Exploring the Impact of Social Connectedness upon Well-being in Undergraduates at a UK Business School

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Declaration of Original Authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources
has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

Positive psychology focuses upon well-being and encourages the individual development of resilience and social connectedness. This study seeks to understand how connectedness is initiated and maintained over the student lifecycle and how it supports students' well-being through its role in social integration, academic assimilation and acculturation. The study was conducted amongst undergraduate students on two specific programmes at a UK business school, based in a campus university in the south-east of England. The methodology consisted of two steps. In the first step, background information was collected, and connectedness, happiness and resilience scales were used to collect data on the students' states of well-being. The scale data were used in a cluster analysis to enable students in relatively high states of well-being to be benchmarked to students of less high states of well-being through semi structured interviews.

Findings show that students maintain as much connectedness to their previous lives as to their new lives as students. This is positive because it provides strong and continuous support and some protection against the adversities that students face but it is accompanied by a lack of belonging to their programme, the business school or the institution. Some UK-domiciled students appear to be moving to a semi-commuter model of university engagement, whereas international students have no option but to follow the traditional semi-permanently leaving home model. Environmental influences, for example, accommodation in first and second years or the amount of change which these students are subject to, appear to influence students' entire university experience. Each year of the programmes has specific issues relating to connectedness; perhaps with the exception of fourth-year finalists. Some first-year students fail to connect effectively. Some second-year students have incompatibility issues with their accommodation partners with the strains of seeking placements and the realisation of results starting to count. Some third-year students feel disappointed to not have secured a placement and may be overwhelmed by sharing modules with fourth-year finalists.

The study raised issues of acculturation and diversity because it was perceived, by some, to be difficult to make friends with white British students. Well-connected students in high states of well-being had positive personality traits, were self-aware, were open and had positive coping and problem-solving styles and made more academic progress during their studies. Students in a lower state of well-being had less well-developed positive traits and some demonstrated a need to hold back to protect themselves; others were uncomfortable with some aspects of social media. The study was aimed at researching connectedness throughout the UK student lifecycle because existing research focuses mainly upon initial transition. Most existing studies in this area are US based and the history of diversity issues and the social and economic considerations are different to those of the UK.

The conclusions of the study indicate that the institution needs to consider how it might engender an innate sense of belonging and support diversity in today's students. The implications for the business school in terms of an overload of change, large programme size and the structure and role of personal tutoring are discussed.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides the overall context for the study. It presents the personal rationale for carrying out the study and goes on to consider the current discussion relating to students' mental health and well-being and how that compares to non-studying young people and the population in general. It then provides a picture of current mental health demand and well-being provision in universities. It proceeds to assess two factors, finance and widening participation, which are being variously advanced as partial causes or contributors to the rise in student mental health issues. The changing model of university participation is then discussed because these two factors may have had an impact upon how it has evolved. The chapter goes on to present a small sample of extenuating circumstances data, produced over a one-year period, for the specific programme in the UK business school around which the present study was based, to examine whether students cited mental health and well-being issues when requesting revised deadlines or exam absences. Finally, the chapter concludes by drawing together the basis for the study and summarising the chapter.

1.2 Personal Rationale for the Present Study

Going to university is a choice that students make, and it should be enjoyable, fulfilling and rewarding but for some students the experience is not so good. The first few weeks at university can be a stressful time for new students and universities have specific resources to try to make this early transition a successful process for all students. During the remainder of the three- or four-year student lifecycle, universities provide other focused academic support, such as study guidance, or more general life support, such as careers advice and well-being services. Students choose whether to take advantage of them. Personal tutors, of which I am one, routinely see students throughout their time at university and tutors signpost university services as appropriate. In amongst all these provisions and being generally aware of the rise in student mental health issues, I felt that

student well-being might need to be reconsidered. Firstly, institutions put specific resources into making initial transition successful but much less is known about the latter parts of the student lifecycle and where or what other resources may be needed to address second or final year well-being. Secondly, little account is taken of the differences between students, the importance of their integration to well-being and the obstacles they may face. For example, my own tutor experiences are that international students have less fluent language skills, particularly in idiomatic slang, are studying in a different learning culture and may find social and academic integration very difficult. Thirdly, some students who are struggling with making new friends and feel that they are missing out are often not mentally ill and, therefore, may not need to seek professional counselling. Such students may use their networks to try to manage low-level life stress in the support 'grey' area which exists between personal tutoring, friends and family and professional counselling.

I was inspired to focus on how well-being support could be reconsidered by considering the approach of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) link the emergence of positive psychology to a need to consider the economic success and material wealth of the US in the context of concern and support for less fortunate individuals and communities. Historically, clinical psychologists and specialist counsellors have treated or managed individuals with mental illness which may have arisen as a result of a less meaningful or happy existence. Positive psychology, on the other hand, encourages us all to focus on what makes us as individuals and our communities healthy, by focusing upon preventing both mental and physical illness by amplifying the positives of life and systematically building competence. Such an approach continues to recognise that certain members of any population may be suffering from serious mental ill health issues and need clinically qualified professionals to support them to recover but for others, hopefully a majority, the focus can be on growing, developing or flourishing to prevent illness.

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) paper introduced a collection of related research papers which identified and discussed different aspects of positive subjective experiences, positive personality traits and positive institutions by considering the potential impact of these upon quality of life and well-being. Themes of social connectedness, social support and social contextualisation of intrinsic motivation as it contributes to effective learning emerged from the contributing papers introduced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) introduction. The field of social psychology had already been developing through the previous century and the specific field of cognitive social psychology from the 1980s (Pennington, Gillen & Hill, 1999). Cognitive social psychology is concerned with our social thinking and contexts. Several individual papers within the collection were considered particularly useful in informing the design and purpose of this study. Buss's (2000) paper took an evolutionary perspective on how evolved social mechanisms such as deep friendship contributed to happiness. Diener (2000) proposed that the measurement of a nation's subjective wellbeing, essentially happiness, should be considered as important an indicator as those which assess a nation's economy and suggested that national interventions aimed at increasing happiness were desirable. Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler and Steward's paper (2000) considered the role of emotion in social support, reinforcing the case for the role of social support in several aspects of well-being, both psychological and physiological. The precise mechanisms of some of these ideas will be explored in greater depth when resilience and well-being are considered, as individual constructs, in the literature review. In addition, social connectedness was not simply present as a theme of well-being, in these papers, but as a contributor to intrinsic motivation which has an impact on learning. Ryan and Deci's (2000) paper proposed that relatedness to others was an essential part of intrinsic motivation, a view which would be supportive of social theories of learning. Massimini and Delle Fava's (2000) paper emphasised the impact of positive daily experience which considered the balance between depth of involvement and concentration combined with intrinsic motivation but also the need for the presence of appropriate skills to address challenges, a particularly pertinent issue for undergraduates. Finally, Peterson's (2000) paper proposed that the scientific study of the personality trait of optimism provided great

promise in the understanding of positive psychology since optimism was argued to be supportive of both positive mental health and physical wellbeing (Taylor & Kemeny, Reed, Bower & Gruenewald, 2000). Since these papers were first published, the positive psychology movement has defined its mission through the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Centre to promote related research and education. Some universities in the UK have begun to consider the benefits that may accrue from such an approach. For example, in January 2017, the University of Buckingham announced, via its own website, that it was to become Europe's first positive university by adopting the approach of positive psychology amongst its staff and students to enable them to be happier, feel more engaged with learning and develop a sense of purpose in their lives while studying. In summary, positive psychology focuses upon wellness, as opposed to illness, and encourages the individual development of resilience and social connectedness. Making social connections and building networks, with family and friends, makes individuals feel happier, more secure and more supported. It can enhance a sense of purpose, allow the sharing of positive experiences and providing emotional support (NHS Choices, 2013).

There is already a considerable body of research which provides evidence that social connectedness is a positive influence upon both physical and mental health (Helliwell & Puttnam, 2004). My thinking was also informed by a US paper, specifically on student mental health, which argued that connectedness was not just a matter for the counselling office; it should be of concern to all members of a community (Whitlock, Wyman, & Barriera, 2012). This approach accorded with the emerging mainstream interests of positive psychology. Whitlock's (2012) paper used student case studies and emphasised that connectedness is dependent upon an individual's perception of their own experience and state of connectedness as opposed to what others may observe of them. The paper finally suggests some ways in which connectedness can be enhanced in the campus environment and I wanted to find out whether these might be as applicable to UK students. Connectedness in the present study related to students' social connectedness, their academic engagement and their integration (Tinto, 2012). Student-centred connectedness literature ranged from general sociological

discussions regarding students' relational networks (McCabe, 2016) to the impact of social media use (Freitas, 2017).

Connectedness may be considered as inner or external (Whitlock et al., 2012). Inner connectedness is a psychological factor; one which affords individuals some degree of protection and is enhanced by practices such as mindfulness and positive solitude. However, the present study set out to explore the more sociologically-based, external social connectedness, which is concerned with an individual's interactions with others. I chose this area because I felt that it would be possible to find ways in which tutors, the business school or the institution could make practical changes to support positive external connectedness. To do that, I needed to gauge the current state of students' connectedness experiences, both good and bad. Whitlock's (2012) paper argued the dynamic nature of connectedness but also the importance of its context. Prior to the research, I had observed that academic study groups, within the programmes associated with the research, changed every term because of the programme structure. In considering the student lifecycle, I wondered how it might be and feel for these students; changing their academic work groups termly, moving to a new house at least annually, moving from study mode to work mode, into placement, and then back out again in the space of four years. These students' connectedness was against a background of continual change. Before starting, I wanted to understand more of the current student mental health issue and the reasons being cited for its rapid increase.

1.3 The Current Discussion about Student Mental Health.

1.3.1 Student Mental Health

Current media and research reports suggest that a significant student mental health problem exists. A survey of 1,093 students conducted for the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group (NUS, 2015) reported that almost eight out of ten students (78%) said that they had experienced mental health issues in the last year; a third of the respondents (33%) also said they had had suicidal thoughts and more than

half (54%) of the students, who felt they had experienced problems, had not sought help. A second survey of 1,091 of Britain's university students (YouGov, 2016) highlighted that 34% of female and 19% of male students reported having mental health problems. It was found that nearly three-quarters (74%) of those students citing problems described themselves as suffering from both depression and anxiety. Reports from similar Western world economies indicate similar mental health issues amongst other student populations. One survey ('Economy, College Stress and Mental Health Poll', 2009) of 2,240 four-year college students in the US, reported that: 80% frequently or sometimes experienced daily stress; 34% had felt depressed at some point in the previous three months; 13% had formally been diagnosed with mental ill health such as an anxiety disorder or depression; and 9% had considered suicide in the previous 12 months. In Australia, a Queensland University Study (Stallman, 2010) of 6,479 students, registered 83.9% as reporting experiencing psychological distress and more than 19% reporting suffering from a serious mental illness. In Canada, secondary research of data collected between 1990 and 2010 suggested that approximately 30.6% of college students were depressed (Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, & Glazebrook, 2012). However, Sir Simon Wessely, Regius Professor of Psychiatry King's College London and President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, has argued that universities may be fuelling the mental health crisis by sometimes mistaking loneliness for depression (Turner, 2018). Sir Simon argues against universities medicalising normal emotions and treating them as mental health disorders, instead using appropriate resources to provide for routine stresses such as exam pressure and loneliness. Furthermore, he argued in favour of a substantial body of evidence from research that the best protection against mental health problems is drawing on active social networks.

1.3.2 The Mental Health Situation of Students in a Wider Context

The 2017 Student Academic Experience Survey (Neves & Hillman, 2017) concluded that undergraduates have higher levels of anxiety than their non-studying peers. The authors argue that students may be trying to manage a collection of stressors in addition to their debt: academic deadlines, employment

and concerns for the future in addition to the other pressures of being a young person. In a UK YouGov (2016) survey, nearly three-quarters of students (71%) reported academic study as being one of the primary causes of stress, followed by finding a job after university (39%), their family (35%), jobs and relationships (23% each), and friends (22%) accounting for most of the rest. Every seven years, an NHS commissioned report monitors mental illness in the English household population. Its most recent report found one adult in six had a common mental disorder and, since 2000, overall rates of such disorders have steadily increased in females but remained largely stable in males (McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, & T., 2016). The data include substance disorders and self-harm behaviours and show a long-term trend of a steady increase of adults with severe symptoms from 6.9% of 16 to 64-year olds in 1993, 7.9% in 2000, 8.5% in 2007 and 9.3% in 2014. However, mental health issues appear to be increasing disproportionately for some sectors of the population and young females, aged between 16 and 24, are one such group. In England, with mental health services now being given parity with physical health services individuals may simply be more willing to disclose their situations. In the 2016 survey by YouGov, approximately half of all students surveyed said that they would be comfortable talking to friends and family about mental ill health but just under one-third would not but 84% of students believed mental ill health to be as serious as physical ill health.

1.3.3 Institutional Mental Health Provision for Students

Universities in the UK are providing increasing amounts of counselling support to students. More than 43,000 students had counselling at Russell Group institutions in the academic year 2014/15, compared to 34,000 only three years earlier (Garni, 2016). A UK universities mental well-being working group report estimates that between 5 and 10% of students, at least 115,000, access university counselling services annually and demand is rising at a rate of approximately 10% per annum (Coughlan, 2015). In the report, one university reported that its rate of increase in demand is closer to 20% per annum. Other students perhaps seek family or peer support as an alternative to professional services and others may suffer in isolation and so the number feeling they need some support may be even higher.

The YouGov (2016) survey reported that approximately three-quarters of students were aware of university support services, approximately one-fifth had used counselling and, of those that had, three-quarters of them had found them to be helpful. Similarly, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) report (2015) reported that more than two-thirds of students (68%) were aware of how to contact counselling support. In response to the rapid rise in demand for a mental health support service, the one-to-one counselling service model may be stretched. University counselling services may now be rationing the number of sessions or offering a broader range of group therapies and self-help systems. Such broader therapies and self-help systems aim to capitalise upon positive psychologies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). They focus upon activities such as how to manage stress, coping with change, enhancing resilience, increasing optimism and practising mindfulness and academic-related support in areas such as overcoming procrastination. One such example of a positive programme is the University of Reading's Charlie Waller Memorial Trust Well-being Action Plan (https://www.cwmt.org.uk/resources). The plan has a toolbox to encourage activities such as getting out of doors, face-to-face and virtual connecting, getting physically active, keeping a positivity journal, compiling a music playlist of life, using quiet time, writing worries on a balloon and puncturing it and drinking in the healing power of tea. Finally, at an institutional level, there are universities, mainly in the US, that are considering compassion as their guiding principle. This is a principle more usually associated with inner connectedness, mentioned earlier (Whitlock et al., 2012). However, such principles guide their mission and the kinds of graduates they expect to produce but it can also relate to culture and the curriculum. This is an interesting development, which starts to consider teaching and learning, regardless of discipline, through an inherently positive holistic well-being lens.

1.4 Factors Contributing to UK Students' Mental Health Issues

1.4.1 Loan Finance

The introduction of tuition fees, in 1998, changed the student financing model to a loans-based system and currently students routinely leave university in substantial personal debt. Concerns about debt inevitably focus on how it may be repaid and, for students, securing well-paid employment upon graduating would enable them to service such debt. To secure a well-paid job, many students aim to attain a first-class degree to compete effectively; at the same time, they may be feeling that their degrees are devalued by constant discussion of grade inflation (Cockburn, 2017). Degree classifications depend upon assignment grades and each assignment can become a source of stress, establishing a vicious circle driven by employment and debt concerns. A longitudinal study of 1,360 UK undergraduates, over three years, found that those with higher levels of concern over financial matters exhibited more stress and anxiety, suffered poorer sleep patterns and were more susceptible to criticism than their less concerned colleagues (Cooke, Barkham, Audin, Bradley, & Davy, 2004). A report into the first group of students graduating with £9,000 per annum debts for their undergraduate degrees in 2015 reported that more than three-quarters (77%) of them were worried or very worried about their debts (NUS, 2016). A US study, which used both primary and secondary data for 4,643 college-educated adults and students, where a similar financial model has operated for longer, found that students with large amounts of debt were more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and stress, not only during college but also later on in life (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). However, American students average debts upon graduation are currently approximately $35,000 (equating to approximately £26,500 at the time of the present study) (Kantrowitz, 2016) against a debt of approximately £44,000 in the UK (Tetlow, 2016). Not all UK students pay tuition fees and it would be useful to consider whether demand on mental health services is related to the payment of fees. Where tuition fees might, perhaps, be more likely to still be financed by the state, in Wales and Scotland, increases in demand for counselling services of 75% in Edinburgh and 72% in Cardiff were observed during the academic year 2014/15 compared to three years earlier (Garni, 2016). In Edinburgh University entry, approximately 44% of its total undergraduate intake would not have paid tuition fees, according to figures released for 2017, and yet the demand for counselling does not appear to be rising at a slower rate.

Data which relate fee status to counselling demand can only be derived by using secondary sources but the particular data above suggest that counselling demand and fees are probably not directly related. The conclusion reached by considering the various reports, surveys and research is that the argument that student debt is the sole cause of student ill health may not be correct but that there is some relationship between debt and mental health.

1.4.2 Widening Participation

The widening participation agenda is advanced as a second factor contributing to mental ill health. UK higher education (HE) has undergone substantial expansion since the late 1990s: firstly, in 1992, with the number of institutions classified as universities increasing and a rise in the number and proportion of the population studying at HE institutions. There is, it must be assumed, a finite supply of traditional, second-generation, socially-advantaged students (Earwaker, 1992) and so any increase in the size of the sector proportional to the population, which draws upon UK applicants, will automatically result in widened participation. In the academic year 2016/17, half of the students starting degrees were the first in their family to do so, according to UCAS data (H. Yorke, 2017). Students from more diverse backgrounds may be the first in their family to enter HE and may start out socially, academically and/or economically disadvantaged. Those of lower socio-economic backgrounds may have less chance of parental financial support and more need to engage in paid work. In addition, in 2016, the abolition of maintenance grants in favour of loan financing may have had a greater impact on such students and an NUS report in 2013 found that 10% of students in vulnerable groups had accessed high-risk debt such as payday loans; further reinforcing their financial disadvantage (Christie, 2013).

