align school and university efforts to improve progression rates.

Underpinning this, the lack of common data currently used by each sector inhibits the creation of shared metrics. Despite the evidence that the 'most valid and reliable indicators to use are officially verifiable individual-level measures of contextual disadvantage' (Boliver et al., 2019, p. 7), universities do not have access to FSM data, and instead use area based measures such as POLAR4 to identify disadvantage. This leads to confusion surrounding the targeting of pupils, as schools would not use POLAR4 and would solely use FSM data. Using measures common to both sectors would enable shared metrics to be agreed.

3. Incentivise early and longitudinal activities.

Despite the growing evidence base outlined in Chapter 9 for early and sustained intervention activities, the OfS' demand for universities to demonstrate impact has resulted in an increasing, rather than diminishing, focus on Post-16 pupils. This runs contradictory to the research, which not only suggests that intervention should begin at a young age, but that interventions at Post-16 occur too late to affect whether pupils progress to HE and are, at best, a sorting mechanism (Boliver, 2013; Chowdry et al., 2009). Incentivising the focus of activity on younger pupils through APPs would ensure that activities are focused upon the age groups where they will have the greatest impact. Post-16 activity should be categorised and funded as direct recruitment rather than access and participation.

University Recommendations

Whilst policy creates the conditions in which schools and universities work, this study has highlighted a number of ways in which institutional level change could improve school-university relationships.

1. Co-create progression to HE activities with school-based staff.

In order to increase the parity between schools and universities, school staff should be invited to collaborate to create HE progression activities and programmes. Providing schools with the material resources, including paid staff time in order to release staff to undertake this work, should be prioritised. Involving school-based staff in the creation of activities would ensure school perspectives were taken into account throughout the planning process, rather than as an afterthought, or as feedback on a programme post launch.

2. Value teacher judgement in identifying pupils for progression to HE activities.

School-based participants were frustrated that their knowledge of pupils was disregarded in favour of targets based solely on quantitative data. This meant that pupils who school staff did not believe would benefit from interventions were consistently identified, and conversely pupils for whom they believed these activities would be of value were not selected because they did not meet the narrow criteria of individual programmes. Whilst there are well documented challenges of teacher bias in relation to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (Murphy & Wyness, 2020), the lack of dialogue between school and university staff undermines any sense of shared aims.

3. Provide funding to remove the barriers schools report to accessing HE progression activities.

Cuts to funding over the last ten years have reduced the material resources schools have to support pupils across all areas of school life. Providing funding for transport, paid staff cover, and TLRs for those responsible for HE progression would increase the capacity of schools in this area.

4. Design and deliver longitudinal activities.

Despite regulatory incentives to demonstrate short term impact, the OfS has published guidance which encourages sustained programmes over a number of years (2019a). This is also reflected in the DfE's guidance on CIAG strategies in schools (2018a). Designing and delivering multiyear programmes, which begin early, would start to align the needs of schools and universities.

School Recommendations

The final recommendations are for schools. School have been at the centre of this study, yet this research finds that they have the least agency to affect HE progression. These recommendations focus on the two highest impact changes schools could make. The very varied state of CIAG, and specifically HE progression in schools, makes generalised recommendations more challenging.

1. Designate clear contacts in school for progression to HE.

The lack of clarity regarding who is responsible for HE progression, and the piecemeal nature of CIAG responsibilities in some schools, makes identifying the correct contact difficult. It appears many opportunities are being missed, and many school-university relationships flounder, due to misdirected communication. Clearly signposting the contact points for universities, for example by adding this information to the school website, would reduce this problem.

2. Begin HE progression work early, and continue it throughout schooling.

The introduction of the new Careers Strategy, and in particular, the Gatsby Benchmarks, has refocused CIAG. It calls for a ‘stable programme of careers’ (Department for Education, 2018) with the opportunity to embed HE progression work throughout CIAG strategies from KS3. Ensuring pupils access CIAG early, and that these activities are delivered throughout their schooling will improve progression to HE.

Concluding Comments

This research is important and timely. At the time of completion, the UK education sector was facing huge challenges in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, major inequalities in ‘lost learning’, and questions over the long-term implications of the past two years on already widening inequalities. It also documents a period of change to both school and university regulation surrounding progression to HE, and tracks some of the implications of this. Importantly, it highlights the ways in which both sectors should come together in this shared space if we are to make meaningful change to HE progression rates to all universities, and from all schools in the UK.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Top Third Most Selective Institutions (Department for Education)

Aston University

Cardiff University

Central School of Speech and Drama

City University

Courtauld Institute of Art

Glasgow School of Art

Goldsmiths College

Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Heriot-Watt University

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine Kings College London

London School of Economics and Political Science Loughborough University

Queen Mary and Westfield College

Queens University of Belfast

Royal Academy of Music

Royal College of Music

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Royal Holloway and Bedford New College

Royal Veterinary College

School of Oriental and African Studies

St Georges Hospital Medical School

University College London

University of Aberdeen

University of Bath

University of Birmingham

University of Bristol

University of Cambridge

University of Durham

University of East Anglia

University of Edinburgh

University of Exeter

University of Glasgow

University of Kent

University of Lancaster
University of Leeds
University of Leicester
University of Liverpool
University of Manchester
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
University of Nottingham
University of Oxford
University of Reading
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University of St Andrews
University of Strathclyde
University of Surrey
University of Sussex
University of Warwick
University of York

(Department for Education, 2017b)

Appendix 2: Destinations Data Broken Down for School Selection

Table 14: High Progression to HE (HP)

Ranking	School Name	Local Authority	Total No. Pupils	No. Disadvantaged Pupils	% Progression to HE	% Progression to HSHE (+ranking)
1	Culver Academy	Redcar and Cleveland	77	6	83	36 (7)
2	School 1	Stockton-on-Tees	94	4	82	33 (9)
3	School 2	South Tyneside	67	8	81	30 (14)
4	School 3	Newcastle upon Tyne	69	16	78	28 (19)
=	School 4	North Tyneside	73	5	78	41 (4)
6	School 5	Durham	112	10	77	44 (2)
7	Stewart College	Gateshead	130	13	75	42 (3)
8	Bettany School	Durham	156	11	74	59 (1)

The schools in Table 14 send the highest percentage of their pupils to HE compared to all mainstream state schools with sixth forms in the North East. All the schools listed are significantly above the national average of 59%.

Another school was initially ranked seventh in this category however, its recent conversion from an independent to a free school in 2012, the very small numbers in the KS5 cohort (22) and the subsequent suppression of some of the data has meant the school has been excluded from the dataset.

Table 15: High Progression to Highly Selective HE (HPHS)

Ranking	School Name	Local Authority	Total No. Pupils	No. Disadvantaged Pupils	% Progression to HE (+ranking)	% Progression to HSHE

1	Bettany School	Durham	156	11	74 (9)	59
2	School 5	Durham	112	10	77 (6)	44
3	Stewart College	Gateshead	130	13	75 (8)	42
4	School 4	North Tyneside	73	5	78 (4)	41
5	School 6	Newcastle Upon Tyne	113	12	71 (15)	39
6	School 7	Stockton-on-Tees	141	5	68 (19)	37
7	Culver Academy	Redcar and Cleveland	77	6	83 (1)	36
8	School 8	Northumberland	218	12	71 (16)	34

Schools in Table 15 send the highest percentage of their pupils to highly selective HE compared to all mainstream state schools with sixth forms in the North East. All the schools listed are significantly above the national average of 24%. Bettany School stands out as a significant outlier, sending 15% more of its pupils to highly selective HE than the second ranked school, despite being ranked ninth for progression to HE more broadly.

Of the eight schools listed, five appear in both categories; Bettany School, School 4, Stewart College, School 5 and Culver Academy. Of the remaining eight schools which appear in either ranking, another school is in the top ten for both rankings (School 1). All the schools which appear in either ranking remain in the top twenty for both progression measures.