Widening participating students' acculturation to the university way of life may also be a challenge. A report by Oxford University's Department of Education used longitudinal data, from 3,000 children between the ages of 3 to 18, to track their academic progress. The report argued that children of less advantaged backgrounds may enter university with less rich academic experiences and are

less likely to have studied subjects which are facilitating, for example, mathematics or English (Sammons, Toth, & Sylva, 2015). Students from more socially advantaged backgrounds have been shown to have better academic results at A level and those with university-educated parents are disproportionately more likely to succeed in HE contexts (Gurney-Read, 2016; HEFCE, 2014). One longitudinal study of 4,305 students results at a Russell Group university showed that students from independent schools did perform better at A level than those from state schools, but that did not extend to their university examinations; all other things being equal (Hoare & Johnston, 2011). Students may also have to adapt to a self-directed way of learning, as opposed to the more directed teaching practices of school, or a more active and participative learning style, as opposed to a more passive learning style of other cultures (Andrade, 2006a). The widening participation agenda has focused on how to make university a potential option for disadvantaged or lower socio-economic groups and universities have developed accompanying systems of student support. The prevailing view is that students must orientate themselves and engage with the prevailing university culture and practices, regardless of whether these may be quite unfamiliar to them, to be successful (Tinto, 2012). However, these students may be the least likely to access support because they may have less time or knowledge of such matters and such support may be a cultural anomaly. Universities may not have adequately considered the acculturation and integration issues bi-directionally, reflecting on how universities may also adapt themselves around these new generations of learners.

1.5 The Changing Model of University Participation

The model of semi-permanently leaving home to go to university may have evolved partially as a result of both loan finance and widening participation. The introduction of tuition fees or the abolition of maintenance grants might mean that living with parents, whatever your parents' wealth, may make financial sense because there will be less debt at the end of the study period. As a result, being able to live at home may also support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to attend university. Between one-quarter and one-third of UK

students choose to remain at home to study and, for approximately two-thirds of those choosing to do so, finance-related issues were the reason (Khanom, 2014; Marsh, 2014). Students may choose to commute, even substantial distances, or perhaps live two separate lives (Marsh, 2014). Finding data to explore the nature of student mobility is difficult to obtain but a 2012 traffic survey amongst students at the University of Sheffield (Hardwick, 2012) revealed that approximately 12% of the students, responding to its survey, went home every weekend and a further 4% went home most weekends versus 29% going home only at the end of term. Survey data from 1,000 students collected by Education Phase on behalf of BBC TV Licensing in 2015 (Arnett, 2014) showed that students had moved an average of 91 miles from home. However, Russell Group university students travelled an average of 112.8 miles, pre-1992 university group students 114.6, whereas post-1992 group students travelled only 67.8 miles. Russell Group students were the most likely (84%) to have gone to study at a specific university of their choice and more than one-third of Russell Group students (34%) had relocated more than 100 miles from their domiciled post code to study. This may suggest that, for institutions regarded as being more prestigious, such as Russell Group or perhaps pre-1992 group with specialist programmes, students were prepared to travel further and semi-permanently leave home in the traditional sense. The present study is based within a non-Russell Group university, although it is within a highly-regarded business school, but it is in a discipline and programme area which could be regarded as being widely available and non-specialist.

1.6 Data on Extenuating Circumstances Forms (ECFs)

There was only one available source of internal business school student data, extenuating circumstances forms (ECFs), which could be used to compare the media reporting of student mental health issues against actual student data. ECFs request some allowance (for example, permitted late submission or more time in an exam) for adverse circumstances (for example, physical or mental ill health or family problems). These data were collected from the same undergraduate programmes, in the same business school, which housed the present study, albeit

for a previous academic year. Approximately one out of every four students, who were currently registered (i.e. not on placement) submitted a form. An analysis of all 115 ECFs, submitted by undergraduate students, during the academic year 2014/15, was carried out as a precursor to the research. The breakdown of the reasons given is in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Reasons Cited on 115 Student Extenuating Circumstance Forms (ECFs) 2014/15

Reason	Number of Forms
Physical illnesses	52
Family illnesses	14
Family bereavements	10
Administrative issues requiring a planned absence	11
Mental health issues	21
Unfortunate life events (for example, car accidents, laptop thefts)	7

This data is only one snapshot of the underlying daily adversities in a student's life which affect assessment. Not all students in difficult circumstances will complete such forms and such forms are only completed if an academic allowance is sought. This system may identify a reported symptom of a problem and not necessarily a root cause. Twenty-one forms (18.3%) cited mental health issues and so these data do not appear to accord with the mental health figures of the media reporting. However, physiological illness may be stress related. Some of the reported physical illnesses cited serious conditions, such as pneumonia, and the forms contained information which tended to suggest a stressful or poor living environment, which might have contributed to the physiological condition. Such forms were not meant to capture such complexity. The personal tutor meeting may have been where more detailed information may have become known but there was no method of assessing what proportion of these students choose to

approach tutors. Some may have used other forms of support, such as peers or parents. One weakness of this university system is that there is no end-to-end system of recording student interfaces with the university; partly because of confidentiality and partly because of the way systems have evolved. In addition, some of the health reporting policies used to manage longer-term issues or to support students to take breaks from study, historically, have had pejorative names such as 'neglect of work', 'fitness to study' or 'suspension', which may further discourage student engagement with any of them.

1.7 Summary

The personal rationale for the present study was to consider how the elements of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) might help tutors, the business school and/or the wider institution to support students' well-being through considering students' external connectedness. The study was aimed to focus on wellness and to ensure that the treatment and management of student psychological ill health issues were left to professionally qualified colleagues. Sir Simon Wessely's argument (Turner, 2018) against categorising the normal stresses and strains of student life as mental health disorders in favour of promoting enhanced social connectedness was published at the end of my study time but provided further validity to researching this topic. Current research seems to have produced a limited understanding of the nature of connectedness throughout the student lifecycle. This chapter considered the context of the study, using current surveys and media reporting of students' mental health issues and both demand and provision of mental health services in universities to understand the nature and scale of the problem. The chapter further assessed the evidence for the rise in demand for students' mental health services being attributable to the forces of fees and financing and widening participation. The model of going to middle ranking universities for widely available disciplines appears to have changed from a semi-permanent leaving home model to a semi-commuter model for some students, perhaps, partially, as a response to these two forces. Having used broad institutional data to establish a picture of student mental health, the chapter finally examined 115 ECFs to establish the reasons students put forward

when requesting academic allowances for adverse situations. Having explored the broader context, Chapter Two will now focus upon exploring the constructs of well-being and the student lifecycle in a literature review.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

Chapter One contextualised the present study by presenting a broad picture of the state of UK student mental health at the current time. The arguments regarding loan finance and widening participation as potential causes and the changing model of university participation were discussed. The present study was motivated by a desire to investigate the role of connectedness for students and to consider potential changes at the institutional or business school level which might enhance it using a positive psychology frame (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This literature review will therefore examine the constructs of well-being and resilience as conceptualised in positive psychology, as opposed to from a perspective of illness and clinical practice. It will then consider belonging and connectedness: the two related constructs at the heart of the study. The second part of the literature review will go on consider the student lifecycle: the stages through which students pass in their time as undergraduates, the challenges each one brings and how they relate to well-being. The third part of the literature review will discuss the role of social media as it relates to connectedness and young people because its widespread use has brought about substantial changes in the nature and conduct of connectedness. Ideas from the literature will then be brought together to produce a conceptual model of student connectedness, identifying areas of connectedness. The literature review will close by providing the setting and identifying the research questions for the present study. Figure 2.1 below sets out the stages of the literature review.
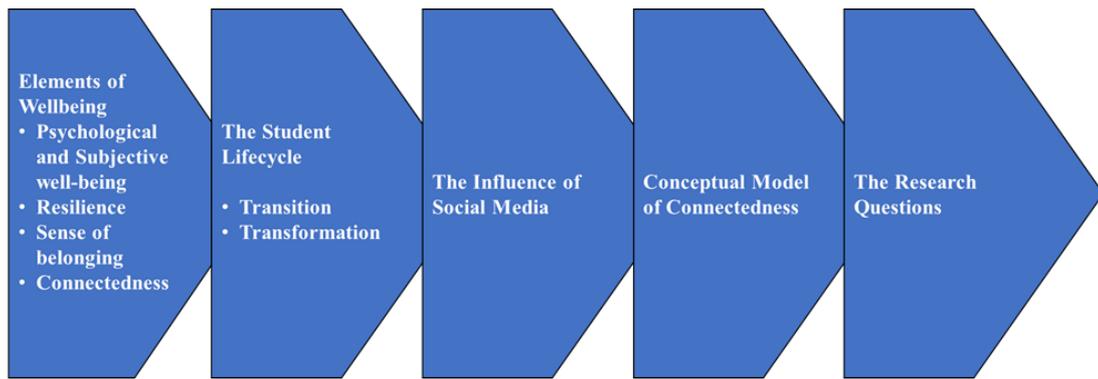
Figure 2.1: Steps of the Literature Review

2.2 Elements of Well-being

2.2.1 Well-being

The construct of well-being relates not only to individuals but also to the communities in which they exist. Well-being includes psychological, social, subjective and physical health factors and how they integrate to achieve a state of happiness and contentment, sound physical and cognitive health, positive attitudes and a good general quality of life, with minimal anguish (Nugent, 2013; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Individual well-being is a state but it is enhanced by the setting and achievement of meaningful objectives, engagement in worthwhile pursuits and enjoyment of appropriate, quality relationships with other people (Ryan & Deci, 2008; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Networks of relationships provide social well-being at community, family and individual levels (Samman, 2007). However, a study of the impact social capital – the networks individuals have – upon well-being in 2,394 adults in the UK, found that individuals did not have or need similar levels of social capital to report similar levels of satisfaction with life. The need may vary from person to person, prevailing circumstances may play a role (Kroll, 2011) and it is the individual's perception of their situation which is key; not an assessment made by an observer (Whitlock et al., 2012).

Well-being is conceptualised using two distinct but related perspectives. Subjective well-being, sometimes referred to as emotional or hedonic, considers happiness in life, and psychological well-being, sometimes referred to as eudaimonic, considers satisfaction with life. Subjective well-being focuses on the maximisation of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, from the ancient Greek philosophy. Psychological well-being is based on Aristotelian philosophy and relates to the higher order pursuits of the setting and pursuit of meaningful goals, as identified earlier, and accords with Maslow's (1968) level of self-actualisation. Individuals need to value a goal to set out to pursue it, coupled with a certain amount of confidence that they can achieve it, even in the face of adversity. This is a measure of their self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981), and this sequence of beliefs is usually related to a generalised sense of optimism (Bouchard, Carver, Mens, & Scheier, 2018). Positive personality traits are key to well-being. At the individual level, Watson and Clark's (1992) US study of 1,328 undergraduates tested students' feelings towards an array of emotion terms and demonstrated that positive personality dispositions, such as optimism and extroversion, do act as consistent positive influences on how an individual feels. In a second study of 312 undergraduates, in a Greek institution, character strengths of wisdom, courage and transcendence were, similarly, strongly positively correlated with well-being, as were good mental and physical health (Leontopoulou & Trivila, 2012). In Hawley, Little, and Pasupathi's (Hawley, Little, & Pasupathi, 2002) study of 719 US schoolchildren, control styles were measured to investigate what personality characteristics make children influential amongst peers. The research showed that pro-social indirect and co-operative control styles were related positive characteristics, such as good social skills, agreeableness, intrinsic friendship motivations and ultimately high well-being. At the community level, civic virtues move their members towards better citizenship and support well-being; characteristics such as responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance and a strong work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

To summarise, well-being relates to individuals and communities and can be considered from two related perspectives: happiness in life (enjoyment); and satisfaction with life (fulfilment). Fulfilment relies on individuals reaching their

potential, through goal setting. Well-being is related to positive personality characteristics and, of particular importance to the present study, it calls for quality and appropriate social ties at the individual and community levels.

2.2.2 Resilience

Resilience was originally conceived in clinical settings and is defined as "the maintenance of positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of significant adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543) but it now has passed into more mainstream use and is often conceptualised as an individual's ability to 'bounce back'. It is very closely associated with well-being and its presence is usually, but not always, positively related. An analysis of longitudinal household survey data from the UK argued that over one third of the UK population appear to have high resilience and low wellbeing (17.8%) or low resilience and high wellbeing (16.6%) (Mguni, Bacon, & Brown, 2010). This study argued that such individuals could be quite robust but unhappy or vulnerable but happy but was based upon broad socioeconomic factors such as employment or family status. One of the earliest studies of resilience was Werner, Bierman, and French's (1971) longitudinal study of children in Hawaii. The study focused on children and adolescents who appeared to be special because they had succeeded in the face of adversity. A later study on the resilient offspring of mentally-ill parents termed such children as 'invulnerable' (Anthony, 1974). These early studies considered resilience to be a personality trait but it is no longer regarded purely as such because it may be influenced and developed. Resilience, as with well-being, is strongly associated with positive attitudes, qualities and characteristics, such as: resourcefulness, extroversion, ambition, optimism and a sense of humour; self-beliefs and attitudes, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy; and qualities, such as happiness, forgiveness and gratitude (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Block, 2002; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2012; Wachs, 2006), as is well-being.

Positive personal qualities can also act as internal protective factors which may aid and support adaptation processes. Werner (1995) identified specific attributes

of some of the children she studied that acted as protective factors. The children were engaging to other people, had good communication and problem-solving skills and an innate faith in their own actions. An intervention aimed at increasing the resilience of 64 undergraduates in a US institution, by teaching them about the management of change, found positive changes in protective factors such as optimism and self-esteem as a result of the intervention (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). In another study, of 141 Australian university students (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013), mindfulness and academic self-efficacy were identified as internal protective factors and were found to be predictive of resilience. Such factors also relate to internal connectedness (Whitlock et al., 2012).

Resilience may be built to enable some steeling – bracing – against future adversity, by teaching skills which can be redeployed in similar situations (Rutter, 2012). In one small-scale qualitative study at a UK university, the challenging experiences of transition had the unanticipated benefit of supporting students' longer term personal development (Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, & Rogers, 2013). Explanatory styles are concerned with how an individual explains events to themselves and the choice of style may act as an indicator of mental health (Kinderman & Bentall, 1996). In an intervention programme designed to build resilience and thriving in 63 undergraduates in a US institution, participants were taught increased use of positive optimistic and personal control explanatory styles to explain events (Gerson & Fernandez, 2013), which successfully increased their resilience; again showing that positive improvements are possible through well focused interventions.

The sociological environment influences and plays a role in resilience. Although the personality and personal attributes of the children were important, in the original studies of resilience, their family and their sociological environments were also shown to play a role (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Emmy E. Werner & Smith, 1982). Psychosocial factors, such as perceived social support, support which is accessible if needed, and social connectedness and a sense of belonging to the institution act as external protective factors for students (Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar, & Lo, 2014). In Pidgeon et al's study of 206 students, aged

from 18 to 59, drawn from US, Australian and Hong Kong universities, which focused upon the role of social support for stress, it was recommended that institutions place greater emphasis on students' social connectedness and a sense of belonging to the institution to enhance well-being.

Resilience study is also concerned with the negative behaviours that may result from stress or distress and the impact on communities and individuals. At a community level, Ahern et al's (2008) review of 25 resilience studies showed that resilience research often monitors populations that are at risk, or in adverse situations, observing that the promotion of positive behaviour and pro-social choices requires family, culture and community to be brought together to identify risks and to develop programmes. When faced with challenging circumstances, individuals' self-belief and their actions influence the outcome. Firstly, the degree to which an individual will persist in trying to succeed depends upon their self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Secondly, their ability to cope depends upon them considering steps to manage or diminish the negative effects of the adversity or to improve the prospect of a positive outcome (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are two ways of coping with stressors: a problem- or task-based coping approach to the adversity, which is evaluative, positive and seeks to address the actual problem; and emotion-focused coping, which involves addressing the emotions that the problem has generated (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, there are also two types of emotion-focused coping: approach, where a positive reappraisal is made; and avoidance, where the distress is denied or avoided (Park & Adler, 2003). A study of cross-cultural differences in academic coping strategies, levels of campus connectedness and psychological distress in 217 university students from three countries – Australia, the US and Hong Kong – found that lower levels of avoidance coping and higher levels of campus connectedness were associated with lower levels of psychological stress (Bales, Pidgeon, Lo, Stapleton, & Magyar, 2015). An earlier study of 203 undergraduates in a US institution, relating to the extent to which college students' academic coping style and motivation mediate their academic stress and performance, found similarly positive associations: that students who engaged in problem-focused coping were more likely to be motivated and perform better than students who

engaged in negative emotion-focused coping (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). It is further suggested that the mechanism leading to choice of coping skill may also be related to personality trait optimism (Bouchard et al., 2018). A study of 132 undergraduates in a US institution, which investigated relationships between personality traits, resilience and coping styles, found that positive personality traits, task-based coping and higher levels of resilience were related (Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006).

Transition to university is particularly associated with psychological distress because students face potential multiple, continual, stresses of academic overload, pressure to succeed, peer competition and concerns over the future as well as personal, social and financial concerns (Pidgeon et al., 2014; Tavolacci et al., 2013). The type of resilience that the majority of students need to routinely call upon equates to Werner's (1995, p. 81) "sustained competence" in the face of change as opposed to that of severe adversity, which is more likely to be the concern of clinicians. However, resilience may not be homogenous nor consistent across different areas of an individual's life (Pemberton, 2015); a situation which could be true of students with their range of stresses. Stress and a perception of stress can lead to problem behaviour. Between 2009 and 2011, the principle of promoting positive student behaviours was considered in a cross sectional study of 1,876 French university students, which collected data on perceived stress and risk behaviours (Tavolacci et al., 2013). The study found that high levels of perceived stress were related to a range of problem behaviours, such as misuse of alcohol, eating disorders and cyber addiction, and low levels were associated with the practice of sport, and concluded that interventions to reduce negative behaviours could result in an improvement in stress coping abilities, leading to better resilience.

To summarise, resilience is concerned with positive adaptation to the disruptive and reintegrative processes of life. Its presence is associated with the same positive personal qualities as the construct of well-being. Resilience may be developed, through interventions to change explanatory or coping styles. Various internal and external, environmental, protective resources, factors and

mechanisms, may be used or called upon, to support individuals during times of adversity. Students are exposed to a continual range of multiple low-level stresses and have to learn to cope with them effectively.

2.2.3 Belonging

Belonging is "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty, Lynch-Bauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992, p. 173). Humans are motivated by a psychological need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This accords with the third level of Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs, for love, belongingness, friendship, intimacy and affection. The source of the need to belong, the degree to which an individual needs to pursue it and what might constitute satiation and satisfaction in belongingness may be an evolutionary adaptation of a human drive to form social networks for survival (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams & Galliher, 2006). The nature of belonging has been conceptualised by Yuval-Davis (2006) at three different levels. The first is broadly a social and economic classification using factors such as ethnicity, occupation and social class using demographic axes. The second is how individuals construct their identities within different groups and make emotional attachments through their own narratives. This level would equate to students' sense of belonging to peers and programmes. The third level is belonging to an ethical and political value system; perhaps the institution in the case of students.

Studies have shown the positive impacts of a sense of belonging to students' institutional environment. A cross sectional US study of 266 first-year undergraduates found that their sense of belonging to their secondary school and the university both acted as predictors of academic and psychological adjustment to the university environment (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). A longitudinal study of 1,845 first-year Canadian undergraduates across six universities found a significant relationship between students' feeling of attachment to the university and their academic adjustment (Buote, Pancer, & Pratt, 2007). A longitudinal experimental US study, of 545 undergraduates, of whom 254 were African

American, found that the students' sense of belonging, along with institutional commitment, acted as predictors of intention to persist at university (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Civitci's (2015) study of 477 undergraduates in Turkey found that students who felt higher institutional and study major belongingness had lower perceived stress and higher life satisfaction.

Attachment styles relate to how we form relationships and reciprocate within them and may affect the development of a sense of belonging. It is argued that childhood attachment style; based on the infant need to have a positive, secure attachment in a loving, parental relationship; may influence adult attachment style (Ainsworth, 1964; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1988). One US study of 529 undergraduates, using a sense of belonging instrument as a measure of their university connectedness, found that students with insecure attachment styles had greater difficultly in effectively connecting to the university, be that through their peers and relationships with them, through setting goals or seeking academic support, and were more at risk of attrition (S. Wilson & Gore, 2013). The study also found that perceptions of support were impacted, by attachment style, and that students with avoidant attachment styles were less likely to attend class, seek, use support services and be engaged in group work with their peers. A second US study of 1,089 first-year undergraduates found that students with high levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance had specific deficits in their social competencies, social self-efficacy and discomfort with self-disclosure and, as a result, experienced loneliness and depression (Wei & Zakalik, 2005).

Students need to feel as if they belong to both the institution and the learning community in which they are studying. Pittman and Richmond's (2008) cross sectional US study of 79 new undergraduates showed that positive increases in university belonging were related to positive changes in self-perception and decreases in problem behaviours such as anxiety or depression. However, a sense of belonging may be more inherently present in some students. An experimental US study conducted on two groups of students found that majority students were more likely to have an inherent and assumed sense of belonging whereas minorities did not (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Wenger's (2013) social theory of learning supports the view that learning is not an individual process but is most effective through participation with others in learning communities. The importance of the class as a learning community was identified in a study of 1,500 science, technology, engineering and mathematics undergraduates in a study over five different US universities. The most positive association was between class-level belongingness and positive emotional engagement; suggesting the importance of engagement in study, alongside self-efficacy (D. Wilson et al., 2015).

Team-based learning aims to capture the synergies and strengths of shared working but the team has to be able to work together to achieve that (Michaelsen, Knight, & Fink, 2002). The creation of social spaces, regardless of the format of the learning, may enable a learning community to be built (Whiteside, Garrett Dikkers, & Lewis, 2014). For example, even in online programmes, Salmon (2013) identifies that one of the first steps should be a bridge-building phase of virtual socialisation to develop belonging, before learning can commence.

The sense of belongingness also increases as engagement in extra-curricular activities, recreational pursuits, clubs and societies increases. Strayhorn (2016) used longitudinal data from 8,000 US College Students' Experience Questionnaires (CSEQs) to gauge the belongingness impact of use of campus recreational facilities, the playing of a team sport or working in a campus-based organisation. The more frequently students engaged with any of these activities, the more their sense of belonging grew. The average amount of time per week spent in such activities was five hours. In using further data from 700 students collected as part of his work on a connectedness scale, students consistently put forward the view that they only felt part of the organisation if they became involved in some institution-based extra-curricular, co-curricular or social unit related to the curriculum. Analysing these data uncovered, conversely, that students who spent more than 20 hours per week in self-directed study, against an average of 11, began to suffer a loss of belonging.

To summarise, a sense of belonging is a subjective assessment of whether individuals feel that they are integral and indispensable to a social system. It is

driven to be established by an inherent need and it may be affected by attachment styles. Belongingness can be present at different levels but high levels of an individual sense of belonging are associated with positive well-being, lower levels of stress, good academic adjustment and the intention to persist at university. Students need to feel a sense of belonging to the institution and the learning community and may benefit from social learning space and extra-curricular activity

2.2.4 Connectedness

The term 'connectedness' is frequently used interchangeably with the term 'belongingness' throughout literature. Belongingness relates more to subjective feelings of identity whereas connectedness denotes active participation in society's organisations and networks but the two are inextricably linked. Research on social connectedness originates from the mid-1990s, when the foundations of a connectedness scale were laid by Lee and Robbins (1995) and were based upon Kohut's (1984) Theory of Belongingness. The gradual internalisation of the experience and the breadth of relationships that an individual has, whether proximal or distal, provides the foundation for the sense of being connected (R. M. Lee & Robbins, 1998). Positive relationships are characterised by instances of regular companionship and intimacy, trustworthiness and reciprocity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Lakey & Cohen, 2000; Putnam, 1995; Thoits, 2011b). The ability to connect is argued to be first initiated during adolescence when identifying in a broader social context, outside of immediate family, becomes necessary as different social roles and identities, such as becoming a student, have to be adopted (R. M. Lee & Robbins, 1995). In Hausmann et al's (2007) study, initial social experiences with both peers and academic faculty at university were key to social connectedness; academic integration came later and supported an ongoing sense of connectedness.

Social capital – the networks that individuals have; be that friends, colleagues or community – strongly support physical and psychological well-being (Helliwell & Puttnam, 2004). Low levels of connectedness have been associated with

chronic loneliness, depression, lower self-esteem, higher perceived stress, higher anxiety, more social discomfort, and higher degrees of hostility (R. M. Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; R. M. Lee & Robbins, 1998). A study of 9,836 US adults found that even a perception of social support made a positive reduction to an individual's likelihood of engaging with a professional mental health service (Thoits, 2011b). Thoits suggested that the mechanism might either be that social support can help individuals with less serious conditions and/or social support might act to postpone the need to use professional services. More highly-connected individuals may initially connect for social exchange but these may develop into deeper reciprocal support networks, which provides broader well-being benefits across the life span (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). The resilience-based view of connectedness explains its facilitation role to enable access to protective factors and resources (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Emmy E. Werner & Smith, 1982). The quality of support may be differentiated by its accessibility, value and weight; the most intimate being of most value (Lin, 1986). An Australian study of 4,679 students living in university housing, or with partners, attributed lower levels of psychological distress to the support factors accrued from living in situations of higher connectedness and interrelatedness (Stallman, 2010).

Measures of quantity and quality of connectedness assess the well-being value of relational networks. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that an individual is driven only to seek interpersonal relationships until that individual achieves the quantity and quality of connections with which they are individually satisfied. The quality of students' connectedness may be affected by influences from the past or early experiences of university. In one US study of 1,149 undergraduates in three different studies, six factors were used to measure connectedness: duration of relationship; frequency of interaction; knowledge of goals; physical intimacy; self-disclosure; and social network familiarity. Duration and frequency were considered as a measure of quantity whereas the remaining four were considered measures of quality of those relationships (Starzyk, Holden, Fabrigar, & MacDonald, 2006). Self-disclosure is the act of communicating personally relevant information, thoughts or feelings to another individual to form a relationship and may be considered a measure of relationship quality. Positive and

appropriate self-disclosure amongst 351 university students in US learning environments found that it promoted connectedness and learning (Johnson & LaBelle, 2015). Most of these studies appeared to assume that students had single networks but McCabe's (2016) longitudinal study on network types identified that different students ran different numbers and types of networks. The study explored the social costs and academic benefits to students of each of the types of network. McCabe (2016, p. 6) defined three types and gave them the following names: 'tight-knitters' were at the centre of a single dense network of overlapping contacts; 'compartmentalisers' had between two and four friendship clusters that operated mostly separately; and 'samplers' had largely disconnected individual friendships. Demographics influenced network choices because minorities were more likely to be tight-knitters, and middle- and upper-class whites, especially females, were more likely to be compartmentalisers.

To summarise, social connectedness is the sum of the individual's relational networks and their presence has an impact on the individual's well-being. Social connectedness is realised through the initialisation and maintenance of a quantity of relationships and may be influenced by the earlier developed ability to connect. The mere presence of social capital supports well-being but also provides access to protective factors. The well-being value of an individual's networks can be measured in terms of quantity and quality of connectedness.

2.3 The Student Lifecycle

Undergraduate students enter university and pass through different stages of transition, as shown in Figure 2.2 below. This section will consider each of these stages and, using theoretical models, will consider how they relate to the constructs of well-being.
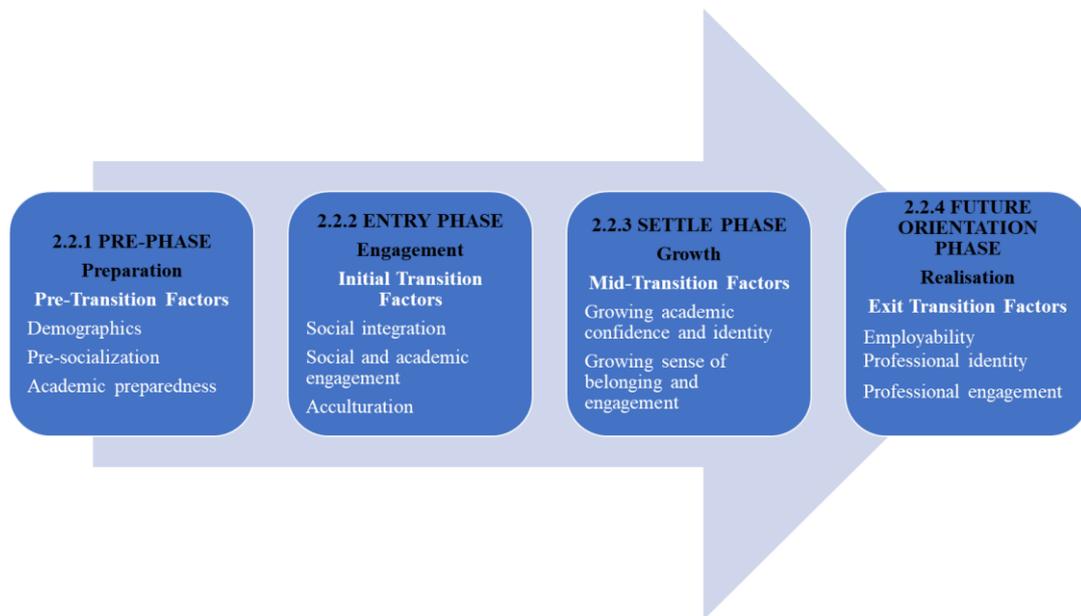
Figure 2.2: Stages of Transformation (Based upon: Tinto, 2012; Wayne et al., 2016)

2.3.1 Pre-Phase – Preparation – Pre-Transition

School leavers may have some difficulty in envisaging university life, which may become a source of difficulty in adaptation (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012). "Anticipatory socialization" (Tinto, 2012, p. 98) is an activity which tries to prepare students to ease transition but, as Tinto argued, students who need the most transition acculturation support, because they are the first generation of their family to access HE, may be the lightest users of it. However, anticipatory socialisation, via social media, is unlikely to be social class dependent in the UK and it is argued to provide a useful bridge from school to university (Jacobs, 2010). In a US survey of 265 undergraduates, social media as a support for students making their transitions to university was found to be useful in both social and cultural integration and supported the development of student identities (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012).

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) transition model considers four categories of factors which affect the ability of an individual to make a successful generic transition: situation, self, support and strategies. Goodman's factors will

be considered one group at a time in conjunction with the student lifecycle literature. The first group are the situational factors and are concerned with what triggers the change, the appropriateness of its timing, whether there is previous experience of such a change and whether there are concurrent stresses. In the case of students progressing to university, the transition is predicted, broadly positive and self-determined. Most students are unlikely to have experienced similar, unless, for example, they attended boarding school or perhaps their parents were in the armed forces. For students at this stage, there are multiple sources of stress and the students' perceptions of whether they already have, or can access, the relevant resources they might need to make the change.

2.3.2 Entry Phase – Engagement – Initial Transition

Although only the process of moving from school to university is generally labelled transition, it is the first, and most significant, in a series of transitions through each of the stages of the lifecycle (Wayne et al., 2016). Initial transition calls upon individuals to restructure how they feel about themselves, their identities, and the roles they play in relation to others. Transition is associated with students becoming accustomed, and adapting, to their new environments. However, students may also suffer perceived social loss from their previous environments. A longitudinal study of 70 US college students assessed the impact of the effect of such loss of, or change in, pre-college friendships upon transition (Paul & Brier, 2001). The study found that continuing student preoccupation with legacy friendships was associated with a discrepancy between pre-college expectations and college experiences and loneliness and poor self-esteem in college. Initial or early transition for students is the internal qualitative process of reorganisation towards a new life stage and identity, involving significant personal change, some stress and continual adjustment to a mundane set of changes in adapting to university life. In a student stress survey of 100 new undergraduates in a US university, intra-personal changes in sleeping and eating habits, workload and personal responsibilities were cited more frequently as stressors than more major interpersonal or academic sources of stress (Ross, Niebling, & Heckhert, 1999). So severe are the strains of the first year that a

survey of 4,699 UK undergraduates found that levels of student well-being did not return to their pre-university levels, at any time during that year (Cooke, Bewick, Barkham, Bradley, & Audin, 2006).

Transition is dependent upon the existence of a combination of factors to support it: social integration, academic assimilation, and acculturation. Empirical research into transition has usually collected data on several factors simultaneously. For example, Huon and Sankey's (2002) study of 530 first-year undergraduates at an Australian university set out to investigate how successful students had been in making the transition to university by assessing clusters of related factors. The study showed that student identity, academic application, social involvement, a perception of the encouragement of independent learning, overall course enjoyment and satisfaction were significant predictors of students' transition success. Successful transition was further supported by structural factors, such as students having English as a first language and a history of sound academic performance. The magnitude and breadth of the demands of transition may be appreciated by considering Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptualisation of the systems in which any individual exists, prior to entry at university and afterwards, and the speed at which this changes, in transition. Comparing pre- and post-university entry using Bronfenbrenner's systems model (1979) demonstrates that most of the individual's systems have to be re-engineered upon entering university. The microsystem changes from family and home, school and school friends to hall of residence, programme colleagues and tutors. The mesosystem includes managing the alignment and harmony of the retained legacy microsystem system with the new microsystem. The exosystem includes the retained legacy exosystem of, for example, extended family and neighbourhood with the new institutional culture. The macrosystem includes the governmental forces discussed in the introduction along with employment prospects, issues of culture and social class. At the point of initial transition, none of the individual's systems remain unchanged.

2.3.2.1 Social Factors of Transition

Successful transition depends upon social integration, which is the dynamic process of community formation through interaction. The importance of social support for well-being, resilience and integration has already been discussed earlier in the Literature Review. The social support factors are Goodman's (2006) second group of factors and their elements are the types, functions and stability of the social support that may be called upon. The implications for students are in the amount and quality of social support they have and the degree to which they are socially integrated. In a small exploratory study of 19 UK undergraduates, social relationships and the formation of social groups to support their adjustment to university, in an unfamiliar environment, were salient factors in their accounts of successful transition (Maunder et al., 2013).

2.3.2.2 Social Integration and Academic Assimilation in Transition

Social integration and academic assimilation are both inextricably linked to student transition. A US study of 2,326 first-year undergraduates found that social integration was more important at four-year residential institutions, whereas academic integration was more important at commuter institutions (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). In a US study of 5,751 students, social and academic engagement were both found to be significant for first-year retention (Ishitani, 2016). Discussion has arisen as to whether social precedes academic or one is more important than the other and whether the type of institution or mode of study has an impact. In the case of university students, initial transition is the incremental process of assimilation in which the student and the institution come to terms with each other (Earwaker, 1992) but it has generally not been regarded as a bi-directional activity (Andrew & Whittaker, 2013). Analysing a combination of some secondary and primary data collected from UK university students found that students would have preferred greater integration of the social and academic activities of Freshers' Week to aid better initial transition (Briggs et al., 2012).

Academic engagement may broadly be defined as the "quality of participation, investment, commitment, and identification" with the educational environment and institution (Alrashidi, Phan, & Ngu, 2016, p. 42). Engagement is not a single

construct of learning; it has been argued to have behavioural, cognitive and emotional elements (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).The behavioural element is of most interest for connectedness because it implies appropriate behaviour towards study and, in classes, involvement in the learning itself and participation in learning-related activities. Students' need for academic achievement can be met and their progress validated (Rendon, 1994) by being appropriately and positively connected to others; be that academic staff or student peers (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Social interaction with a skilful tutor helps learners progress to levels of learning that students could not achieve without pedagogical support, according to Vygotsky's (1978) theories. An experimental study in a faculty of education at an Australian university reduced attrition and increased student satisfaction by using an introductory programme to support students making peer-to-peer and faculty connections thereby enhancing academic competence (Perry & Allard, 2003). However, faculty-initiated contact might be indicative of study issues and may not be positively related to academic assimilation (McGubbin, 2003).

Successful engagement may depend upon some prior knowledge and expectations of academic study and how to become a successful learner. In a UK-based study of 602 new undergraduates, across six faculties at two universities, students in transition were judged to have limited knowledge about, rather than contextualised knowledge of, their new learning environments (Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007). In a study of 691 undergraduates at the University of Ulster, a wide gap between prior expectations of academic difficulty and experience was found but, in general, students had been successful in making the initial transition into the academic aspects of university life (Lowe & Cook, 2003). However, within this study, two-thirds of the interviewed sample had predicted problems with coping with academic study and half of these students had had difficulties, one-third of the interviewed students were challenged by independent study and the study found that students had little knowledge or understanding of class sizes and contact hours prior to entering university. A consultation on student engagement, in Scotland, suggested that the transition focus should be upon the

co-creation of confidence building, engagement and belonging rather than being delivered as an orientation opportunity to students (Andrew & Whittaker, 2013).