Table 16: Average Progression to HE (AP)

Ranking	School Name	Local Authority	Total No. Pupils in Y13	No. Disadvantaged Pupils	% Progression to HE	% Progression to HSHE (+ranking)
37	School 9	Sunderland	124	9	60	16 (48)
=	School 10	Redcar and Cleveland	25	9	60	SUPP
National Average = 59% Progression						

39	Ferrars Community High School	Northumberland	149	15	59	24 (29)
=	School 11	Northumberland	61	11	59	11 (62)
40	School 12	Gateshead	177	16	58	24 (29)
=	School 13	North Tyneside	144	13	58	19 (39)
=	School 14	Durham	106	15	58	18 (42)
=	School 15	Gateshead	74	17	58	16 (48)

Table 16 shows the schools with sixth forms in the North East which send a percentage of pupils to HE in line with the national average of 59%. The national average is used rather than the North East average in order to understand schools performing at the national average, as opposed to the regional average.

Table 17: Low Progression (LP)

Ranking	School Name	Local Authority	Total No. Pupils in Y13	No. Disadvantaged Pupils	% Progression to HE	% Progression to HSHE (+ranking)
69	Dene School	Newcastle upon Tyne	126	39	40	8 (65)
70	School 16	Durham	56	12	39	18 (42)
=	Annersley Academy	Northumberland	41	11	39	0 (69)
72	School 17	Newcastle upon Tyne	21	2	38	SUPP
73	School 18	Northumberland	65	11	34	5 (67)
74	School 19	North Tyneside	30	6	33	SUPP
=	School 20	Northumberland	42	9	33	SUPP
76	School 21	Newcastle upon Tyne	80	49	31	4 (68)
77	School 22	Newcastle upon Tyne	52	33	27	SUPP
79	School 23	Redcar and Cleveland	26	10	19	SUPP

Table 17 shows schools with the lowest progression to HE in the region. All schools are significantly below the national average for progression to HE of 59%.

Two schools which would have appeared in this dataset have been removed. Both are studio schools, which are part of local MATs, and have been set up with the explicit purpose of facilitating entry to apprenticeships and business. This aim and the self-selecting nature of their cohort suggests that are not useful comparators to other schools with sixth forms.

Table 18: High Disadvantage Progression to HE (HPD)

Ranking	School Name	Local Authority	Total No. Pupils in Y13	No. Disadvantaged Pupils	% Progression to HE ()*	% Progression to HSHE ()*[37]
1	Wilson School	Sunderland	242	28	79 (67)	14 (23)
2	School 24	Middlesbrough	86	18	78 (65)	SUPP (17)
3	School 3	Newcastle upon Tyne	69	16	75 (78)	25 (28)
=	School 25	Newcastle upon Tyne	299	28	75 (68)	14 (27)
5	School 26	North Tyneside	257	11	73 (68)	SUPP (30)
=	School 27	North Tyneside	57	11	73 (65)	SUPP (26)
7	Crescent College	Darlington	114	17	71 (66)	41 (32)
8	School 28	South Tyneside	115	15	67 (70)	SUPP (27)
=	School 29	Middlesbrough	147	39	67 (67)	SUPP (15)
=	School 30	Middlesbrough	90	27	67 (71)	SUPP (14)
=	Maynard School	Hartlepool	120	24	67 (73)	25 (28)

Table 18 shows the schools with the highest percentage of their disadvantaged pupils progressing to HE. The number of disadvantaged pupils within each cohort varies

[37] In brackets is non-disadvantaged HE progression rates for each school for comparison.

significantly from 11 to 39 pupils, meaning the net numbers of pupils will vary. Progression for disadvantaged pupils within each of these schools is above both the national average for progression of disadvantaged pupils in school sixth forms of 56%, and the national average for all pupils of 59%. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils progressing to HE is higher than their non-disadvantaged peers in the case of six of the schools listed.

Table 19: High Disadvantaged Progression to Highly Selective HE (HPHSD):

Ranking	School Name	Local Authority	Total No. Pupils in Y13	No. Disadvantaged Pupils	% Progression to HE ()*	% Progression to HSHE ()[38]
1	Crescent College	Darlington	114	17	71 (66)	41 (32)
2	Ferrars Community High School	Northumberland	149	15	53 (59)	33 (24)
3	Bettany School	Durham	155	11	55 (74)	27 (59)
=	School 31	Newcastle upon Tyne	187	22	59 (56)	27 (26)
5	School 3	Newcastle upon Tyne	69	16	75 (78)	25 (28)
=	Maynard School	Hartlepool	120	24	67 (73)	25 (28)
7	Stewart College	Gateshead	130	13	62 (75)	23 (42)
8	School 32	South Tyneside	157	31	45 (55)	16 (16)
9	School 33	Northumberland	133	20	60 (61)	15 (24)
=	School 34	Gateshead	92	20	65 (63)	15 (20)

Table 19 shows the schools with the highest percentage of their disadvantaged pupils progressing to highly selective HE. Again, the number of disadvantaged pupils within each school varies significantly from 11 to 31 pupils, meaning the net numbers of pupils will vary.

[38] In brackets is non-disadvantaged progression rates for each school for comparison.

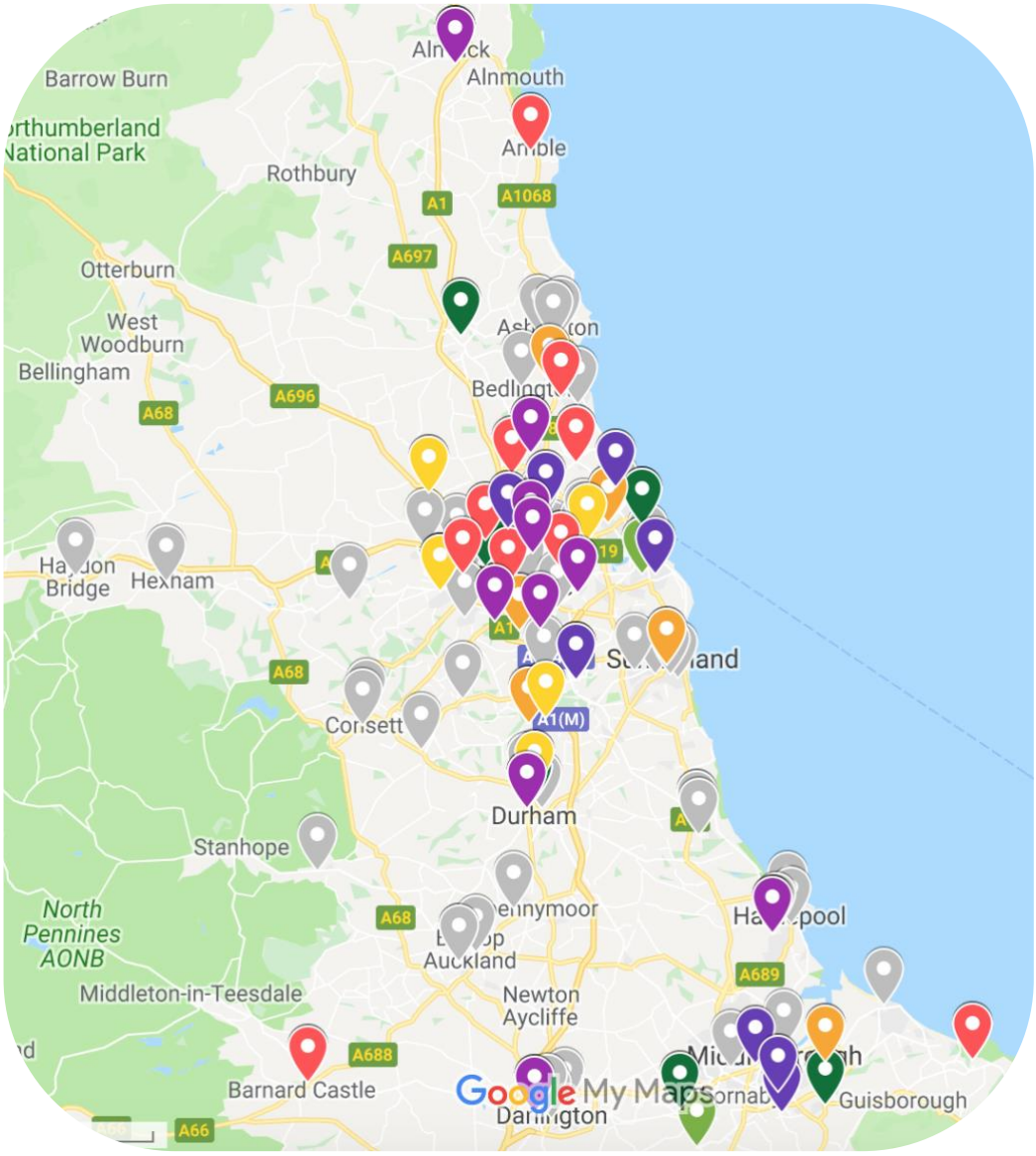
Progression for disadvantaged pupils within each of these schools is equal to or above both the national average for disadvantaged pupils in school sixth forms of 15% and the top six schools are above the national average for all pupils of 24%. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils progressing to HE is higher than or equal to their non-disadvantaged peers in the case of four of the schools listed. Of the 82 schools remaining in the pool, 9 schools sent 0 disadvantaged pupils to highly selective HE and 56 schools had supressed data for this subset, suggesting very low numbers of pupils included. Only 17 schools had available data which ranged from 8% to 41% of their disadvantaged pupils progressing to highly selective HE.