Learning is a social activity as already discussed under belonging. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971) is based upon individuals learning by observing other individuals and seeing the benefits which accrue from their actions. The view of learning as a social activity has led to the development of collaborative systems of learning in workshops, in groups and communities of practice (Wenger, 2013), whereby the right level of challenge is set for students leaving academic faculty to manage the communication and facilitation processes relating to the learning. The study suggested that student identity formation through situated learning interaction, for example, group work, with other students, encouraged the development of peer networks to act as a learning complement to the contribution from members of faculty. In addition, "students prefer to learn with and from those with whom they have formed human connections and relationships" (Whiteside et al., 2014, p. 42).

2.3.2.3 Acculturation at Transition

Transition may be a function of balancing the students' old and new systems of culture. The extent to which a student adopts part of the university culture as their reference system is argued to depend upon the degree to which they have loosened their traditional bonds with their previous social systems (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gennep, 1960). "A person's ability to leave one setting, whether physical, social or intellectual, may be a necessary condition for subsequent persistence in another" (Tinto, 2012, p. 96). Where students' culture is different to that of the majority in the institution, students may also be trying to manage peer assimilation without losing their cultural identities (R. M. Lee & Davis, 2000). As above, US research makes a distinction between residential and commuter college attendance, leading Tinto (2012) to identify a move to university as being phenomenological not physical, for some students in US commuter colleges. Berger and Millem's (1999) study of 387 undergraduates in a US university found that first-year students sharing existing values, norms and behaviours with the

institution were more likely to persist. The historical assumption has been that the student might be needing to be supported to integrate into the institution and its existing culture but, as Devlin and McKay (2014) argue, that this could be better reconceptualised as a mutual issue of bridging a sociocultural gap. Historical studies postulated that living at home had negative effects on integration and involvement; not only in the first year but also in subsequent years (Astin, 1984). A US-based study of 7,571 first-year undergraduates found that not only were non-campus-based students more likely to drop out but students living with their parents were one-third more likely not to enrol for their second year (Ishitani, 2016).

Going to university, in the UK, may no longer only mean semi-permanently leaving home and building a new identity as a student, in a different location. This may be one model of university participation as students try to balance their finances and lives in general (Finn, 2017). As Finn identified, in a study of 24 women progressing from further education (FE) to HE, in the UK, the breadth of choices made by contemporary students range from hypermobility as middle-class students spend time abroad studying to those who choose to remain at home. A study of 180 students entering a post-1992 university in the UK showed that 70% were employed, as well as studying, and spent minimal time on campus, but wished that they had had more campus-based structured activity and more support from academic faculty to help them fit into their university life better (Leese, 2010). The traditional concept of going away to university was described by Earwaker (1992) as a kind of freedom and an opportunity to make new friends but such freedom may no longer be part of the motivation to go to university. In a study carried at a university in Ulster, on student motivations for applying to university, students moderately disagreed with getting away from home as a reason to attend university (Lowe & Cook, 2003).

2.3.2.4 Models and Persistence at Transition

As already discussed, successful transition is somewhat attributable to the right combination of conditions being in place. Tinto's (2012) student integration

model focuses upon the potential outcomes of deficiencies in social integration, academic performance or cultural integration to explain failure to persist. Tinto's (2012) longitudinal model included factors of the pre-college situation, for example, demographics and schooling, personal abilities and the demographics of the institution itself as an influence on the student's commitment to the goal of completion. An alternative, organisational, approach to successful transition was taken by Bean (1983) in his application of a work turnover model to student attrition, focusing upon attitudes, fit to the institution and integration. In a study of 2,459 undergraduates at a US university, Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) compared Tinto's and Bean's models, finding substantial areas of overlap and justification for the integration of the two. They argued that the principal difference was that Tinto's model appeared to place insufficient weight on external factors, such as the impact of family, friends and partners, because he saw them as an influence on commitment, whereas Bean's model found such environmental factors more significant and the greatest predictor of intention to persist was encouragement from family and friends.

There are several reasons for leaving university prematurely: academic failure, voluntary withdrawal, permanent or temporary dropout and transfer (Tinto, 1975). Students may develop and persist at university or suffer from attrition and desist but it is not a simple dichotomy, with a range of factors impacting upon the experience of being at university and a subjective assessment by the student. Studies have been carried out to consider the steps that institutions can take to retain students who may have a greater likelihood of leaving. For example, in a UK study of six institutions who had exceeded retention expectation of students from lower socio-economic groups, a supportive student development climate, pre-entry support, early engagement, the recognition of the social dimension of learning and acceptance and the preparedness for different student backgrounds were essential for transition success and retention (M. Yorke & Thomas, 2003). A longitudinal US study of 1,343 undergraduates (Berger & Braxton, 1998) tested only a narrow range of organisational factors – communication, fairness in policy and extent of participation in decision making – but they were found to impact decisions to persist. The study concluded that it would be useful to consider other

organisational factors' role or impact on persistence decisions but the work was generally supportive of the theory of organisational factor impact, in line with Bean's theories (1983) on decisions to persist.

Literature has tended to focus on the students who leave; not the ones who stay. In a UK survey of 2,151 students who had prematurely left UK university in the mid-90s, six main factors emerged: poor quality of the student experience; inability to cope with the demands of the programme; unhappiness with the social environment; the wrong choice of programme; matters related to financial need; and dissatisfaction with aspects of the institutional provision, although the factors differed between disciplines (M. Yorke, 2000). Of these, the dominant reason cited for their leaving was the poor quality of student experience. In 2010, a contemporary study of 377 students in a business studies department in a new university in the UK found financial difficulties coupled with poor academic performance or with lack of commitment were the prime motivators in students deciding to leave (Bennett, 2003). However, the study showed that teaching quality was a determinant of student satisfaction which contributed to commitment: sound relationships with faculty members contributed to decisions to stay, stress produced by poor academic performance and low self-esteem linked to low grades or financial hardship influenced decisions to leave.

Persistence in early transition may also depend on personal attributes and external factors. The same positive personal characteristics, attributes and behaviours of individuals, identified in the section on well-being and resilience, are identified in self and strategy factors in Goodman's (2006) model in his third and fourth group of factors. The components of the self-factor are personal and demographic characteristics, for example, socio-economic status and psychological resources, for example, optimism and self-efficacy. Socio-economic factors, diversity and language ability would be examples of student self-factors, and examples of the psychological resources are the personality and attributes, self-efficacy and resilience. The components of the strategy factors modify and control the situation and aid the management of stress. Elements of these, for these students, would be their problem-solving and coping mechanisms. Bringing transition factors from

Goodman (2006) together with the attrition factors from Bean (1983) and Tinto (2012), Figure 2.3 below shows that the influences upon the decision to persist or desist are a combination of academic and institutional.
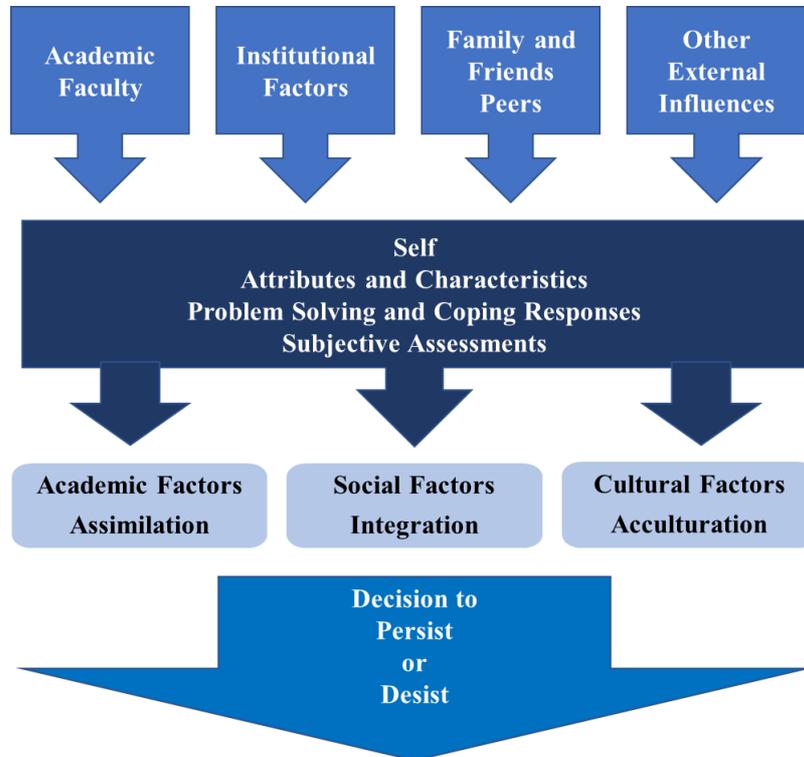
Figure 2.3: Factors of Success and Influence upon the Decision to Persist or Desist (Based upon: Bean, 1983; Goodman, 2006; Tinto, 2012)

2.3.2.5 Diversity and Transition

Students of more diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds may experience greater challenges to academic and social integration. Language ability is critical to academic assimilation and is also the vehicle of acculturation (Vygotsky, 1978). Minority students face two simultaneous challenges to academic assimilation: their language fluency may affect their learning but at the same time, if the university's cultural system of learning is different to their previous learning culture, they have to adjust their learning behaviour (Andrade, 2006a; Tas, 2013). Andrade's (2006b) qualitative study of 17 final-year students in the US, coming from Asia and Polynesia, with English as a second language, found that the

students had had to adapt their cultural learning styles by becoming more active and less passive in class, while appreciating they were in a co-operative and not a competitive learning environment. Their competence in English meant that they felt less confident to participate and so they had to overcome both the confidence, cultural and language obstacles, simultaneously. The study showed that openness to connectedness can facilitate a reduction in bias and ethnocentrism but, most importantly, it had a positive impact on the English language abilities of the less proficient students. In social interactions, the students felt that moving outside their own cultural groupings to form friendships was positive and breaking down any such barrier was essential. They had also had to choose how to adapt, culturally and socially, and many had learned to operate a blend of their cultures. In a separate study, inclusive class practices and the intercultural competence of the academics were found to be supportive of a student's sense of belonging to and engagement with the institution in a series of 40 in-depth interviews with international students at a US university (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015). Integration positively impacts language competence.

Recognition and respect of other individual students through a positive attitude to diversity is an essential part of engagement. Students learn by being friends with each other at an individual level, especially where individuals are more diverse (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). One study of school children's abilities to learn English in a bilingual school in Mexico provided insight into how respecting a diverse friend might be expected to generalise to acquaintanceship and how that integration acts as a virtuous circle (Graham & Brown, 1996). A study of 86 international students from a university in Hawaii, which devised a friendship network grid from measures of social connectedness, homesickness and contentment and satisfaction with life, found that, contrary to previous research, these students had the majority of friends amongst host nationals not co-nationals (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). The students in the survey had relatively strong English compared to other international students, which was felt to be one factor in the results, and Hawaii is quite unique in that it lacks a dominant culture. Overall, in the study, international students with a higher ratio of host nationals in their friendship networks reported significantly

higher levels of satisfaction and contentment, and significantly lower levels of homesickness than those with lower ratios.

The benefits of diversity are not solely social. In academic performance measures, the benefits of diversity have been recognised in academic group work. A US study of 357 undergraduates found more complex reasoning used in assignments by study groups which contained racial and opinion minority members (Antonio et al., 2004). In the same study, where members of groups reported friendships with minorities, such groups produced work of greater intellectual complexity, tending to substantiate the interdependence of the social and academic facets of learning. The advantages of study in such diverse groups was argued to be a reduction of groupthink; a unanimity of opinion based on similarities which often results in poor decision making, and generally greater diversity of thought. Similarly, a recent gender-based study considering the quality of discussion in group work found that the diversity of approaches between males and females was academically beneficial (Curşeu, Chappin, & Jansen, 2017). Studies have tended to focus on the challenges of integration, for students, with much less research upon how integration might happen. A study of 24 students from 15 different countries in a US university attempted to determine whether adjustment is a more bi-directional issue for institutions as well as the individual international student (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Lee and Rice's study concluded that international students were undermined in their attempts to fully participate, suffered some hostility towards some cultural attributes and some negative stereotyping hindered friendship formation and integration. However, the study found that students from Western countries encountered minimal to no discrimination compared to students from other regions. This was especially true of English-speaking students. Most recently, McCabe (2016, p. 10) talks of "homophily (social similarities in terms of race, gender and academic orientation)" as being one influence shaping the networks that undergraduates make; be they social or academic.

2.3.3 Settle – Growth – Mid-Transition

First-year transition is only the start of the lengthy student transformation journey. Students discover things about themselves as individuals as they integrate into friendship or academic work groups in cycles of differentiation and integration (Patton et al., 2016). In a qualitative study, outlined earlier, one student spoke of her connectedness to different groups of students and how, at the outset of transition, she formed relationships of convenience; later becoming more selective over her friends and reorganising her social networks accordingly (Maunder et al., 2013). Interviews with 19 second-year students at a US university led to the argument that students go through four stages: random exploration; focused exploration; tentative choices; and commitment (Schaller, 2005). In the present study, random exploration related to their first-year experiences but, before the commencement of the second year, they usually entered a stage of focused exploration, evidenced by them beginning to express some frustration with current relationships and engaging in a process of looking back at their childhoods and forward to their lives as adults. They began to question the relationships they developed during the first year and sought new, more fitting, relationships with their peers. In Schaller's model, tentative choices referred to a stage where students were making and locking in study decisions; enabling a far greater clarity of purpose towards commitment for the end of the programme. The establishment of optimal conditions for academic development may be no less critical for students of later years. Subsequent year groups may have their own focus, for example, second years may be focused upon their academic choices (Tobolowsky, 2008). Tobolowsky's review of US universities' interactions with second years, based on analysis of 382 institutions' sophomore survey data, found survey respondents describing institutional efforts to: create a sense of community; foster social engagement; facilitate faculty-student interaction; encourage major and career exploration; and promote academic engagement and leadership. The study concluded that second years needed institutional support to develop a collective identity. In a Higher Education Academy (HEA) literature review of first year at university, the first year was regarded as a mass experience, differentiated from later years where learning uses a more facilitated approach (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006).

Students of later years are less likely to leave the institution because the perceived benefit of graduation outweighs the perceived gains that might result from leaving (Tinto, 2012). The strength of such goals was demonstrated in a US study of 2,235 high-performing adults. Perseverance and passion for long-term goals accounted for 4% of the variance in success outcomes (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007); such internal strength of commitment could balance or even outweigh intelligence or personality factors in achieving successful educational outcomes. Academic integration may also be deepened, through the lifecycle, by students becoming involved in curricular or co-curricular activity, which may increase the breadth and depth of engagement (Astin, 1984). Research on increased involvement of students in co-curricular activity shows a direct impact upon academic performance but also upon student retention (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Co-curricular activity is that which is allied to the programme or the institution. Examples include: achievement awards; student-centred organisations; leadership positions; communal activity in halls of residence; and formal contact with academic staff. In terms of curricular involvement, the beneficial outcomes of student participation in pedagogical planning have been explored in case studies across a wide range of educational settings (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011). The paper discussed cases from a liberal arts college in the US, a national university in Ireland and a post-1992 institution in Scotland, presenting evidence of success with such engagement. One further factor in a student's decision to persist in the second year of a programme is the impact of parental educational levels, despite it having no effect upon first-year retention (Ishitani, 2016). In Ishitani's US study, mentioned earlier with regard to the impact of students who lived at home, first-generation students were 54.9% more likely to drop out during the second year compared with students who had both college-educated parents.

2.3.4 Future Orientation Phase: Realisation

This phase is concerned with transition out of university and relates to a gradual loss of the student identity in favour of a new professional identity (Andrew & Ferguson, 2008). However, it is still pertinent to the present study because some

of the students undertake a placement, in the context of the present study; thereby moving between the settled phase and the future orientation phase and back again.

2.4 Social Media as an Influence

The nature of what connectedness is, and what it might be, has changed immeasurably during the last 20 years with the evolution of social media platforms coupled with the reducing cost of hardware, smartphones and tablets, to enable continuous mobile access. The advent of social media means the messaging of friends is now far more prevalent than communicating with strangers (Valkenburg & Jochen, 2009). In the early days of the internet, it is likely that social peers were not widely web enabled. Whereas, in 2001 only 11% of Western-world adolescents were web enabled, 99% of 16–34 year olds in the UK were (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Western-world adolescents can therefore connect virtually with nearly every face-to-face contact they establish. University students' accommodation and teaching spaces are internet enabled and smartphones can fill any gaps with mobile data enablement.

Early research tended to suggest that social connectedness was harmed by internet use, whereas other, later, studies do not always support that. For example, a study of a random sample of 2,689 US households surveyed in 1999 (Nie, 2001) suggested that any time spent on the formation of superficial, less beneficial, virtual private connections via the internet detracted from time which might have been better spent developing actual relationships, resulting in diminished social connectedness and well-being. Conversely, a longitudinal survey, of the same era, demonstrated that internet use amplified the advantages that extroverts and those with existing social networks had, and suggested internet use was related to maintaining existing relationships, not forging new ones, but also proposed that internet use might have matured over the three-year period of the study and users were more effective in how they used it (Kraut et al., 2002). A third study, again of the same era, found that, of 1,221 US survey respondents, those using the internet to communicate with family and friends, were more extroverted and had better social resources (Bessière, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva, 2008).

Contemporary social media use continues to be a matter of great debate. One view is that contemporary social media use complements face-to-face friendship and therefore leads to enhanced well-being; perhaps especially so for the socially anxious (Valkenburg & Jochen, 2009). The alternative view is that young people are experiencing substantial difficulties when they try to use traditional tools of relationship development, such as the art of conversation in face-to-face encounters, because they may be used to being infinitely, continuously and indiscriminately digitally connected (Turkle, 2015). The question of what proportion of students' time is being spent on social media and related communication may be an issue. In a set of studies carried out in the US, using data from 8,000 CSEQs, in conjunction with data from 700 students in the development of a connectedness scale alongside some earlier qualitative interviews, the average time per week expended on social media was eight hours (Strayhorn, 2016). In the same study, the average time spent using mobile phone, voice or text, was 13. However, the relevance of these data today may well be diminished because its collection era was the early 2000s and pre-smartphone.