Table 20: Geographical Spread of Schools Across LAs

Local Authority	No. of Secondary Schools	No. of Secondary Schools with Sixth Form	No. Schools in each category								Total
			HP	HSHP	AP	HSAP	LP	DAHP	DAHSP	No SF	
Gateshead	10	8	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	5
Newcastle upon Tyne	13	13	1	1	0	0	4	2	2	0	10
North Tyneside	12	9	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	8
South Tyneside	10	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Sunderland	18	5	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	5
Hartlepool	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Middlesbrough	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Redcar and Cleveland	10	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	5
Stockton-on-Tees	13	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	5
Durham	33	18	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	3	11
Darlington	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Northumberland	17	17	0	1	2	3	3	0	2	0	11
Total:	**157**	**89**	**8**	**8**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**10**	**8**	**72**

Table 20 illustrates the number of secondary schools in each LA and the number of those secondary schools which offer Post 16 provision. Some schools may be double or triple counted as they appear in more than one category. Larger LAs tend to have a great number of schools represented across the categories however, within every category there are schools from across the region.

Map 2: Schools with Sixth Forms across the North East.



Appendix 3: Pen Portraits of Schools

Annersley Academy

Annersley Academy is an 11-18 school, located in a coastal town in Northumberland. It is part of a large MAT which it joined in 2013. The school is in an area of high socioeconomic deprivation, with over 50% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The town's economy was built on shipbuilding and coal mining, industries which have suffered significant decline over recent decades, although there have been recent attempts to regenerate the area. The town has poor transport connections to the rest of the region. The school has high levels of absence, high numbers of pupils becoming NEET and has a Progress 8 score of well below average. The school has been graded 'Requires Improvement' consistently by Ofsted for a number of years, and there have been several changes to the school's leadership team, including the headteacher, during this period. The school has historically had a Sixth Form however, the number of pupils progressing into the Sixth Form has dwindled in recent years and the school did not recruit a Year 12 intake for 2019-2020. The number of qualifications offered to Post 16 pupils is very narrow because of the small number of pupils and includes A Levels and BTEC qualifications. The future of the Sixth Form was uncertain during the period of this research. The school had very low numbers of pupils progressing to HE.

Bettany School

Bettany School is a large 11-18 non-selective comprehensive school located in a city in the North East. It has not academised, remaining a Local Authority school. It has been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted for its previous two inspections in 2011 and 2015 and previous to that was rated 'Good'. The school is consistently highly ranked in regional and national performance tables at both GCSE and A Level. The school has a highly competitive Sixth Form which takes pupils from many other schools across the local area. The entry requirements for the Sixth Form are some of the highest in the North East. The Sixth Form was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2015. The Sixth Form offers only A Level courses. The school sends a significant number of pupils to Oxford and Cambridge each year, as well as other highly selective universities. It has a below average proportion of Pupil Premium pupils. The school intake includes many children whose parents work in the university in the city. It has an 'above average' Progress 8 score and a significantly higher proportion of their pupils attain a 5+ in English and maths GCSE than the national average.

Culver Academy

Culver Academy is a larger than average school in the south of the region. The school academised in in 2012 and is the lead school in a small MAT. Ofsted recently rated the school ‘Good’, downgrading it from its previous ‘Outstanding’ rating. The school has slightly lower than average proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The Progress 8 score is below average, and significantly lower than average proportion of pupils are entered for Ebacc. A slightly above average proportion of pupils at the school gain a 5+ in English and maths at GCSE. The Sixth Form provision was judged to be ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted in their recent inspection. It is a relatively small school Sixth Form which focuses on traditional A Level subjects. The vast majority of pupils who progress onto the Sixth Form are recruited from the school. The Sixth Form is run quite separately from the school and occupies a different building on the site.

Dene School

Dene School is one of the largest schools in England, located in a large city in the north of the region. The school is part of a small MAT which includes the Dene School and one other small studio school. The school was rated ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted in 2009 and ‘Good in’ 2012 but since 2016 it has been given a ‘Requires Improvement’ rating. The Sixth Form has been rated as ‘Good’ in both 2016 and 2019. The school has a much higher than average proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. It has a Progress 8 score significantly below the national average and a lower than average proportion of pupils achieve 5+ in both maths and English at GCSE. The school has a significantly higher proportion of NEET pupils than the national average. The Sixth Form includes around 150 pupils in each year group and offers a mix of BTEC and A Level qualifications. It also blends Level 2 and Level 3 learning pathways. Pupils are accepted into the Sixth Form without maths and English GCSE at 4+. The entry requirements for the Sixth Form are significantly lower than the majority of other Sixth Forms in the area. The pupils in the Sixth Form are almost entirely pupils who have been recruited from the lower school, with very few external pupils joining in Year 12. The Dene School has very low rates of progression to HE and very few pupils progress to highly selective universities. The School was one of the pilot schools for the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Ferrars Community High School

The Ferrars School is a larger than average comprehensive school which has not academised. It is a rural school situated in the north of the region. The school was graded

as ‘Good’ by Ofsted in 2017. It has a below average proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The school’s Progress 8 score is below average and the percentage of pupils entering the Ebacc is below average. The school has a large Sixth Form and a high proportion of pupils remain at the school for Post 16. The Sixth Form offers a larger range of subjects than many school Sixth Forms, this is partly enabled by its relatively high pupil numbers, but is also because the school tries to cater to a wide range of pupil interests and needs due to the lack of other options for pupils in the area. Although the school is very rural, it is relatively close to a train station which is served by the East Coast Mainline, making it unexpectedly well connected nationally.

Linton Academy

Linton Academy is an average sized secondary school located in a city in the centre of the region. The school academised in 2012 and is now the lead school within a small local MAT with one other school, Moore Academy. The school was rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted in 2017, and had received the same rating for multiple years before this. The school has a slightly above average proportion of pupils who are eligible for Pupil Premium funding. It has a Progress 8 score well below average, with an average proprtion of pupils gaining a 5+ in English and maths at GCSE. The school opened a Sixth Form in September 2014, having hitherto catered for pupils from 11-16. The Sixth Form was rated ‘Good’ during the 2017 Ofsted inspection. The Sixth Form focuses on traditional A Level subjects with a very small number of BTEC qualifications. The school has an explicit focus on social mobility through progressing to HE and it has relationships with different universities across the UK.

Maynard School

Maynard School is a larger than average 11-18 Catholic comprehensive school in a town in the south of the region. The town is a post-industrial coastal town which has suffered economically from the significant decline in the shipbuilding and steelworks after the Second World War. Maynard School is currently the only school in its MAT, but it is looking to bring more schools into the MAT. The school had been consistently judged ‘Good’ by Ofsted, however in 2017 it was given a ‘Requires Improvement’ judgement. The school has a slightly below average Progress 8 score. The proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is around the national average. The Sixth Form retained a ‘Good’ judgement in 2017. Most of the Sixth Form pupils are recruited from Year 11 pupils at the school, with a very small number joining the Sixth Form from other schools. The Sixth Form has around 200 pupils

and offers mainly traditional A Levels subjects and a very small number of BTEC qualifications. The school has high levels of progression to HE and particularly high levels of progression for disadvantaged pupils. The school is a Careers Hub School.

Moore Academy

Moore Academy is part of the same MAT as Linton Academy. It is a smaller than average 11-16 school located in the same city as Linton Academy. The school has a smaller than average intake and serves its local community, which is predominantly an estate with high levels of socioeconomic deprivation. It has a very high proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The school was rated 'Inadequate' by Ofsted in 2013 and in its most recent inspection was graded 'Requires Improvement'. The school has had significant change in leadership, and high staff turnover, in recent years. The school has a below average Progress 8 score and a low proportion of pupils entering Ebacc qualifications at GCSE. The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ in English and maths GCSE is significantly lower than the national average. The school does not have any Post 16 provision so all pupils leave at the end of Year 11.

Stewart College

Stewart College is a larger than average sized 11-18 school serving a town to the north of the region. It is the founding member of a small MAT, which has subsequently taken on a small number of other local schools. Stewart College has been graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in its most recent inspections. It has a well above average Progress 8 score, very high Ebacc entry, and the proportion of pupils who achieve a 5+ in maths and English at GCSE is significantly above the national average. The school is significantly oversubscribed and has admissions criteria based on a non-verbal reasoning test after which pupils are admitted on a distribution curve. The school also uses the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) as part of its admissions, which describes as a tool to ensure a 'social mix' of the catchment within its intake. Despite this, the school's admission test and the strongly Christian ethos it espouses have given it a local reputation for being exclusive. The school has a lower than average proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium. The school has a successful Sixth Form which is largely recruited from its Year 11 cohort, with a small number of pupils joining from other schools each year. The Sixth Form offers a relatively narrow range of what is described as 'traditional' A Levels and a small number of BTEC

qualifications. The school sends high numbers of pupils to HE from its Sixth Form and a high number of pupils to highly selective universities.

Wilson School

Wilson School is a Catholic 11-18 comprehensive school serving a community on the outskirts of a city in the centre of the North East. It is part of a MAT with other Catholic schools across the region. It is a larger than average school with a very large Sixth Form of over 400 pupils. Wilson School serves a relatively affluent area and has a lower than average percentage of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. It has been graded ‘Good’ by Ofsted consistently since 2007, most recently in 2017. The school has an average Progress 8 score and an above average proportion of pupils who attain 5+ in English and maths at GCSE. Although the Sixth Form is within the school, it operates very separately and autonomously. The Sixth Form offers a relatively broad range of A Level subjects and a smaller number of BTEC qualifications. The school has a relatively high number of pupils who progress to HE.

Appendix 4: Research Timeline

Half Term	Time Period	School Calendar	Research Timeline
1A	September and October	New academic year, staff and pupils have been away for six weeks. Schools have greater capacity for new ideas and demands on time.	Undertake research in schools.
1B	November to Christmas	Long term so pupils and staff are very tired towards the end of term.	Undertake research in schools.
2A	January and February	Schools begin to focus on GCSE and A Level exams.	Contacting for any follow up interviews or materials.
2B	February and March	Revision for GCSE and A Level exams becomes dominating. High pressure period for staff leaving little resource for additional demands on time.	Do not contact.
3A	April and May	GCSE and A Level period. Full school focus on exams.	Do not contact.
3B	June and July	Post GCSE and A Level exams – Year 11 and Year 13 pupils will not be in school, teachers have 'gained time' and are planning for the next academic year.	Requests and information emailed to schools and followed up. Visits scheduled for 1A and 1B wherever possible.
Summer Holidays	July and August	Few staff are available during this period and schools will not be staffed. Some staff (notably headteachers and SLT) use this time to clear out inboxes but this will be sporadic.	Respond to any emails which come in during this period but do not expect quick replies, decision making or access to information.

Appendix 5: Fieldwork Plan

Activity	Month												
	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July
Pilot Study													
Analyse pilot study and adapt materials.													
Contact schools to arrange fieldwork													
Fieldwork in schools													
Interviews with universities													
Interviews with policymakers													
Arrange observation of activities discussed in interviews													
Collect documents from participants													

Interview Schedule

School:	
Name	
Role:	
Interiew Date:	
Transcription Date:	

Reminders:

- Introduce self and research.
- Explain about the audio recording and turn on.
- Confirm information sheet received
- Any questions or concerns?
- Confirm verbal consent and written consent.
- Confirm amount of time for interview and finish time.

Introductory Questions:

1. What is your role the school / what does your role mean in your school?
2. Length of time, other roles in school.
3. Does anyone else work on progression in school?
4. How would you describe the school?
5. Demographics, location, type of school, changes, difference between Sixth Form and lower school. Comparison to other schools in the area.

Progression to University:

6. How many pupils in your school go onto university?
7. Are there progression pathways you prefer or encourage pupils to go down?
8. Who is responsible for talking to the pupils about university?
9. Do you have an overall strategy?
10. Are there any specific events or situations that you see as being particularly important for giving pupils information about university?
11. Outside of the people who work directly on progression, how do other staff get involved? E.g. UCAS references, trips, talking to pupils?
12. Do pupils visit universities?
13. Which ones? When? Who goes on these trips?

Accountability:

14. Does your school use Destinations Data?
15. Do you use the Gatsby Benchmarks?
16. Do you ever get asked progression, careers or destinations by Ofsted?
17. Do you use anything else to plan your progression work?
18. How to you promote the school and the Sixth Form to parents and pupils?
19. Who do you think is held accountable for the number of pupils progressing to university?
20. Who do you think should be accountable?

Disadvantaged Pupils:

21. Are disadvantaged pupils at your school more or less likely to go to university than their peers?
22. Do you do anything specifically aimed at disadvantaged pupils?
23. Is there anymore accountability for disadvantaged pupils destinations?

School-University Relationships:

24. How does your school work with universities?
25. Are there any universities your school has a particularly good relationship with?
26. What does that look like?
27. Are there particular universities or types of universities that you put effort into building relationships with? (Oxbridge)
28. Are there any universities who you think are try hard / are good at building relationships with schools?
29. Are there any barriers to building relationships with universities?
30. Have you ever had a bad relationship or experience with a university?
31. Is your school part of any programmes which support pupils to go to university?
32. Which ones? What are the benefits? Do you think they are effective? Are there any problems with these schemes?
33. Are there any that are particularly effective or accessible?
34. Do you work with NECOP, NERAP or Opportunity North East as part of your work?
35. Do you think there is more universities could be doing to build relationships with schools?

University Types:

36. Do you use the Russell Group as a grouping when you talk to pupils?
37. How do you describe it?

38. Do you use any of the following: Million Plus University Alliance, 1994 Group, GuildHE
39. Do you ever use any other sort of categorisation or ranking of universities when speaking to pupils? E.g. highly selective, DfE top 30.
40. Do you use league tables to inform your work or when you speak to pupils?
41. Do pupils use categorisations or rankings to pick universities?

Final Thoughts:

42. Do you think how you work with universities will change?
43. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about?

Reminders:

- Thank you very much for your time.
- Just to check (having done the interview!) that you are happy for me to use this interview as part of my research.
- If you have any questions or change your mind about being included in this research, you have my contact details.
- Ask about any follow up e.g. sessions or documents mentioned.
- Turn off audio recording.

Interview Schedule

University:	
Name	
Role:	
Interiew Date:	
Transcription Date:	

Reminders:

- Introduce self and research.
- Explain about the audio recording and turn on.
- Confirm information sheet received
- Any questions or concerns?
- Confirm verbal consent and written consent.
- Confirm amount of time for interview and finish time.