There are multiple aims, objectives, and risks, in social media use. An online survey of students completed at events held in 26 countries across Europe, Asia, Latin America, North America and Africa showed that approximately one-quarter cited the principal use of social media as an opportunity to make useful connections (Vannozzi & Bridgestock, 2013). Students routinely use social media as part of their educational and related social experience. In a survey of 55 students who were using Facebook within a sports and exercise science programme at an Australian university, most appeared to find it positive and useful in promoting awareness and engagement in co-curricular activities (McGuckin & Sealey, 2013). However, social media is increasingly focused on self-projection and "a reflection of the life an individual wants others to think they are leading" (Shrimsley, 2016, p. 10). Messages posted from young people, even amongst their own communities, may be more focused on presenting their own message as opposed to communicating. The barometers of social media success may be gauged by the number of 'likes' (Freitas, 2017; Shrimsley, 2016) as one's

life is showcased to others. Young people may manage their social media activities strategically, presenting family-friendly versions of their life on Facebook but use other closed apps to be more open about themselves to their friends (Moore, 2017). Self-disclosure is always a risk regardless of the method of its facilitation but the damage which may be wrought through hostile or bullying communication on social media could be even more substantial (Valkenburg & Jochen, 2009).

Decisions on the extent or depth of social media use may be influenced by sociological factors. Strayhorn's (2012) study of 755 undergraduates from a mainly white US college found demographic differences in social media use and mixed results on whether social media use was related to decisions to persist. The study found that: students of colour are heavier users of social media than their white counterparts; first-year female students were greater users of the systems than their male colleagues; and campus-based students were greater users than non-campus-based students. The absence or infrequent use of social networking sites use was weakly but positively related to sense of belonging to the institution, leading Strayhorn to assume that time spent on social media may be at the expense of new relationship development because using social media supported the ties to the students' old home life in favour of an evolution to the new. A survey of 1,204 adults carried out by an Australian community-based support organisation found that people who frequently felt lonely were more likely to use Facebook to communicate with family, friends and potential partners, and to use a greater number of different communication methods, as opposed to those who never felt lonely (Morgan, 2011). This research raised the question of whether loneliness stimulated virtual communication or whether engaging in more virtual communication might amplify feelings of loneliness as the lack of face-to-face communication became more apparent.

Finally, social media use may be a structural challenge to conventional theories of student development. For example, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) system emanating from a core microsystem is perhaps challenged because social media might create overlapping social systems, each based on different centres with different norms

of operation with regard to privacy and familiarity (Brown, 2014). Many seminal student development, transition and engagement studies were carried out before the advent of widespread use of social media (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Sanford, 1967; Tinto, 2012). In the academic assimilation section of Entry and Settle Phase above, social environment is one environment that can substantially influence self-belief and has already been identified. Bandura (2001) specifically emphasizes the electronic as a major influence upon acculturation. In discussing the direct and indirect pathways of communication in relation to social media, Bandura (2001, p. 265) asserts "In the direct pathway, they promote changes by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding participants. In the socially mediated pathway, media influences link participants to social networks and community settings that provide natural incentives and continued personalized guidance, for desired change."

2.5 Summary and Conceptual Model

This chapter examined the constructs of well-being and resilience as they were conceptualised in positive psychology. The literature relating to belonging and connectedness, the two related constructs at the heart of the present study, was reviewed. Theoretical models of transition were then used to relate these constructs to the stages of the student lifecycle. The role of social media for young people and its impact and function in the student lifecycle was discussed. At the outset, the present study was focused towards studying external connectedness as opposed to internal connectedness (Whitlock et al., 2012) although neither may be considered completely in isolation. Figure 2.4 below now brings together internal and external aspects of connectedness and how they relate to the construct of well-being. The aspects of external connectedness in the model were used in the design of Research Question One, which aimed to investigate student external connectedness.
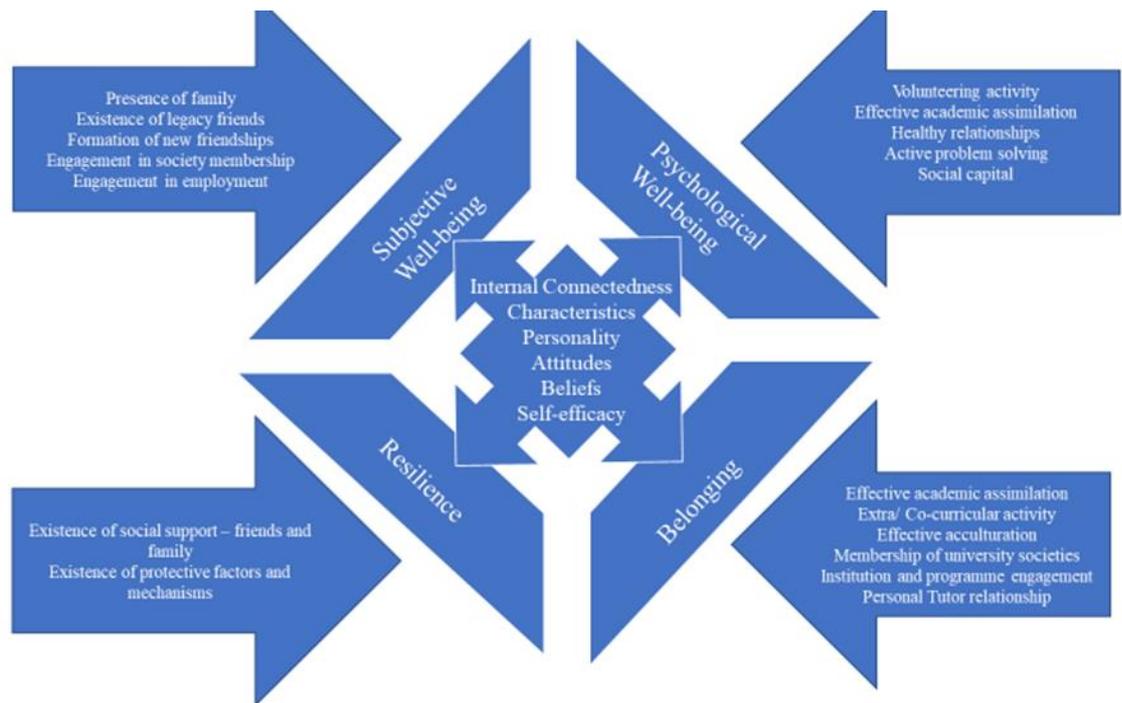
Figure 2.4: The Effects of the Factors of Connectedness Upon Well-being

2.6 Existing Research

The roots of the study of resilience and well-being are clinical and much of what is known comes from studies of people of compromised mental health. Contemporary non-clinical concerns are focused towards interventions which develop resilience and enhance well-being to try to avoid more serious issues. High levels of connectedness are generally associated with high levels of well-being. However, little work has been done on the substance, activity or lived experiences of student connectedness, especially how that evolves over later years of study, in UK undergraduate populations, and what conditions might foster low connectedness or how it might be recognised. Well-being research has tended to focus upon the less happy and the compromised, because of its clinical background, as opposed to the students who are generally happy and flourishing because deficit models, perhaps, offer more room for intervention or improvement. This research gap was particularly pertinent to the design of Research Question Two and the methodology. The current study was designed to

identify the situational factors which affect connectedness and how did the student of high well-being differ from the student of lower well-being.

Much of the theory and research has been US based. The US has a two-institution system at this level: community colleges and residential degrees. There are some similarities with the UK model but it is not an identical operating model. The sheer size of the US also has an impact on physically how far away friends and family may be. The US has provided most longitudinal research relating to the impact of tuition fees on student progression owing to the length of time its financing model has been operating. Diversity discussion in US research comes from a different history to that of the UK but there are some similarities with the issues of integration. The first detailed exploration of the microstructure of friendship groups and their interrelationships, in a longitudinal study, was published during the present study (McCabe, 2016). This study investigates the structure and nature of relational networks of friends operating amongst college students in the US and there is no UK equivalent on friendship groups.

Student development theory and transition acculturation were active fields of research in the 1980s and 1990s with academics such as Chickering and Reisser, Astin, and Tinto. This field was concerned with students fitting in socially and academically and how they may execute that. Social media has impacted some of the bases upon which early theory was predicated. This has meant that historical research has generally argued that there is a need to leave the past behind to succeed in a new student identity, but social media has enabled easier retention of friends from the past. There is currently limited research on changed models of attending a UK university. On the topic of academic assimilation, there is little data on students' current study habits, how much time they spend studying or where they do that, although there is some research on group work.

2.7 Setting of the Study and the Research Questions

As identified in Chapter One, the setting for the study is a UK business school housed within a campus university in the south-east of England, and data were

collected in the academic year 2016/17. The first question to be addressed concerned an investigation into the nature, substance and operationalisation of students' connectedness over the lifespan as it relates to initial transition and later transformations, to contextualise the study, using the elements of Figure 2.2: Stages of Transformation and the Lifecycle.

Research Question One:

- How is social connectedness realised and how does it develop through the lifecycle of these undergraduate students?

This led to the second question, which concerned itself with the connectedness characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of students with higher levels of well-being so that they might be compared with those exhibiting lower levels of well-being.

Research Question Two:

- How do the social connectedness attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of well-being compare to those exhibiting lower levels of well-being?

The findings from the Research Questions One and Two were then used to inform Research Question Three, which relates to how the institution might be better informed in its support of student well-being and the implications that may have.

Research Question Three:

- How might the findings on connectedness, from this doctoral study, inform the institution, the business school and personal tutors' approach to promoting well-being amongst these undergraduate students?

Chapter Three will now define the methodology used to answer the three research questions.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology, Methods and Ethical Considerations

3.1 Overview

The first part of this chapter presents: the methodology and philosophical framework for the study; the purpose of the study; the research questions; the method of enquiry; the research plan; and the sampling approach. The second part presents: the methods used to conduct the study; the online survey; and the semi-structured interviews. The third part reflects upon the power and politics of the participants' positions and the ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1. Philosophical Framework

Research is not solely an objective exercise concerned with understanding; it depends upon the researcher's views of what understanding is, what its purpose is and what its value and importance might be (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The methodology is based upon the ideological, ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher (Crotty, 1998). The ontological framework for the study was interpretivist: the researcher believed that individual knowledge about social science does not exist independently but is constructed by human beings as they interact with their environments (Gordon, 2009). The epistemological stance of the social *constructionist* over that of a social *constructivist* was marginally favoured in the research approach. Social constructionism sees individuals co-constructing experience and meaning together, for a not wholly external reality, whereas constructivism sees reality as an internal construction, the interpretation of experience by an individual to assign meaning (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). Constructionism is more allied to a sociological approach and constructivism to a psychological approach but the terms are more usefully conceptualised by a continuum because neither position wholly rejects the primary emphasis of the other. The meaning of concepts such as belonging and connectedness are a matter of perception and personal to

individuals. They are socially constructed, and perhaps especially so, for this population, with influences such as social media.

3.2.2 Purpose of the Study and the Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to explore the construct of connectedness over the student lifecycle and its role in supporting well-being amongst undergraduates. The outcome of the present study informs practice at the institutional, business school, and personal tutor level by considering student resilience and well-being. The three research questions are:

- How is social connectedness realised and how does it develop through the lifecycle of these undergraduate students?

- How do the social connectedness attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of well-being compare to those exhibiting lower levels of well-being?

- How might the findings on connectedness, from this doctoral study, inform the institution, the business school and personal tutors' approach to promoting well-being amongst these undergraduate students?

3.2.3 The Method of Enquiry and the Research Approach

Any methods of enquiry, data collection and analysis have to be considered, systematically planned and open to review (Creswell, 2012). The primary objective of the study was to capture and reflect upon the students' awareness and experiences of connectedness, in their own words, from within their sociological environment and to assess its impact on well-being: a largely qualitative objective. Research Question One could only be answered by being able to select different students in different years and Research Question Two could only be

answered by selecting specific students to study (Miles et al., 2014), according to their levels of well-being. The method of enquiry had to take account of both the need to capture as large a proportion of the population as possible, and the need to select from that group for more detailed study. Therefore, data first needed to be collected to enable purposive sampling before the primary, qualitative, data collection could be realised. The most viable and practical option of a structured online survey was chosen for Stage One. This enabled a large number of undergraduates to be reached efficiently and the resulting electronic data collection enabled timely sampling. Studies using mixed methods, can also be used 'to elaborate on or expand the findings of one method with another method (Creswell, 2003 p 16). In this case, the initial online data was later re-analysed in conjunction with the later qualitative data and some secondary data, to further augment the findings. Mixed methods in qualitative research may be approached in a number of ways but, for the present study, the design could be considered embedded (Patricia Bazeley, 2009) because the qualitative data collections were nested beneath the quantitative survey to enable a richer perspective to be obtained. The study was therefore designed as to be cross sectional, to use sequential mixed methods and was to consist of two discrete steps (Rudestam & Newton, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Several options for primary data collection for the second, qualitative, stage were considered. The depth of data needed justified a more personal interface, and so focus groups and interviews were considered. Focus groups would have meant students needed to be able and willing to share personal experiences and the nature of some of the lines of enquiry could have been too sensitive for this approach to be effective. Having rejected focus groups as an approach, an interview process was evaluated for its suitability. Individual interviews were chosen as the method for qualitative data collection because they are frequently used to 'learn something new rather than to test something that is known' (Richards 2009, p 13) and the purpose of this study was explorative. The interaction between the researcher and the researched in social life research situations is how knowledge in interpretative approaches is created (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The purpose of this study was to investigate how undergraduates

connected to each other and their studies but retained links to their past lives and a depth and richness of data was critical to success. Research interviews are on a continuum from fully structured to completely unstructured (Walliman, 2011). Walliman argues that the more structured interview provides more easily coded or interpreted data but can limit the range of the interviewee's responses. Conversely, the more unstructured the interview, the greater the interviewee's freedom, but the greater the likelihood of interviewer bias in interpretation. In addition, less structured interviews are more time consuming to conduct and more difficult to code.

Semi structured interviews have 'a thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach where the researcher has topics, themes or issues they wish to cover, but with a fluid and flexible structure' as a core feature (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p 3). The semi structured interview offers greater flexibility for appropriate and related digression. The ethical considerations of this study also meant that it might have become necessary to approach more sensitive areas slightly differently in different interviews and such contemporaneous adjustment is possible in a semi structured format. From the interviewees point of view, a semi structured interview more closely resembles everyday human conversation and interaction, but it bestows upon the interviewer a 'privileged access to a linguistically constituted social world' (Kvale, 1994, p147). The interviewer can also modify the pace, style or ordering of the questions, as appropriate, to evoke richer responses from the interviewees (Qu &Dumay, 2011). The chosen method of enquiry for the second part of this study was, therefore, a semi-structured interview. The tentative conceptual framework, presented in Chapter Two, defined the boundaries of the constructs to provide the framework for the semi structured interview (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), but left some freedom for both the interviewer and the interviewee to deviate or reflect (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Inductive content analysis could then be carried out to establish themes, commonalities and differences, to understand how students conceptualised their own connectedness with some reporting using the actual voices of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2012). Such an approach "conceptualises the similarities of experience of an aggregate of individuals"

(Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 47) and aims to build theory from data related to the research question.

3.2.4 Approach to Sampling

Although undergraduate students at the business school could be considered a relatively homogenous group in some respects, the study required some differences to be recognised. Research Question One was concerned with the nature and role of connectedness and how that might change over time, and so the year of study was considered important. Other potentially important influences on connectedness in the lifecycle were also considered: whether the students lived at home; and perhaps their gender and whether their parents had attended university. The online survey was designed not only to elicit data in these areas but also to identify students in apparently higher states of well-being as opposed to those in apparently lower states. This was established by using suitable pre-existing scales to assess connectedness alongside two other well-being factors, resilience and happiness (subjective well-being), as other researchers had (Bales et al., 2015; Pidgeon et al., 2014), with similar constructs.

3.2.5 Research Plan

The research plan therefore, was to: stage the online survey; analyse the results to select interviewees from each end of the well-being spectrum; and analyse the interview results in conjunction with the survey results to answer the research questions. The decision regarding the number of interviews to be conducted was not made in advance. An iterative process between theory and data was used to enable the interview sample to be continuously modified after the research commenced (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Practical difficulties arose in that some online participants did not want to be interviewed and some first years had already departed. The decision about who or how many to invite for interview evolved during the research as gender, year of study and students of apparently high states of well-being and those of apparently lower states were considered to try to achieve a balanced sample.

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3.3 Research Methods

A summary of the research methods and the order in which they took place is given in Figure 3.1 below. Selection of the relevant research tools and management of the processes, for each stage, will be discussed.

Autumn Term 2016 Stage One – Online Survey	Autumn Term 2016 Stage Two – Interview Pilot	Spring Term 2017 Stage Three– Interviews	2017/18 Stage Four – Analysis
• Generated data to enable purposive sampling • Collected background data to be used directly in the research	• Checks semi-structured interview guide for meaning	• Generated interview data for the core of the study	• Online survey data • Interview data • Additional background data

Figure 3.1: Chronology of the Research Methods

3.3.1 Stage One: The Online Survey

3.3.1.1 Programme and Participants

The characteristics and structure of the programme chosen for the research will now be presented. As stated in Chapter Two, when the research questions were identified, the study was based in a UK business school, which is housed in a campus university in the south-east of England. In the autumn of the academic year 2016/17, 440 undergraduate students were registered as studying for the BA in Business and Management or the BA in Management and Business programmes. The programmes are identical apart from one having a placement and the other not, and the two programmes together comprise the largest undergraduate programme in the business school. Students move between the two, as they attain a placement, or change their minds about completing one so it is not necessarily known amongst first and second years, at any stage, which programme they will finally graduate from. The third- and fourth-year finalists study for the same modules together and, for the purposes of the research, the

programme will be referred to as 'the BA programme'. However, the distinction between third-year finalists and fourth-year finalists was retained in the study because this proved an important distinction. Students on placement were not invited to participate because: they were not technically registered; they were widely dispersed; interviewing them would have proved challenging because some were abroad; and their placement connectedness experience was not necessarily related or relevant to their university connectedness experience. The presence of the fourth-year finalists was felt to be particularly useful to be able to gauge post-placement connectedness. The breakdown of the registered students by year is detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Total Number of Students Registered in Each Year of the Chosen Programmes

2016/2017 Academic Year BA Business and Management	Total Numbers of Students Registered
First year	139
Second year	132
Third-year finalist	85
Fourth-year finalist	84
Total	440

3.3.1.2 The Online Survey

The online survey was carried out during the first half of the autumn term to enable the researcher to analyse the results and to make appropriate selections for interview during the spring term of the same academic year. The survey used a structured questionnaire, in two sections. The first section was concerned with background and demographic information and contained between 10 and 14 questions, depending on which year of the programme the student was in and whether they were engaged in paid work, volunteering activities or both. The second section focused upon the assessment of the degree of a student's

connectedness, resilience and happiness: the core constructs of subjective well-being, identified in the conceptual model in Chapter Two in Figure 2.4. A copy of the online survey, as well as the information and consent form which preceded it, is provided within the Ethical Approval Form in Appendix A.