Introductory Questions:

1. What is your role in the university / what does that role mean at the university?
2. How would you describe the university?
   a. Demographics, location, type of university, changes, comparison
3. How is your team structured?
   a. How many people? Other teams working on similar work?

Working with Schools:

1. How many schools does your team work with each year?
2. How do you find schools to work with?
   a. Selection criteria? Geography? Disadvantage (what sort?)?
3. What do you do when schools contact you that don't meet your criteria e.g. private?
4. What is the aim of your team when you work with schools?
   a. Pre 16
   b. Post 16
   c. Different groups?
5. At what age do you start working with pupils in schools?

6. How do you communicate with schools?
7. Are there any specific events or situations that you see as being particularly important for giving pupils information about university?
8. How many schools would your team like to work with each year?

School-University Relationships:

1. What makes a school easy to work with? Are there schools that you think are easier to work with?
2. What difference does this make?
3. Are there any schools your team has a particularly good relationship with (you don't have to give names however, you could use them as an example to answer the following questions).
    a. What does this relationship look like?
    b. Who manages it from school?
    c. Who manages it from university?
    d. What do they do?
    e. How long has this been the case for?
4. Do more pupils go onto university from schools that you have a relationship with?
    a. Do they come to your university?
5. Is there a 'typical' school that you find it easier to work with?
6. Have you ever had a bad relationship with a school?
    a. Can you describe it? Why was this?
7. Are there any barriers to building relationships with schools?
8. When you think about the schools you work with usually, do they have higher than average numbers of disadvantaged pupils or lower?
9. On average do you think schools with higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils are easier or harder to work with?
10. Do you work with many schools which don't have a Sixth Form?
    a. Does this change the relationship you have with them?
11. What do you think schools can do to help universities to increase progression to university?
12. Does your university run programmes which support pupils to progress onto university?
    a. Which ones?

b. What are the benefits?
c. Do you think they are effective?
d. Are there any problems with these schemes?

13. Are there any schemes that are particularly effective?
    a. Why?

Non School Based Provision:

9. Do you work with pupils outside of schools?
10. How do you structure this work?
    a. Agencies / organisations?
11. How do you advertise this this?
12. Do you ever speak to parents about university?
    a. What forum?
    b. Is it successful?

Policy Influence:

13. Has the new Office for Students changed how you and your team work?
    a. How?
14. Has it changed how the university sees your team?
    a. Senior involvement?
    b. Funding
    c. Recognition
15. Has it changed how you work with schools?
16. Does your APP influence your day to day work?
17. Have the targets in your APP changed to reflect the new national targets?
18. Do you think APPs are useful?
    a. In what way?
    b. Why not?
19. Who do you think is held accountable for the number of pupils progressing to university?
    a. Schools or universities or neither?
    b. Who do you think should be?
20. Do you feel pressure to make sure pupils progress to university?
21. Are there certain pupils who you feel more pressure than others?

22. Do you think the measures which are currently used are a good way of measuring who progresses to university?

44.

University Type:

1. Do you use any sort of formal categorisation or ranking of universities when speaking to pupils?
    a. Which ones?
    b. Why do you use them?
2. Do you compare yourself to other institutions?
    a. In the NE? In the UK?
    b. Which ones?
    c. Do you have a biggest competitor?
3. Do you think university rankings or perceptions influence how schools work with universities?

Final Thoughts:

1. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Reminders:

- Thank you very much for your time.
- Just to check (having done the interview!) that you are happy for me to use this interview as part of my research.
- If you have any questions or change your mind about being included in this research, you have my contact details.
- Ask about any follow up e.g. sessions or documents mentioned.
- Turn off audio recording.

Appendix 8: Reflections on Pilot Study

Area	What went well…	Even better if…
Pre-Visit Communication	Initial communication went smoothly and I created template emails which can now be sent to other schools to ask for permission to undertake fieldwork.	A final email reminder could have been useful had the contact not been so proactive. Reminders about sending out parental consent forms is important.
Fieldnotes	I spent some time in the local area before and after the visit, which was useful for contextualizing my visit.	Take more time to write fieldnotes as the day progresses – it is much harder to write reflections afterwards and they are not as detailed. Create a template for fieldnotes with some questions to trigger initial thoughts.
Interview Scheduling	My contact at the school understood my brief very clearly and scheduled lots of relevant interviews for me.	Identifying the most relevant people in school to interview is difficult. This will be more challenging in schools in which do not have a proactive contact. Interviews were scheduled back to back which was very tiring and did not give me time to write reflections in between. Schedule interviews with more time in between.
Pupil Interviews	Pupils seemed engaged and laid back. Group interviews were good for ensuring more confidence.	Ask pupils to write name badges and take stickers – this would make it much more personal.

		Don't have more than six pupils as the time doesn't allow everyone to have a voice. Adapt to ensure that the interview questions fit within 45 minutes as lessons are often 50 minutes. Ask for teacher not to be present / find out a way of achieving this as it may influence pupils. Check timings before starting interview to confirm when pupils need to leave. Be clear on what 'best' means before asking pupils to do final pairing activity.
Staff Interviews	Good rapport building, staff seemed happy to give thoughts.	Shorten interview schedule as too many questions for the time. Check timings before starting interview to confirm when staff need to leave. Does the interview schedule collect the data needed to answer all research questions?
Post Visit Communication		Thank you email should be sent the same day / next day. Take email addresses of all adult interviewees so you don't have to

		rely on central point of contact for follow up.
Interview Documents	Pupil interview document worked well to structure interview and gave pupils tasks.	The staff interview document does gather the data I intended. Develop another method or consider whether this data collection is needed. Put a name space on everything! Consider whether the first university listing exercise should be named – what will this data be used for? Is the pupil interview over structured? It did not give much time for free discussion. Check when transcribing. There are lots of pieces of paper for pupils! Can this be condensed? Consider the process and flow of the interviews.
Collection of Documents	Several useful documents identified during the interviews.	Write down or take a photo of the specific documents as soon as mentioned so you can refer back or chase for them later. It is hard to identify these documents – consider how this will be integrated into study.

Appendix 9: Example Transcript Initial Coding

getting ~~that~~ from, and actually when you look at national datasets, the holes in it start becoming bigger whereas schools can often keep track of kids quite well because we get like UCAS report and stuff like that. So in terms of internal data, if it's useful to you, I can forward you an email with raw data in it actually.

SH: That would be cracking if you were able to do that.

[redacted]: Yeah… over three years it averages about 30% go to Russell Group from… Sixth Form.

SH: About 30 you say? 30%?

[OFF TOPIC COMMENTS]

[redacted]: I've found it now. So, it says over three years, higher tariff universities between 30% and 44%. Russell Group between 28% and 54%, so I think on average it's about 30%. And a few every year going onto things like vet school and Oxbridge and stuff like that.

SH: Do you use Destinations Data very much? The official version or your internal data?

[redacted]: Yeah I do now, but it's only been this year that've had any official data for Sixth Form.

SH: Because of the lag time?

[redacted]: Yeah. But erm, in terms of 11-16 you have to have Destinations Data as part of your SEF and so on. I probably use it far more than most because of the Sixth Form and the way the Sixth Form has to run.

SH: So when you say you use it, what do you use it for?

[redacted]: A lot for promotion. We sell the Sixth Form on it being an aspirational place so we kind of say that, look the Russell Group take up is a big draw for people. Also, with working with Opportunity North East and various other people and because it is a specific mission of the Sixth Form and the school's agenda is social mobility we are often in the market for trying to do projects that are related to it. So I will often have to use that as justification for why we're a good partner for something…so it can go into all sorts of different things.