3.3.1.3 Scales Used for the Online Survey

A connectedness scale was central to the research but, from the conceptual model, other factors were related to well-being, resilience and both subjective and psychological dimensions, so a decision was taken to use several scales together, as had been the case in other studies of students for assessing similar factors (Bales et al., 2015; Pidgeon et al., 2014). Research was carried out to identify suitable pre-existing academic scales to use in Stage One – the online survey – which are discussed below. Three scales were finally chosen, which together provided a broad well-being assessment. The one element of well-being not assessed was psychological well-being because this was judged to be inappropriate outside of a medically-controlled environment and the present study related to positive psychology not mental ill health.

3.3.1.3.1 Resilience Scale

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was chosen for this survey (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This scale was first developed in 2003 in an attempt to provide a reliable generalisable scale to psychiatrists. It was developed from academic work on hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), Rutter's (1985) work on resilience and Lyons' (1991) work on patience and enduring stress. It had been tried and tested over a wide range of participants, including in excess of 20 published studies of students. The scale had been used extensively in general populations in Western and Asian cultures, and the findings published in academic journals, for example, Bitsika, Sharpley and Peters' (2010) work with 401 undergraduates in Australia, and Campbell-Sills and Stein's (2007) work with 1,743 undergraduates in the US. Both of these studies reported upon the internal consistency of the scale and its test–retest validity.

The most prominent criticism of the CD scale concerns the weighting given to each of the five factors of which it is comprised because they are not equally weighted. Independent work to review 19 widely-used resilience scales (Amat, Subhan, Jaafar, Mahmud, & Johari, 2014) judged the CD Resilience Scale, the Resilience Scale for Adults and the Brief Resilience Scale the highest scoring scales when evaluated for validity, consistency and reliability measures. However, they judged the quality of these scales to be only moderate. The Brief Resilience Scale focuses on the aftermath of stress and illness and not the state of resilience and was therefore not appropriate to a well-being context. Of the remaining two, the Resilience Scale for Adults focuses on the measurement and presence of protective factors and the CD Resilience Scale focuses on stress coping ability. For this research, the factors associated with stress and resilience were planned to be explored in greater detail in the semi-structured interviews and therefore the choice was made to select the scale with the stress coping ability dimension because this was of most interest to student well-being. Because its principal function was to identify low or high scorers, it had been used in similar cultures and populations successfully, it was well regarded within the research community, it was suitably brief, it was able to be self-administered and it was sufficiently rigorous for clinical settings, its use was judged to be appropriate. A licence was taken to use this scale and the scale contained 25 questions.

3.3.1.3.2 Subjective Well-being Scale

A search for a suitable well-being scale – one which could be considered to be measuring subjective well-being but avoiding any assessment of psychological well- being – identified The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). The OHQ was derived from the original Oxford Happiness Inventory and was originally developed by psychologists (Hills & Argyle, 2002). It aims to measure three components: the frequency of positive affect/joy; the average level of satisfaction; and the absence of negative feelings. The scale had previously been used with students and did not use statements of depression measurement; a key ethical consideration. The OHQ has been widely used from its inception in academic

papers (Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby, & Ward, 1995; French & Joseph, 1999) and continues to be used in a wide range of contexts (Liaghatdar, Jafari, Abedi, & Samiee, 2008)

However, the OHQ is not without its critics. Kashdan's (2004, p. 1225) paper stated that "instead of assessing the structure of subjective wellbeing *(sic),* items of the OHQ tap into self-esteem, sense of purpose, social interest and kindness, sense of humor, and aesthetic appreciation". Kashdan (2004, p. 1226) also asserted other scales "Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; 18-item Wellbeing Scale; Tellegen, 1982" as being preferable, because they were devoid of the conceptual overlaps of the OHQ. However, the OHQ was chosen because of its broad assessment capabilities. In the online stage of the research, the objective was to try to identify different individual and situational profiles for the interview sample and a general, broad academic tool addressed this need. Kashdan's (2004) arguments regarding the issue of potential score inflation or the mixing of cognitive and affective components within the scale counted towards its utility in this context. This scale was downloaded from the web and contained 29 questions.

3.3.1.3.3 Connectedness Scale

The availability of a connectedness scale was more limited because only Lee and Robbins (1995) Social Connectedness Scale and a Social Assurance Scale, based upon Kohut's (1984) self-psychology theory were found. The scale consisted of factors relating to three aspects of belongingness – connectedness, affiliation and companionship – and had already been adapted to a Campus Connectedness Scale by some minor contextual adaptations to its wording (R. M. Lee, Keough, & Sexton, 2002). Both versions predated social media. A decision was therefore taken to adapt the scale by adding two similarly-structured statements, regarding social media use, and to test them for validity as an appropriate compromise. The contextual adaptations had related to its US situation and referred exclusively to campus-based relationships. These terms were replaced by the more anglicised

version of *within this university.* This scale originally contained 14 questions and the two further social media questions were added, making a total of 16 questions.

3.3.1.3.4 Scale Alignments and Polarities

Each of the scales and some of the responses had to be aligned to ensure their utility and validity. Each scale used a different number of points in its rating. The Resilience Scale was scored over four points, the connectedness scale over five points and happiness scale over six points. The least confusing compromise was use a scale of five points throughout. Only one piece of research has been carried out on the validity of taking a scale already scored on four points and then converting it to scoring on five points (Holmes & Mergen, 2014) and the research produced a method of doing so. However, this is not the same as scoring on a five-point scale at the outset. The drawback of using a five-point scale with CD meant that the findings were not comparable against reported averages for students in other research. The polarity of the questions in the scales varied: the most positive score in some questions was the highest number, and in others, the lowest. After the data were collected, responses were aligned so that all positive responses were allocated high numbers. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software could then then be used to support the analysis of the data.

3.3.1.4 Management of the Online Survey

Students were encouraged, monitored and incentivised to participate in the online survey. Firstly, the researcher visited one of the core lectures for years one and two to introduce the research personally and asked the students to complete the online survey, during week three of the autumn term. Finalists had no compulsory modules, which meant that three different sessions needed to be visited to communicate with them. Week three of the autumn term was chosen to start the online survey process because students were most likely to have settled in or settled back after the summer break. Later would have meant that there would have been no opportunity to further incentivise participation if response rates were

disappointing. Academic colleagues kindly followed up on these visits three weeks later, in their lectures, urging students to complete the survey if they had not already done so. Qualtrics software (www.qualtrics.com) was used to house, disseminate and manage the online survey. A single non-transferable, non-repeatable link was sent to each potential participant with a personal message after seeing each class. Using such software enabled links to be re-sent to non-responding students after two weeks. Participation in the online survey was incentivised, as fellow researchers had advised. A single prize was offered to be drawn at random. The prize was £100, increased by every participant over 100 who had fully completed the survey, up the value of £200. Ultimately, a prize of £164 was awarded to the 128th student on the list of 164; a first-year male. The online survey closed at the end of the autumn term.

3.3.1.5 Verifying Reliability of the Online Survey Scales and the Additional Questions

The internal consistency of two aspects of the method had to be verified. Firstly, whether it was reliable to use a single score for each of the scales and make interview selections based on this, knowing that they were comprised of several factors. Secondly, whether the two additional social media questions that had been added to the connectedness scale were consistent, as they had never been tested. In relation to the first issue, the reliability of using a single resilience, connectedness and well-being score was verified using Cronbach's Alpha. Table 3 below shows the results.

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha for each of the Three Chosen Scales

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Questions
Resilience	0.870	25
Connectedness	0.933	16
Happiness	0.881	29

A Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.800 or more is considered to be a demonstration that the same concept is being measured. In the case of all three scales, the scores were substantially higher than 0.800 and, in the case of connectedness, very high. This meant aggregating scores within each scale was valid and connectedness was the most reliable scale.

In the case of the second issue, Cronbach's Alpha was used to test whether adding the two social media questions to the scale impacted its reliability. This was done by removing each of the social media questions in turn and recalculating the Cronbach's Alpha. Table 4 below shows the results for the two new questions.

Table 4: Testing the Impact of Removing Each New Question on the Connectedness Scale

Question	Cronbach's Alpha for scale if this question is *removed*
Social media is good for making new friends at university	0.934
Social media helps me to feel a part of the university	0.936

This result shows a slight improvement in Cronbach's Alpha upon removal of each of these questions. This demonstrates that the new questions are not quite as reliable as a measure of connectedness because there is a marginal improvement to the score by removing each. When the other questions were tested for removal in the same way, the range was 0.926 to 0.930; indicating that the original group of questions were marginally more closely related prior to the inclusion of the two new questions. However, the degree of improvement suggested that the Cronbach's Alpha testing confirmed sufficient reliability of the amended connectedness scale, in order to justify the two additional questions being retained.

3.3.1.6 Correlations between Scale Variables

The three scale areas were grouped together to allow correlations to be considered between resilience and connectedness, resilience and happiness, and happiness and connectedness. The Pearson correlation coefficient, a measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables, was calculated. All the correlations were identified as being positive; meaning that, for each group of two variables considered, as one increased the other increased. The results are given in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Pearson Correlations between Scale Variables (*n*=164)

	Resilience Mean	**Connectedness Mean**	**Happiness Mean**
Resilience Mean	1	0.473	0.752
Connectedness Mean	0.473	1	0.613
Happiness Mean	0.752	0.613	1

In psychological research, Cohen's (1988) conventions may be used to interpret effect size. A correlation coefficient of .10 is thought to represent a weak or small association; a correlation coefficient of .30 is considered a moderate correlation; and a correlation coefficient of .50 or larger is thought to represent a strong or large correlation. Therefore, in this sample, according to these definitions, resilience and connectedness were moderately correlated, but both happiness and connectedness and happiness and resilience were strongly correlated.

3.3.1.7 Response Rates

The survey response rates are given in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Response Rate Data by Gender and Year of Study

Year of Study	Total Number of Females in Year	Number of Females responding	Total Number of Males in Year	Number of Males responding	Total Students	Total Respondents by Year
One	70	38	66	25	136	63
Two	66	37	70	19	136	56
Three	33	12	51	3	84	15
Four	49	23	35	7	84	30
Total	218	110	222	54	440	164

3.3.1.8 Cluster Analysis to Identify Stage Two Participants

A cluster analysis was carried out, in SPSS, using all three of the scale variables simultaneously in order to determine the sampling strategy for Stage Two. The objective of cluster analysis is to form groups of individuals who are similar in some way but can be distinguished from individuals in other groups (Tan, Steinbach, & Kumar, 2005). Cluster analysis requires that the chosen variables on which the grouping is based are all judged to be relevant by considering the conceptual considerations underpinning the research (Cornish, 2007). Mean overall scores were calculated for each of the three scales of resilience, happiness and connectedness. In addition, an average score of the three scales taken together for each respondent was calculated to classify each respondent and then to identify patterns of response. A hierarchical agglomerative approach (Ward's method based on z scores) was initially used as a means of assessing the most appropriate number of clusters. The agglomeration schedule showed that the step where the distance coefficients made the biggest difference was three; thereby indicating that three clusters was the optimal to maintain homogeneity. This cluster solution also met a secondary criterion in that there were sufficient cases in each cluster to permit further statistical analysis. Subsequently, a K-means,

exploratory as opposed to a hierarchical, clustering approach, was then used. The algorithm can only be used for a set number of clusters; hence, the step above to determine the number of clusters. This approach is considered suitable for this sample size and, as identified above, the chosen number of clusters was three. This method of cluster analysis relates to the researcher's assignment of subjects to their nearest cluster. It is a widely accepted method in social science research and its exploratory nature means it may be used as one step towards more confirmatory research (Tan et al., 2005).

This number of clusters was felt to be appropriately balanced with the dominant group being in the middle of the scales and an appropriate-sized population either side of them, which indicated that this approach was appropriate. It is argued that the number of clusters should also be considered to determine whether they may be considered of a natural and useful size (Krantz, Korn, & Menninger, 2009). This method could have produced clusters of little value: if all of the first years had been in the lower scoring group and the third-/fourth-year finalists were all in the higher scoring group, clustering might have been regarded as less useful because it did not provide an opportunity for the kind of research envisaged. Such a result might simply have suggested that the passage of time at university caused all three scale variables to rise. Each of the clusters was compared and considered by potentially informative data, from the demographic, fact-based responses, such as whether their parents attended university, their living situations and, for years two to four, their previous year's academic results. The clusters were named as *Uppers, Middles* and *Lowers*. Uppers (*n=44*) were the cluster with the highest, most positive, scores across all three scales; Lowers (*n=38*) were at the opposite end of the scale with the lowest scores across all three scales; and Middles (*n=82*) were the remainder, the middle scoring and the largest group.

Selections for interview were made in light of the clustering. Six students from the Uppers group were initially chosen for interview in order to identify some key attitudes and behaviours and then the study moved to investigating similar factors for the Lowers. The selection of Uppers was made by taking high scorers from different years, balanced by gender and trying to take into account other factors,

such as living at home or graduate parents, which might have impacted their connectedness. The outline characteristics of the Uppers students selected for interview are given in Appendix B and the reason why they were selected over other potential interviewees is also given. There were 38 students in the Lowers group and, between the autumn term and the spring term, five students had left the university. A decision was taken to invite all of the remaining 33 Lowers to interview to try to reduce the risk of low participation. Three declined to be interviewed and 12 failed to respond, despite several attempts to invite them using their preferred email address. First-year females were particularly elusive and, despite all reasonable attempts, no first-year female interviews were secured. Therefore, 18 Lowers were interviewed. The outline characteristics of the Lowers students selected for interview are given in Appendix C.

3.3.2 Stage Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

3.3.2.1 The Interview and its Design

The semi structured interview was designed to build upon the online questionnaires and explore the elements of the conceptual model, in greater depth, through the students' views and perceptions of their experiences. The rationale for the framework was derived from literature and previous research and is outlined below. A semi-structured interview guide was designed and used to ensure that a consistent thematic approach was employed in each interview (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Consistency in the interview process was further increased by all the interviews being personally conducted by the researcher. The flow of questions was based around clarifying but further enriching situational data from the online survey at the start of the interview (for example, if the student was campus based, whether s/he often went home), proceeding to more sensitive, nuanced and personal topics in the latter stages (for example, the approach the student used to address problems). The authenticity of the research relies upon students' views in their own words and interview quotations are reproduced verbatim, in the Findings section, including non-formal and ungrammatical

aspects (as present in the original transcripts). A copy of the Interview Guide is within the Ethical Approval Form in Appendix A.

3.3.2.2 Rationale for Each Section of the Stage Two Interview Guide

The Living and Meeting People section of the guide was designed to elicit a deeper understanding of a student's sense of belonging or feelings of isolation, their sense of fitting in or of marginalisation or, perhaps, a duality of belonging. The discussion related to current connectedness: current and previous home life; current and previous friends; the ease or difficulty of forging new friendships at university; and their perceived depth. This enabled the assessment of transition factors and the extent of the students' protective factors to reveal what systems of resilience appeared to be present. The Diversity section was designed to gauge the students' experience of diversity as it related to themselves and how they saw it relating to others. Students might have perceived themselves to be outsiders or see others who they judged to be being treated as outsiders. These two sections related to the exploration of traditional theories of student development, retention, and engagement (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1975) and more contemporary additions to diversity, such as Strayhorn (2016).

The University Academic, Non-Academic Life, University Connectedness and Non-University Connectedness sections were designed to explore the students' lifecycle of attachment to the institution at the broader level: extra-curricular activities; and their attachment to activities at or outside the university. Discussions were directed to the understanding of perceptions, expectations and reflections upon the universe of connectedness experiences. Those experiences might be of academic learning, academic belonging and involvement in co-curricular activity or membership of university societies. The Academic section set out to determine how and where students spent their study time, who they consulted regarding their academic work and the role they saw their tutors playing. The Non-Academic section set out to determine what co-curricular activity students engaged in. These sections related to engagement and connectedness felt by students and their degree of involvement (Astin, 1984). The

extent to which a student felt a sense of belonging to the programme, the department or the business school was important and aspects of their attachment to the programme and to peers was assessed in this section.

The Social Media section was designed to identify what role it played in retaining: the protective systems of home, ongoing relationships with previous networks or those relationships allied to the parental home but also with new relationships and in academic work. The discussions were designed to gauge how the students felt about using social media, reflecting on its benefits and drawbacks and how it might support academic connectedness (McGuckin & Sealey, 2013). The discussion also addressed the relationship between face-to-face and virtual connectedness, and whether social media was a connectivity complement or a substitute. One key issue was whether relationships could be initiated or only maintained via social media.

The Paid Employment section was designed to assess the extent to which the student had a work identity outside of a student identity and how important or dominant that was in their lives. Having a strong work identity might impact on university connectedness and academic success. The role of employment related connectedness, and commitment to it was explored. Similarly, the Volunteering section was designed to assess the place of volunteering, if any, in a student's life: time-wise, connectedness- and belongingness-wise. Psychological and subjective well-being might have been influenced by volunteering because a broader meaning may provide a deeper sense of purpose.

Finally, the Problem-Solving section was designed to map what happens when a student had issues of varying severity and what part their friends, tutors and university services played in that. The level of a student's resilience and their access to protective factors but also their coping mechanisms (Freire, Ferradás, Vallejo, Valle, & Núñez, 2016) would be implicated in their approach to problem solving. The section presented levels of issues to the student, for example, where/who would you go to get help with an assignment, the fact that your laptop had been stolen, feeling depressed or isolated, and then finally asked them to think

of something unpleasant they had had to face and reflect on who/what they turned to for help.

3.3.2.3 Focus Group to Test the Structure and Pilot the Content of the Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide was tested, with a group of students, to verify its clarity and to determine whether there were discussion areas which needed to be improved or changed. An appeal to help was made to finalists in one module, and three females and two males volunteered. One student reading a joint honours programme, as non-BA, was asked to participate so that the impact of this in the interview areas might be gauged. Students were not asked the questions directly but were presented with them and asked how their friends might interpret each of the questions or indeed answer them. During the session, students raised and discussed related issues, such as to how they had made friends and chose housemates and how the questions might be answered. The students alerted the researcher to the impact of early housemate choices for Year Two and added to the range of planned probes in the discussion areas.

3.3.2.4 Invitation to Interview

During the first half of the spring term, all selected students were invited, by email, to attend a one-hour interview. If no response was received, a maximum of two follow-up emails asking for their support were sent. Students who had not replied at this stage were considered to have withdrawn. The emails were sent in small campaigns to enable some control over year and gender balance as interviews were secured. Students agreeing to be interviewed were offered an appointment time, in most cases within three to five working days. All students being invited to interview were sent an information sheet about the interview in advance as well as receiving a second, hard, copy at the start of the interview appointment, prior to them signing a consent form (a copy of the information sheet is provided within the Ethical Approval Form in Appendix A). The interview requests were concentrated in the first half of the term because

willingness to participate would naturally decrease towards the end of term, with academic deadlines approaching and exam revision starting.

3.3.2.5 Recording and Transcribing of Interviews

All the interviews were recorded under the conditions defined in the Ethical Approval Form. The MP3 files were given numerical codes, as opposed to the students' names, before being transcribed by a professional audio typist. As each was returned, the researcher listened to all voice recordings and, where the transcriber had indicated that a word was missing because she could not decipher it, the researcher identified the word and added it. At the same time, the researcher read and checked that the transcripts exactly matched the voice recordings and noted the non-spoken indications, for example, reflective pauses, tailing off, laughter and emotional voice, as students described both happy and sad events, and noted them on the hard copies. The way interviewees expressed certain events was as much a part of the communication process as the words they chose. Each transcript was then listened to and read twice more prior to being stored using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. Participants were given their final pseudonyms prior to their information being loaded into the software.

3.3.2.6 Qualitative Data Analysis

The core research was exploratory, guided by the data and not wholly defined by the research question (Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Silver & Lewins, 2014), despite there being outline categories in the interview guide. The process of qualitative data analysis involves data condensation, data display and the drawing of conclusions; all of which may take place concurrently (Miles et al., 2014). As indicated above, data management was supported by the use of software. Using such computer-assisted software meant that the pdfs housed in EndNote from the Literature Review, the online survey data, the interview data and, later on, additional school and results data, could all be brought into one system for integrated data management (Pat Bazeley & Jackson, 2014). Cycles of coding to

index the data into themes and to facilitate interpretive thinking (Silver & Lewins, 2014) were used. Coding entails assigning a "summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of language based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). The first cycle was an elemental coding system (Saldaña, 2016), and was descriptive, loosely based around interview sections and cut across the case-based data (Silver & Lewins, 2014). Some of the data coded was more conceptual than descriptive, relating to, for example, feelings of trust in friendships and inauthenticity in social media, but such a mixture would have been anticipated in open coding (Silver & Lewins, 2014). The first cycle coding, using interview sections as parent codes is shown in Figure 3.2 below. In addition, during the coding process, selective coding (Saldaña, 2016) simultaneously took place where sections of interviewees' own words to illustrate research findings were identified.

Figure 3.2: First Cycle Coding: Elemental

A second cycle of coding followed in order to reduce and organise the data to categories which were aligned towards the research questions. This was done by taking the two main research questions, reassessing the value of the data in each block of child code in the elemental system, eliminating the least interesting or

useful and aligning those remaining to parent codes which directly related to the research question. Some difficulty was encountered with social media related coding: it facilitated connectedness but it was more than just a facilitation mechanism; it was an influence in its own right and so it was separated out so that its position in the research could be reconsidered. The second cycle coding is shown in Figure 3.3 below.
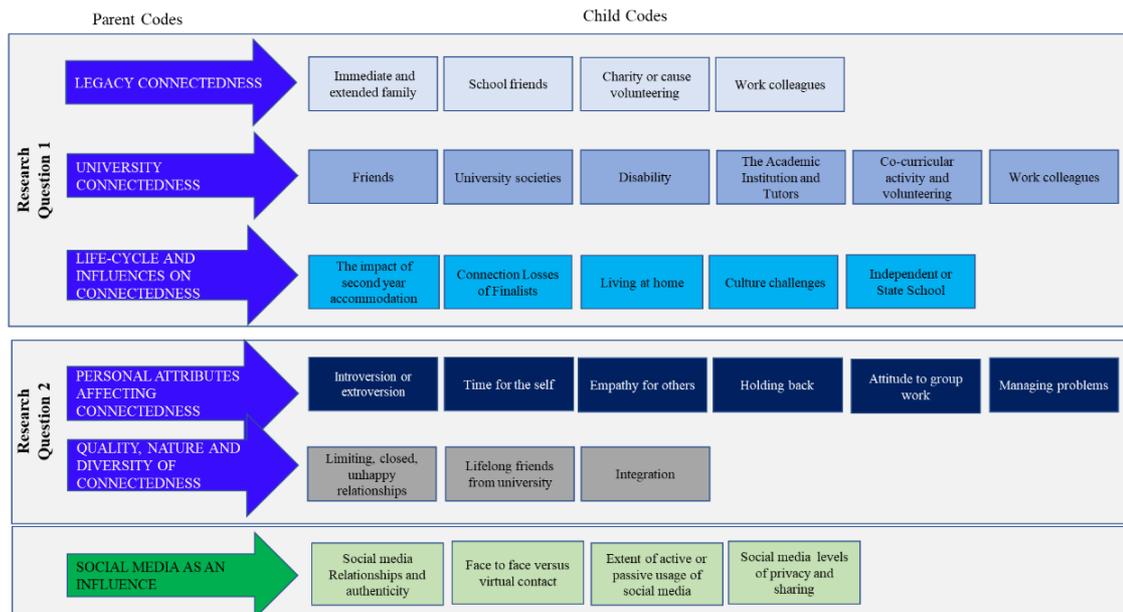
Figure 3.3: Second Cycle Coding: Focused

The final coding step was to select what the major themes of the study would be because they related to the research questions. The interviews were data rich, not everything could be reported upon and the most pertinent and interesting findings were chosen. For Research Question One, the Lifecycle theme was a common timeline of the university connectedness experience and the Diversity and Difference theme was both powerful and interesting as a part of the lived experience of students. Research Question Two had been designed to compare Uppers and Lowers but the coding clarified the basis for the comparison as being on two axes: personal attributes; and the quality, nature and diversity of connectedness. The third coding cycle to identify key themes is detailed in Figure 3.4 below.
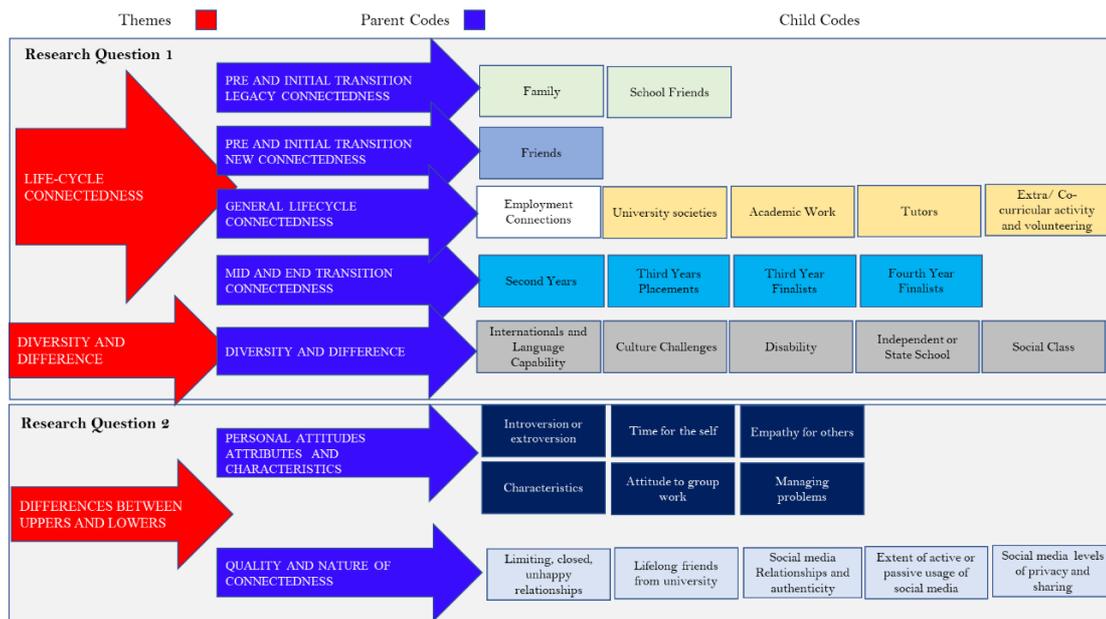
Figure 3.4: Third Cycle Coding: Themes

3.3.2.7 Data Verification

The validity of the meanings being ascribed to qualitative data had to be tested
for robustness and authenticity to make the step from the interview story to
research output (Miles et al., 2014). Therefore, a research active colleague, who
is also a qualitative researcher, was asked to assist in a verification step. An
outline of the research was provided to the reviewer along with the methodology
adopted, the methods used and all 26 transcripts. Brief outlines of each
participant were given using the background data from the online survey. The
reviewer selected eight transcripts to use for the review; these are listed in
Appendix D. The first cycle coding chart in Figure 3.2 was provided and the
rationale for descriptive coding and the definition of each of the child codes was
provided. The reviewer reviewed the transcripts in light of the coding in order to
review what had, or had not, been coded and against what code, the process of
code evolution, discussing them in a face-to-face meeting. For example, the code
'Time for the Self' was specifically explored with regard to whether this might
be an instinctive mindfulness and whether further analysis of the transcripts in

this area might be useful. This was later done. The reviewer also questioned gaps, for example, whether data had been collected on school type and whether students taking gap years or delaying entry to university had been identified in order to explore whether there might have been an impact on connectedness. As a result, aggregate school type data were later collected but it was not practical to collect data on which students had delayed entry or why, because, by the time the verification was being done, the finalists had left and second years were entering their placements.

3.4 Reflections and Ethical Considerations

This section reflects, firstly, upon the chosen approach and the researcher's position in choosing this research methodology and, secondly, upon the ethical considerations of the research.

3.4.1 Reflections upon the Chosen Approach

A non-positivist approach has the disadvantage that the research cannot be generalised. The core research – the interview – was directed towards a better understanding of well-being in undergraduates and the depth of the data was more important than its breadth. However, the online survey, originally conceived as only a sampling tool, but with 164 respondents, provided an opportunity to consider two things. Firstly, there were data in the online survey which related to interviewees which could be extracted by case, for example, whether their parents were graduates, and it could be added to each case in the research. Secondly, these scales could be considered for use in a more generalised way, by the business school, to perhaps assess well-being, because the online survey had taken a more positivist stance and had a large proportion of respondents. The online data were added into each case and the wider consideration of the possibilities for the scales was used to address Research Question Three of the present study.

Students who left the university between the online survey and the interviews and students who chose not to participate in the online survey were considered. Five

out of the 33 Lowers had left the university between the autumn and spring terms. The Lowers being interviewed were, therefore, only the Lowers who had persisted. The second consideration was that students' ability to take part, their willingness or ability to communicate effectively, was key to the study. In the analysis, the challenges for students with less fluent language skills came to be fully appreciated and, as with all research, the students who chose not to complete an online survey because they may not have wished to go on to be interviewed might have been the most informative study cases.

3.4.2 Reflecting upon Power and Politics in the Interviews

Any researcher's beliefs, values, assumptions, previous experiences and professional views not only influence the design of the research but guide its conduct and interpretation (L. Cohen et al., 2011). Researchers are inextricably linked to the subjects of the research and may well interact with participants as the facilitator (Creswell, 2003). As a trained personal tutor, the researcher was used to communicating effectively and comfortably with similar aged undergraduates and was therefore able to listen, seek clarification, empathise and communicate, using the credentials of an insider, to support an effective qualitative approach. It may be argued that, being in this position, equipped with pertinent conversational and social skills, is a benefit and leads to more interesting and perhaps deeper research (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009). Conversely, existing beliefs and assumptions about the subjects from previous interactions with similar subjects would influence the researcher's objectivity (Tarling, 2006), and such activity is not without ethical challenges because inviting and encouraging disclosure could run the risk of participant exploitation (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Asymmetries of power exist in the interview process in conscious and unconscious ways in qualitative interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013) and the interviewer's ability to generate an atmosphere of openness is accompanied by an ethical responsibility. The interview drew out details of interviewees' friendships and feelings of belonging. Interviewees' feelings of isolation, for example, might be heightened by discussing them. Conversely, the participant also had power –

the power of their knowledge – and controlled what to reveal of themselves, having assessed the environment and circumstances of any revelations. Students could choose to deny or retain information and present it in any way they perceived it or wished it to be perceived.

The characteristics of the interview location were evaluated because it would affect the power and positionality of participant (Elwood & Martin, 2000). The interviews took place in the researcher's office but, a small round table within the office, as opposed to a desk, was used for the discussions. Steps were taken to ensure privacy and to eliminate interruptions by using a 'Do not disturb' sign on the door. The researcher ensured that, should the interview exceed its planned time, an additional time buffer was placed in the researcher's diary to facilitate any further post-interview discussion or support. The information sheet and the consent form were discussed briefly with the interviewee. Once they had signed the form, the interviewee was shown how to know when they were being recorded (a small light on the recording device) and the researcher announced when the device was being turned on and when it was being turned off. After the recording device was turned off, each participant was asked if s/he was satisfied with the conduct of the interview and asked if s/he wanted to ask anything further.

3.4.3 Ethical Safeguards for the Research

The present study was conducted only after formal ethical approval had been granted by the university based upon the Ethical Approval Form in Appendix A. Most importantly, the research instruments of the study were all chosen to avoid any clinically-based scales or measures relating to mental ill health because they should only be used by trained practitioners. Informed consent is founded upon the principles of freedom and self-determination (L. Cohen et al., 2011) and was especially important for the purposes of the present study because it was easily possible that it might be stressful for participants to discuss relationships. Two separate information sheets, to enable informed consent, were used: one at the start of the online survey, where it was impossible to complete the survey unless consent was given; and a second for the face-to-face interviews, where a signature

was required. A cut-off date for withdrawal was set for six weeks after the interviews and the date was reiterated in both the follow-up email after the online survey and the interview thanking participants. Confidentiality safeguards were built in to all administrative processes. Issues such as where the materials might be stored, who had access to them and for what period were all outlined in the information sheets and were strictly adhered to. Anonymity could not be offered because the students needed to be identifiable for the two different stages of the research.

It was standard practice for the researcher to be a personal tutor to a number of undergraduates in the business school and this was considered a conflict of interest. Fortunately, all the researcher's undergraduate students had graduated the previous summer and so none lost their personal tutor and the researcher was allocated only postgraduate personal tutees for the academic year of the data collection. The second issue concerned the potential for interviewees to become distressed when disclosing information and reflecting on personal friendships, as identified earlier. Advice from the Head of Student Well-being at the university – a qualified counsellor – was sought. The well-being service agreed that, should any student raise a personal issue which was outside the scope of the interview, the student could be referred directly to the well-being service by the researcher, providing that appropriate permission had been obtained from the student. This did become necessary during the research and three students were individually referred, with others being informed or reminded of the service provision.

Lastly, the Ethical Approval Form clearly defined the extrinsic rewards for participants giving their time to the survey. Students may currently be considered as an over surveyed group, suffering from survey fatigue at every level from module to programme to National Student Surveys. Offering a single extrinsic reward to attract participants to Stage One signified the value of their input, and giving each interviewee a voucher for their interview time signified the value placed on their time. Students were also made aware that, by participating in the research, the intrinsic reward of potentially helping other students who followed them into the university might also accrue.

3.5 Summary

This chapter set out the methodology and philosophical framework for the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the method of enquiry, the research plan and the sampling approach. The second part presented: the cross sectional, two-step mixed method used to conduct the study; the online survey, initially to obtain data for purposeful sampling; and the semi-structured interviews to explore students' connectedness lifecycle in depth and to compare the characteristics and connectedness activity of students from the Uppers cluster to that of students from the Lowers cluster. The third part reflected upon the power and politics of the participants' positions and the ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter summarises and analyses the findings from three sources. The first part presents findings from the online survey, the second part presents background data relating to schools and year-end academic results, and the third part presents the findings of the semi-structured interview. Findings for Research Questions One and Two will also be presented in this chapter. Research Question Three concerns professional practice and will be addressed in Chapter Six. The two underlying themes of Research Question One were the lifecycle of student connectedness and difference and diversity. The theme of Research Question Two is the differences between students of apparently high levels of well-being, Uppers, when compared to those of apparently lower levels of well-being, Lowers. The themes as they relate to the research questions are shown in Figure 4.1 below.

Research Question One

How is social connectedness realised and how does it develop through the life-cycle of these undergraduate students?

Themes
• Lifecycle of connectedness
• Diversity and difference

Research Question Two

How do the connectedness attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of wellbeing compare to those exhibiting lower levels of wellbeing?

Theme
• Comparing Uppers to Lowers

Research Question Three

How might the findings from this doctoral study inform the institution, the business school and personal tutors' approach to promoting wellbeing amongst undergraduate students?

Figure 4.1: Research Questions with Themes

The study was conducted in two stages. Stage One, the online survey, attracted 164 respondents, and data were collected on students' accommodation situations, level of parental education, previous average grades and scores against each question on the resilience, connectedness and happiness scales. As defined in Chapter Three, in section 3.3.1.8, the scores from the resilience, connectedness and happiness scales were used to cluster respondents. Eight of the students from

the Uppers cluster of students, exhibiting higher levels of well-being, and 18 from the Lowers cluster of students, exhibiting lower levels of well-being, were invited for an interview: Stage Two of the present study. Largely successful attempts were made to draw students equally across the years of study and by gender. Indications are given as to whether interview findings relate to all or only some of the students but, in this qualitative study, the proportions and numbers are not statistically significant and serve only to give an indication of the degree to which any of the findings were present.