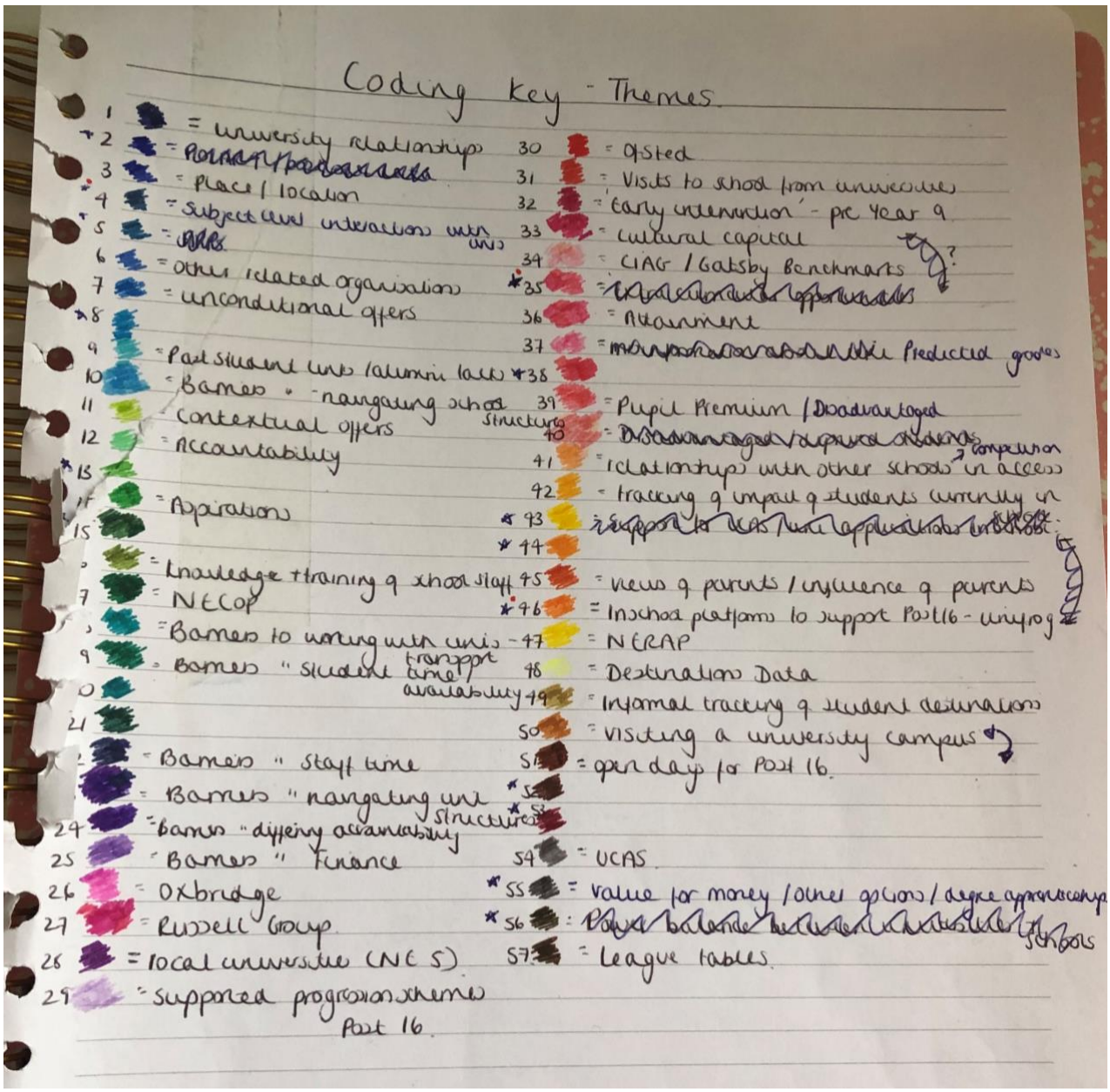
SH: And do you use your internal data or do you use the DfE data?

[redacted]: I use a combination to be as clear as possible. I mean the DfE data, it says similar things, it's just exactly as we took it internally. And also, the other thing is that the DfE data seems to er…erm…er… I'm never quite clear by what you mean by higher tariff, you know which are those universities, Russell Group are a clearer group and that seems, I don't know, it seems to fluctuate a little bit, what they report on it.

SH: So a lot of what you've talked about it specifically progression to university, is that the aim of the Sixth Form to send children to university or are there other destinations?

[redacted]: Yes and no. So when we started, that was the explicit aim, right, it was very intentionally academic erm Sixth Form that was you know, meant to be about connecting to university and that was because that was a specific lack in the area, so the college was not doing it very effectively, so the statistic we had when we were applying for the Sixth Form was that of the cohort of 2013, I think or 2014, those that would've finished Sixth Form in 2014… one of them went onto Russell Group, having gone through the college. So there really wasn't a stable kind of route of progression and er, and I think the other thing is that statistically in Sunderland it's pretty poor as well, so it's something like 17% nationally and 11% in Sunderland. But then, that's current data but when we went back to 2014 it was something like 4%, you

Appendix 10: Building Focused Codes

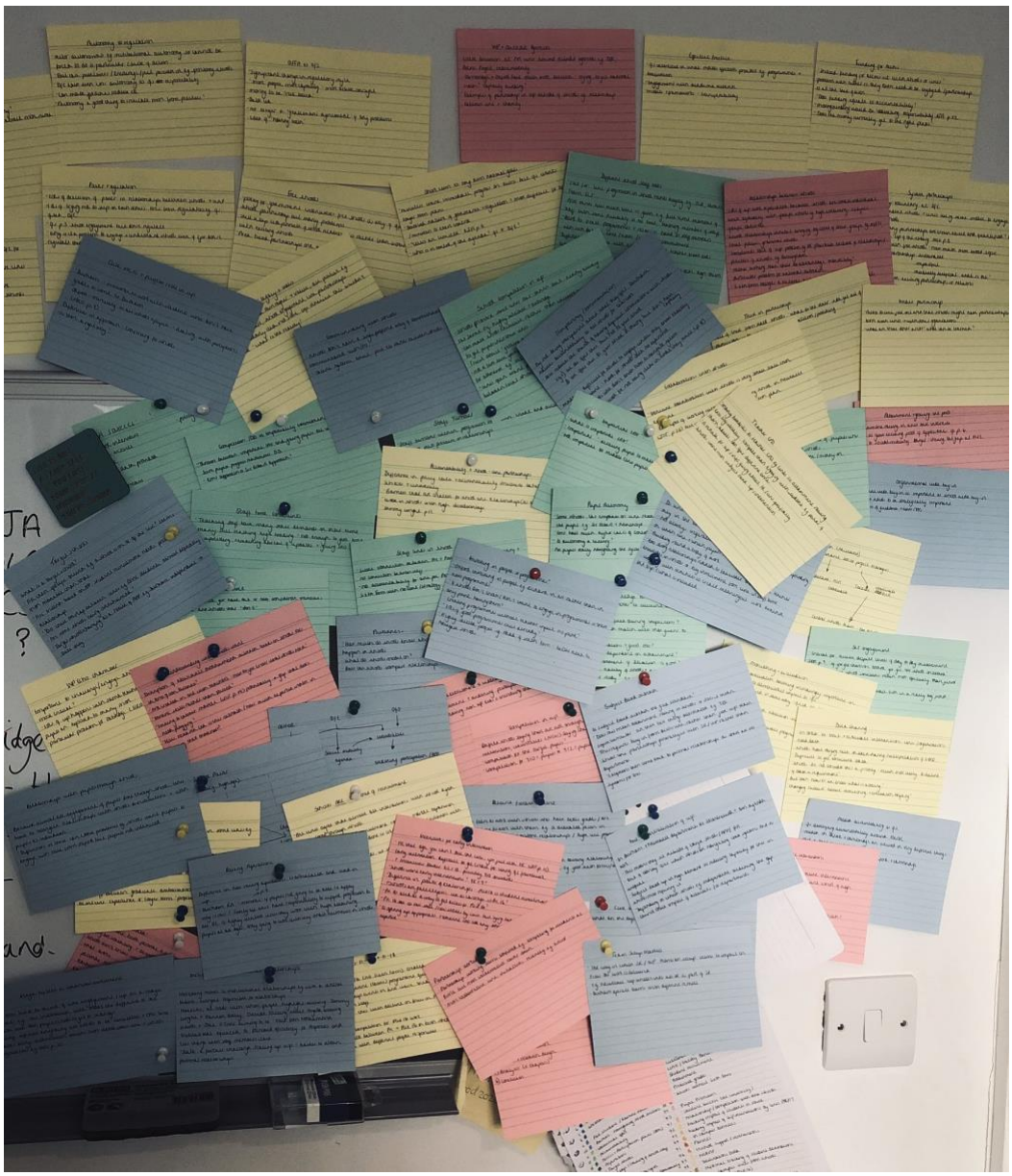


Coding key - Themes

1 = university relationships
2 = [illegible]
3 = Place / location
4 = Subject level interactions with unis
5 = [illegible]
6 = Other related organisations
7 = unconditional offers
8
9 = Past student unis / alumni talk
10 = Barriers - navigating school structure
11 Contextual offers
12 = Accountability
13
14 = Aspirations
15
= knowledge + training of school staff
7 = NEOP
= Barriers to working with unis - transport
9 = Barriers "student time availability
0
21
= Barriers " staff time
= Barriers " navigating uni structures
24 = barriers "differing availability
25 = Barriers " Finance
26 = Oxbridge
27 = Russell Group
28 = local universities (NE S)
29 = supported progression schemes Post 16.

30 = Ofsted
31 = Visits to school from universities
32 = 'Early intervention' - pre Year 9
33 = cultural capital
34 = CIAG / Gatsby Benchmarks
35 = [illegible]
36 = Attainment
37 = [illegible] Predicted grades
38
39 = Pupil Premium / Disadvantaged
40 = [illegible]
41 = relationships with other schools in access comparison
42 = tracking of impact of students currently in school
43 = [illegible]
44
45 = views of parents / influence of parents
46 = In school platforms to support Post 16 - uni prog
47 = NERAP
48 = Destination Data
49 = Informal tracking of student destinations
50 = visiting a university campus
51 = open days for Post 16.
52
53
54 = UCAS
55 = value for money / other options / degree apprenticeships
56 = [illegible] schools
57 = League tables.

Appendix 11: Memos



Appendix 12: Expanded Coding Example

Barriers: Navigating university structures

- RKI p.8, talks about difference in engaging colleges + universities eg Newcastle college highly involved + flexible
  - p. 13, doesn't have any university which stands out as having a good relationship, depends on formal structures eg NCCOP + NERNP
  - p. 13, highlights importance of a named individual - 'there isn't that one person'
  - " connection between sixth form & connectivity + understanding of structures?
- JCL p.1, 'I was trying to forge links' but no longer tow / no successful?
  - p. 7 named examples of unis
- JLO, p.15, 'universities wouldn't share new but many hoops to jump through p.15
- JLO p 16 comparison of expertise + infrastructure with private schools - impact on students attending schools without info
  - " particularly focused on oxbridge for examples of this - perhaps because of higher rates of progression can afford to?
  - " challenge more acute in NE because of teacher demographic?
- POS p.16, 'it's down to staffing'. It seems once you get to know a university, that member of staff moves on.
- JCL p.17, unis send out booklets + then say, 'name your day' - accommodating
- BJE p 15 we used to do a lot with Teesside but staff changes - applied us.
  - " Northumbria is the one where I don't find of know the person - personal relationship - good relationship!
  - " p.15. They'll try to accommodate us
- DBR p. 5 'I forget who ~~are~~ our link college is because it seems to have changed or flipped a little bit'... 'it's interesting, the whole thing I think is still a bit disjointed'.
  - " p.5 The college system is a bit... it's quite unclear I think'.
- DBR p 7 I think sometimes... one of the plans I had - wanted to have - is honestly have a named contact at each of the universities. I'd love to have, as one of our development plans, was to have a named contact at all the Russell Group unis
- DBR p 7, So that as a part of call, you can have a good rapport with people. I know that in student recruitment in unis, I'm sure like anywhere else, there's a turnover of people so there's not consistency in that way, so I think for me that relationship establishment would be a bigger thing.
- DBR p 7 Tough, it's been, - 'I'm not there' yet, I'm however near that yet, I think to be honest. That's the hard part. Unis are good at coming ~~out delivering~~ in to deliver things to groups of students, that's fine but then in some ways... may be having then a direct contact that can come in and talk to the sixth form team, 'this is your Newcastle link for this college' or 'your Northumbria link'.. I think I'd find that more beneficial
- DBR p. 10, 'unis are quite good at coming in to subject days, but the problem is you just can't take all those options for subject days, ~~but the problem is you just~~ you know the student would be

Appendix 13: Information Sheet - Schools

Research Project

Understanding School-University Relationships

Introduction:

My name is Sally Holt and I am a research student completing a PhD at the Institute of Education in London. Previously I have worked in schools in the North East with whole school responsibility for access to higher education. I have also worked for a university access charity for the past three years.

I am hoping to find out more about the relationships between schools and universities in the North East. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there's anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

I will be carrying out the research, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), an independent public body funding research on social and economic issues in the UK. This research will contribute to my PhD thesis.

Why are you doing this research?

I am doing this research to better understand how schools and universities support pupils to access higher education. I am particularly interested in how schools and universities across the region work in different ways to help pupils from different backgrounds. I would like to talk to people working in schools and in universities who do this work.

Why am I being invited to take part?

This research will ask schools and universities across the North East about their experiences. As someone in a school in the region, who works supporting pupils to progress to university, I would be interested to hear about your experiences and to ask you about your views on the ways in which your school works with universities.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to take part, this will include a recorded interview which will last approximately an hour. I would like to ask you about:

- What relationships, if any, your school has with different universities
- What those relationships involve
- What the benefits and disadvantages of these relationships are
- Any challenges you face in developing or sustaining relationships with universities.

Depending on your school's availability, I would also like to observe any lessons, assemblies or sessions that are relevant this research. It would also be very helpful if you could share with me any materials you use to deliver information about university e.g. lesson plans, assemblies or an overview of the UCAS process.

Will anyone know if I have been involved?

Your data will be anonymised so you will not be identified within the research project, your words will not be attributed to you and your name will not be used.

It is entirely up to you whether you as an individual take part. Your decision whether or not to do so, and anything you say if you do take part in the research will not be shared with anyone else. The only time confidentiality will not be observed is if you disclose anything to me which suggests you are at serious risk of harm or of harming someone else.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research will be used as part my PhD thesis and will be shared with the Economic and Social Research Council. In addition, this research may be used in research publications and presentations based on this project.

Your data will be stored anonymously and securely, and may be used in this research project and subsequent related research by the same researcher.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. I hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it an interesting experience. You may can withdraw from this research project at any time, and that if choose to do this, anything you have said will not be included in the research.

Data Protection Privacy Notice:

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice

The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project.

If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

Further Information:

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at:

Email: s.holt.16@ucl.ac.uk

Phone: 07791122728

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 14: Information Sheet – Universities

Research Project

Understanding School-University Relationships

Introduction:

My name is Sally Holt and I am a research student completing a PhD at the Institute of Education in London. Previously I have worked in schools in the North East with whole school responsibility for access to higher education. I have also worked for a fair access charity for the past three years.

I am hoping to find out more about the relationships between schools and universities in the North East. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there's anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

I will be carrying out the research, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Why are you doing this research?

I am doing this research to better understand how schools and universities support pupils to access higher education. I am particularly interested in how schools and universities across the region work in different ways to help pupils from different backgrounds. I would like to talk to people working in schools and in universities who do this work.

Why am I being invited to take part?

This research will ask schools and universities across the North East about their experiences. As someone in a university in the region, who works supporting pupils to progress to university, I would be interested to hear about your experiences and to ask you about your views.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to take part, this will include a recorded interview which will last approximately an hour. I would like to ask you about:

- The relationships your university has with schools

- What those relationships look like
- Any challenges you face in developing or sustaining relationships with schools.

Depending on your team's availability, I would also like to observe any school visits or sessions that are relevant this research. It would also be very helpful if you could share with me any materials you use to deliver information about university e.g. session plans, access schemes or university guides.

Will anyone know if I have been involved?

Your data will be anonymised so you will not be identified within the research project, your words will not be attributed to you and your name will not be used.

it is entirely up to you whether you as an individual take part. Your decision whether or not to do so, and anything you say if you do take part in the research will not be shared with anyone else. The only time confidentiality will not be observed is if you disclose anything to me which suggests you are at serious risk of harm or of harming someone else.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research will be used as part my PhD thesis and will be shared with the Economic and Social Research Council. In addition, this research may be used in research publications and presentations based on this project.

Your data will be stored anonymously and securely, and will be used in this research project and subsequent related research by the same researcher.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. I hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it a valuable experience. You may can withdraw from this research project at any time, and that if choose to do this, anything you have said will not be included in the research.

Data Protection Privacy Notice:

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal

data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice

The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project.

If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

Further Information:

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at:

Email: s.holt.16@ucl.ac.uk

Phone: 07791122728

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 15: Consent Form

Research Project - Perceptions of Higher Education:

Adult Consent Form

Name of Participant: _____

If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to Sally Holt in person or to s.holt.16@ucl.ac.uk .

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information leaflet about this research.		
I understand that my involvement with this research will include a recorded interview which will last approximately one hour.		
I agree for my interview to be recorded and transcribed and for my anonymised data will be stored securely.		
I agree for my data to be stored anonymously and securely for research undertaken by this researcher on related projects in the future.		
I understand that any information about me will be treated in confidence.		
I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations, they will not be attributed to me.		
I understand that I can withdraw from this research project at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used.		
I understand that the data and results of this research project will be shared with the Economic and Social Research Council and in research publications and / or presentations.		

Signature: _____ **Date**: _____

Appendix 16: Literature Review to Interview Questions Mapping

Area of Interest	Questi-ons	Literature
Progression to HE	4-13	Wilkinson, D. S., & Lane, D. K. (2010). *Rural and Coastal Participation in Higher Education*. 35. Thrupp, M., & Lupton, R. (2006). Taking School Contexts More Seriously: The Social Justice Challenge. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *54*(3), 308–328. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2006.00348.x Thorkildsen, R., & Stein, M. (1996). Fundamental characteristics of successful university- school partnerships. *The School Community Journal*, *2*, 79–90. Spielhofer, T., Golden, S., & Evans, K. (2011). *Young People's Aspirations in Rural Areas* (p. 40). NFER. Shiner, M., & Modood, T. (2002). Help or Hindrance? Higher Education and the Route to Ethnic Equality. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *23*(2), 209–232. JSTOR. Rünz, P. (2018). *Going the Distance: Improving University Access in Rural and Coastal Areas* (Impact Case Study).

The Brilliant Club. https://thebrilliantclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Impact-Case-Study-RC.pdf

Reay, D., David, M., & Ball, S. J. (2001). Making a Difference?: Institutional Habituses and Higher Education Choice. *Sociological Research Online*, *5*(4), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.548

Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L., Adnett, N., & Slack, K. (2006). *Review of widening participation research: Addressing the barriers to participation in higher education* (p. 170). University of York, Higher Education Academy and Institute for Access Studies.

Donnelly, M., & Gamsu, S. (2018a). 'Home and away': Social, Ethnic and Spatial Inequalities in Student Mobility. *The Sutton Trust*. https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/home-and-away-social-ethnic-and-spatial-inequalities-in-student-m

Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Micklewright, J., & Vignoles, A. (2017). *Family Background and University Success: Differences in Higher Education Access and Outcomes in England* (1 edition). Oxford University Press.

Partnership Working	24-35	Wiggans, J. (2012). *Collaboration and partnership working in a competitive environment*, Higher Education Academy. Tough, S., Whitty, G., & Sasia, A. (2008). *Productive Partnerships* (p. 51). Sutton Trust. Thomas, L., Ashley, M., Diamond, J., Grime, K., Farrelly, N., Murtagh, L., Richards, A., & Woolhouse, C. (2010). *From projects to whole school/college-higher education institution partnerships: Identifying the critical success factors under-pinning effective strategic partnerships: report submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as part of the HEI-School/ College/Academy Links Grant Programme, March 2010*. Higher Education Funding Council for England. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10007/1/rd07_10edgehill.pdf Social Mobility Advisory Group. (2016). *Working in partnership: Enabling social mobility in higher education* (p. 124). Universities UK. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/27586/1/working-in-partnership-final.pdf Smedley, L. (2001). Impediments to Partnership: A literature review of school-university links. *Teachers and*

		Teaching, *7*(2), 189–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600120054973 Sirotnik, K. A., & Goodlad, J. I. (Eds.). (1988). *School-University Partnerships in Action: Concepts, Cases and Concerns*. Teachers' College Press. Eyre, R., & Rünz, P. (2019). *Barriers to Access: Five lessons for creating effective school university partnerships* (No. 7; Impact Case Study, p. 24). The Brilliant Club. https://thebrilliantclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Barriers-to-Access-PDF-Web.pdf
CIAG	6-11	Watts, A. G. (2013). False dawns, bleak sunset: The Coalition Government's policies on career guidance. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *41*(4), 442–453. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.744956 The Education Committee. (2013). *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools* (Seventh Report of Session 2012–13). House of Commons. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/632/632.pdf

		Sweet, R., & Watts, A. G. (2004). *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Department for Education, & Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2013). *Careers Guidance Action Plan: Government Response to Recommendations from Ofsted's Thematic Review and National Careers Council's Report*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/238791/Careers_Guidance_Action_Plan.pdf
Destinations Data	14,16,17	Smith, P. (1995). On the unintended consequences of publishing performance data in the public sector. *International Journal of Public Administration*, *18*(2–3), 277–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900699508525011 Selwyn, N., Henderson, M., & Chao, S.-H. (2015). Exploring the role of digital data in contemporary schools and schooling—'200,000 lines in an Excel spreadsheet'. *British Educational Research Journal*, *41*(5), 767–781. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3186 Department for Education. (2018f, October 16). *Destinations of KS4 and KS5 pupils: 2017*. GOV.UK.

		https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-ks4-and-ks5-pupils-2017 Department for Education. (2020). *Secondary Accountability Measures Guidance*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/872997/Secondary_accountability_measures_guidance_February_2020_3.pdf
Gatsby Benchmarks	15,17	Holman, J. (2014). *Gatsby—Good Career Guidance*. Gatsby Foundation. http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/good-career-guidance-handbook-digital.pdf PwC. (2014). *Assessing Benchmarks of Good Practice in School Career Guidance*. Gatsby Foundation. https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/pwc-assessing-benchmarks-of-good-practice-in-school-career-guidance.pdf Sweet, R., & Watts, A. G. (2004). *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mission Groups / Rankings	36-41	Sutton Trust. (2016). Teachers' Oxbridge perceptions polling. *Sutton Trust*. https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/teachers-oxbridge-perceptions-polling/ Boliver, V. (2013). How fair is access to more prestigious UK universities? *The British Journal of Sociology*, *64*(2), 344–364. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12021
Ofsted / OfS / Accountability	14-20	Sikes, P. (2001). Teachers' lives and teaching performance,. In D. Gleeson & C. Husbands (Eds.), *The performing school: Managing, teaching and learning in a performance culture*. RoutledgeFalmer. Shore, C., & Wright, S. (1999). Audit culture and anthropology: Neo-liberalism in British higher education. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *5*(4), 557–575. Ofsted. (2019b). *School Inspection Handbook* (p. 97). Office for Students. (2020d, July 27). *Strategic relationships with schools and raising attainment* (Worldwide). Office for Students; Office for Students. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/strategic-relationships-with-schools/

		Office for Students. (2019f, June 5). *Creating successful strategic partnerships—Office for Students*. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/strategic-relationships-with-schools-and-raising-attainment/creating-successful-strategic-partnerships/ Office for Students. (2019c). *Access and participation standards of evidence*. Office for Students. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/6971cf8f-985b-4c67-8ee2-4c99e53c4ea2/access-and-participation-standards-of-evidence.pdf Lingard, B., Martino, W., & Rezai-Rashti, G. (2013). Testing regimes, accountabilities and education policy: Commensurate global and national developments. *Journal of Education Policy*, *28*(5), 539–556. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.820042