4.2 The Online Survey Findings

The online survey was completed by 164 students registered on the business school's BA business and management programmes. It collected outline data on current accommodation arrangements, their previous year's overall grade, their parents' highest educational level and whether they worked or volunteered. Questions related to well-being, as outlined in the previous chapter, were then used to score their individual resilience, connectedness and happiness, and the results were used to cluster participants into Uppers, Middles and Lowers (a copy of the online survey is in the Ethical Approval Form in Appendix A). As discussed in the previous chapter, the scale scores were standardised at five points and having aligned the question polarities; five was the most positive score. An overall analysis of key data collected, by named cluster, is given in Table 7 below.

Table 7: A Cluster Analysis of Data from Stage One: The Online Questionnaire

Scale Means by Cluster (n=164)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Mean – All Participants
Resilience	3.80	4.04	3.29	3.75
Connectedness	3.79	4.53	2.85	3.77
Happiness	3.62	4.07	3.18	3.64
Overall	3.72	4.16	3.14	3.71

Gender Split by Cluster (n=164)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Average
Female	62.2%	70.5%	73.7%	67.1%
Male	37.8%	29.5%	26.3%	32.9%
Programme Year Split by Cluster (n=164)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Average
Year 1	36.6%	43.2%	36.8%	38.4%
Year 2	39.0%	27.3%	31.6%	34.1%
Year 3	6.1%	6.8%	18.4%	9.1%
Year 4	18.3%	22.7%	13.2%	18.3%
Average Grade Split by Cluster (n=101*)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Average
First	34.6%	36.0%	37.5%	35.6%
2:1	55.8%	60.0%	45.8%	54.5%
2:2	7.7%	4.0%	16.7%	8.9%
Third	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Living Status Split by Cluster (n=164)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Average
With a partner or spouse	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
With one or more other students	80.5%	86.4%	68.4%	79.3%
With other young people but not all of them are students	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
In a shared house but there are different age groups	2.4%	2.3%	5.3%	3.0%
With my parents or other relatives	4.9%	2.3%	13.2%	6.1%
With one or more other students/In a shared house but there are different age groups	6.1%	2.3%	0.0%	3.7%
With other young people but not all of them are	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	0.6%

students/In a shared house but there are different age groups				
With one or more other students/With other young people but not all of them are students/In a shared house but there are different age groups	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	0.6%
Other	0.0%	2.3%	2.6%	1.2%
Other combination	4.9%	4.4%	5.3%	4.9%

Outside of Term Time Does that Usually Change? (n=164)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Average
Yes	76.8%	95.5%	78.9%	82.3%
No	23.2%	4.5%	21.1%	17.7%

Parent's Education Split by Cluster (n=161**)	Middles	Uppers	Lowers	Average
Yes, both parents	33.3%	31.8%	50.0%	36.0%
No, neither parent	43.2%	45.5%	44.4%	43.3%
My mother did but my father did not	9.9%	6.8%	0.0%	6.7%
My father did but my mother did not	13.6%	15.9%	5.6%	12.2%

Table Key:

    (i)   Middles (*n=*82); Uppers (*n=*44); Lowers (*n=*38*)*

    (ii) *Excluding first years (no previous grades at the time of the online survey) (*n=*101)

    (iii)** Three students did not know their parents' educational attainment level (*n=*161)

    (iv)The Averages column contains scores for mathematical averages of all the students (for example, 3.75 is the average scale score for the factor of resilience) or percentage breakdowns for each variable (for example, 67.1% of the respondents were female).

(v) The figures and percentages given for each of the three cluster groups, Middles, Uppers and Lowers, are their group averages *or* percentages.

Analysing the data from the above table led to the following observations regarding Uppers and Lowers in relation to Research Question Two. Lowers showed disproportionately lower scores for connectedness against the rest of the participants (2.85 against an average of 3.77). Students living in the parental home were disproportionately present in the Lowers (13.2% against an average of 8.9%). Lowers were more likely to have two graduate parents (50% of Lowers had two graduate parents but only 31.8% of Uppers). There was little difference between the groups for neither parent being a graduate (44.4% of Lowers and 45.5% of Uppers). Lowers appeared to be performing less well academically, in that they had double the average of third-class classifications for the previous year (16.7% as opposed to an average of 8.9%). Uppers were much more likely to live the traditional student life of moving to the parental home at the end of term and hall/shared student accommodation in term time (95.5% against an average of 82.3%). Third-year students had a lower response rate overall (they represented only 9.1% of participants but, had they participated proportionately, they would have totalled 19.3% of participants). Third-year students were more than doubly represented in the Lowers than their participation rate would have predicted (they represented 18.4% of Lowers but, given that they represented 9.1% of total participants, they should have also have represented approximately 9.1% of Lowers). Despite males and females being in the available potential population in relatively similar numbers (222 males as opposed to 218 females), only 54 males, less than one-quarter (24.3%) responded, whereas 110, more than half (50.5%) of females did. This is identified as a limitation of the study in Chapter Six.

4.3 Additional Background Data

End-of-year results, progression data and school types were collected to augment the findings of the study.

4.3.1 Results and Progression Data

Results data were collected from student records because they were not available until several months after the interviews and are given below in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Aggregated Results and Progression Data: Interviewed Students

Results Data: Interviewed Students			
Uppers or Lowers	First-Year Results	Second-Year Results	Third-/Fourth-Year Final Results
Uppers average results %	61.23	65.92	68.91
Lowers average results %	65.95	67.17	70.23
Difference between Uppers and Lowers average results %	4.72	1.25	1.31
Difference between Uppers and Lowers average results %	7.70	1.89	1.91
Progression Data: Interviewed Students			
Uppers % increase versus first-year		7.64	12.53
Lowers % increase versus first-year		1.84	6.48
Uppers % increase year on year		7.64	4.54
Lowers % increase year on year		1.84	4.56

On average, the interviewed Lowers attained better results in every year and disproportionately better results in their first year but interviewed Uppers made

significantly better progression judging by the results of the second year but there was little difference in progression from the second to the final year. The results of the interviewed students showed Uppers to be, on average, achieving nearly 5% less than Lowers in the first year. The gap had narrowed by the end of the second and final years to just over 1%; hence, the Uppers had made the most significant progress. On average, Lowers appeared to be likely to outperform Uppers in final classifications. However, data from the interviewed students did not accord with the self-reported data from the online survey. In the online data, Lowers appeared to be performing less well academically in that they had double the proportion of upper second-class classifications for the previous year (16.7% as opposed to an average of 8.9%) and Uppers reported delivering more than the average number of firsts and upper seconds in the self-reported data. The online survey data are more significant because the data were collected from 164 students but were self-reported and excluded first years. The results data collected for interviewees are accurate because they were drawn from administrative records but cover only a small sample of 26 students. It is possible that the online survey data were inaccurate because students had misread the question and/or provided information relating to the grade they hoped to achieve. Alternatively, students may have been unaware of the complexities of borderline grade calculations and reported inaccurately.

4.3.2 School Type Data

The type of school attended by each of the interviewees was verified by the university records office and is set out in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Numbers of Students in Each Cluster by Type of School Attended

Type	Uppers	Lowers
Academy	3	6
Comprehensive School	0	3

Further Education College	0	1
Grammar School	1	0
Independent School	2	5
Sixth Form College	0	1
International Institution	2	2
Totals	$n=8$	$n=18$

4.4 The Interview Findings

The findings were drawn from the 26 transcripts (a sample transcript is in Appendix E). The first part of this section, 4.4.1.1, relates to legacy connectedness and the second, 4.4.1.2, to new friends' connectedness findings for the pre-entry and initial transition stages of the student lifecycle. The third part, 4.4.1.3, presents the general lifecycle findings relating to employment, societies, academic connectedness, tutors, co-curricular activity, volunteering and employment. The fourth part, 4.4.1.4, presents specific findings for second year to fourth year. The fifth part, 4.4.2. relates to diversity and difference related findings. These five parts together relate to Research Question One. The last two parts together relate to Research Question Two and present the findings for the differences between Uppers and Lowers in their personal attitudes, attributes and characteristics, in section 4.5.1, and the quality and nature of their connectedness, in section 4.5.2. Figure 4.2 below sets out the findings sections as they relate to each part of Research Questions One and Two.
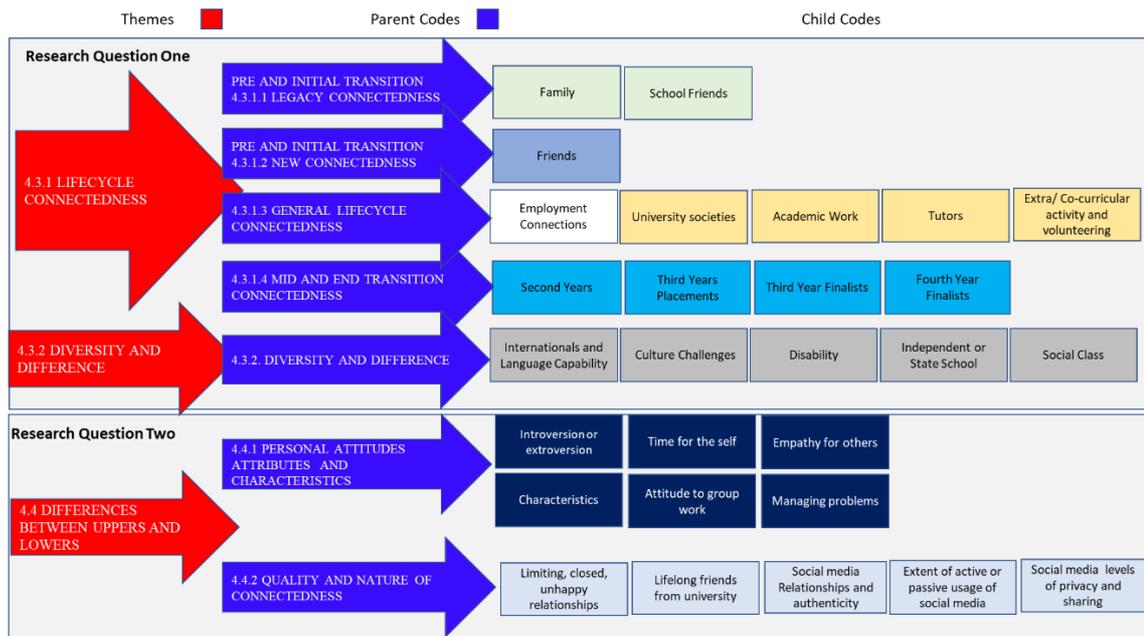
Figure 4.2: Findings Sections Related to Research Questions One and Two

4.4.1 Research Question One: Theme One: The Lifecycle of Connectedness

4.4.1.1 Legacy Connectedness

This section presents findings regarding two aspects of legacy connectedness: family and school friends.

4.4.1.1.1 Family

All students remained well connected to their immediate, and often their extended, families. The 16 students, who were both UK domiciled and classed as living away from home, were just over two hours by public transport, on average, from the parental home. Half of these students visited the parental home three or more times per term but some cited employment as part of the reason for the visit. Finalists' visit frequency was highest and, on average, females made fewer visits to the parental home during term time than males. Approximately half of students used social media with their parents, but most had some extended family members abroad and were using social media to stay in touch with them.

4.4.1.1.2 School Friends

All students also retained friendships with ex school friends, but the number of friends and the depth of the relationships varied. Ten were in contact with a sizeable group of, say, as many as 12, whereas 14 were in contact with only two or three. Eighteen students felt that they were maintaining deep friendships and some felt these relationships were their closest friendships despite some having been at university for several years. Students who had completed foundation years, had been to boarding school or had primary homes abroad were included in this data and had equivalent friendships and expressed similar views. Such were the strengths of old school friendships that two students were actively planning to live with some old school friends, in a new location, after graduating. Most students' closest school friends also appeared to have also progressed to university, and friendships were maintained on a face-to-face basis by visiting each other's universities and meeting up at the end of term but also virtually, through social media. Social media was used by all students to maintain existing friendships and one student explained how social media typically enabled that to continue:

> I mean, without it (*social media*) I don't know if I'd still be in contact with the people I was friends with at school, especially at university when you don't have the ability to pop down the street to see a friend. This way you're still in contact all the time and you're talking and you're being friendly and making sure you've still got that connection (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

One student, who lived at home, identified two types of friends from school: those who had progressed to university and those who had not (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper). She explained that the ones she chose to be in contact with were the ones who had also progressed to university and had, at least temporarily, moved away and not the ones who had remained living near her. A second student, who did not live at home, felt that she had naturally lost touch with people who were "not meant to be in my life" (Hannah, female, fourth year,

Lower). Therefore, students choosing to live at home did not do so to be in close proximity to old school friends because their closest friends had also gone away.

4.4.1.2 New Connectedness

This section is primarily concerned with first-year experiences and later year students' recollections of their first year and making friends. Students had numerous opportunities to make new friends when starting out at university, and this situation continued, to a lesser degree, throughout the lifecycle; students met others through accommodation, the formal and informal activities of the institution itself, each module, the programme, a plethora of social events and people with whom they worked. In the year of the study, the university had launched a pre-Freshers' system, whereby students allocated to traditional university accommodation (hall) could be linked to their new hall mates, using social media, before the start of Freshers' Week. These first years had had an opportunity to pre-connect using social media and it had met with universal approval:

> I met four of my people that I was living with before I'd even moved in, so that was quite nice. It didn't make it awkward, I walked into the flat they said 'hey there, how are you doing? Like it wasn't 'oh, this is a person I don't know' (Charlotte, female, first year, Upper).

Students in hall described potential new friends being present in large numbers, from tens to hundreds, in the first year. Students acknowledged that other new students were open to making friends, and interviewees provided enthusiastic descriptions of face-to-face social connections, whereby groups of new friends were chatting, in the kitchens of their halls, until the small hours, during this opening period of university life. Face-to-face socialising preference was highest for first years; all but one preferred it. This preference diminished year on year. As already presented, students indicated that they used social media to maintain legacy relationships, with their old school friends, but nearly all preferred not to make new contacts in this way, with the exception of the pre-Freshers'

socialisation activity. Students of later years recognised that many of these new friends turned out to be just acquaintances. However, these relationships were often used as the basis for forming second-year house share communities and selective longer-term friendships. First-year students differentiated between meeting people and making friends; the majority comparing the new friendships to their legacy friendships, as this comment demonstrates:

> … compared to people at home, like my best friend since like nursery or reception… I've spent huge amounts of time with people back home, I know them really well, they know me really well, but it's people here at uni I've only known them five months… it's nowhere near as much as the people back home (Toby, male, first year, Lower).

However, situations arose which prevented the formation of hall-based first-year friendship groups. One international student reported coming late to Freshers' Week and felt it had inhibited him from making new friends because, by the time he arrived, despite being in hall, he felt that cliques had formed. Two students had been placed in non-traditional accommodation at the start of their university life – one in returners' accommodation; the other in a hotel – and both described the challenges of making new friends. They had had to actively make specific plans to make friends and, for both, the programme had been a logical place for them to try. One explained how he had attempted to make friends through his programme:

> … obviously you hear about other people I've met through my course and they're all saying, you know, oh they've had a great time in they're living with people from their flat next year and things like that. But on the other hand, I think it's made me more outgoing with people on my course, because, obviously, I was looking for people to be, you know, friendly with, and you know, I'm ending up living with some people from my course next year, so, I've kind of got that friendship group from there, but just, you know, not in a traditional way (William, male, first year, Lower).

Students in non-traditional accommodation also included those living at home as they were similarly disadvantaged, connectedness-wise by not being in hall, and one student, even though she was in a smaller programme, had to make some effort:

>…people had their week at halls before uni actually commenced, so for me it was a lot harder, like I had to make more of an effort with everyone. … But, um, I would say that was the only like…I'd say it's a struggle yeah, cos everyone else had got their cliques at that point and you've got to try and enter one… (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper).

The potentially positive impact on connectedness of smaller programmes was evidenced by two modern language students who were taking only single modules at the business school and had participated in the study, somewhat serendipitously. These students reported high levels of connectedness and deep programme engagement to their programme peers; the total number of students taking them was small (approximately 30 students) and programme peers represented a principal friendship group to these students. The majority of students on the BA programmes, in the business school, throughout the lifecycle, demonstrated transient and strategic study connection to individual modules, evidenced by students' comments regarding ever changing group work groups, and relatively low overall connectedness to programme peers and the programme itself when compared to that of the smaller programmes. There were indications that secondary friendship groups could form in the BA programmes, and clearly did, indicated by a couple of students, but accommodation friendships were, in general, the primary friendship group.

Finally, university was not only an opportunity to make new friends but was also an opportunity to reflect and renew themselves for three out of the eight first-year students. One spoke of wanting to try, in some sense, to reinvent himself a little bit by becoming more confident and sociable. Another felt that, after only two weeks at university, his confidence levels had increased considerably, and a third discussed university as a way of finally moving on from being excluded at school

and making a fresh start. It was possible that students of later years had also felt the same at the start of the university experience but had moved on and had forgotten how they had felt as first years.

4.4.1.3 Lifecycle of Connectedness

This section presents the general lifecycle findings relating to employment, societies, academic connectedness, tutors, co-curricular activity, volunteering and employment relating to all year groups.

4.4.1.3.1 Employment Connectedness

Students had a wide variety of employment arrangements. At the time of the interviews, 12 students were employed, working just under eleven and half hours a week, on average, during term time, including those in remunerated university employment. Students frequently changed employers and hours of work to accommodate their studies. Some students had never worked while being at university and one student reported sometimes working 40 hours per week during term time. Some students continued with part-time, weekend and/or employment with employers they had worked for while at school. Two students described being regularly contacted by their school era employer and had been asked back to cover weekends or holidays in their home locations. Two further students expressed a strong affinity to their work colleagues from their school era; one even favouring them over her school friends:

> I keep in contact with a bunch of school friends, like briefly just to catch up, but it was my work colleagues that I really do like make an effort with, I go out with them, go to dinner (Charlotte, female, first year, Upper).

Three students had established employment with retail organisations with operations in both the students' home town and in the university's town and so they were able to switch back and forth, with the same organisation, in term and holiday time. One of these three reported:

> I think I have better friends in my home town, mainly because I work a lot more hours there, so I've met more people. …working in my home town, I enjoy it… I'll go on nights out and things with them and when its people's birthdays we'll all go out and celebrate and things like that (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

4.4.1.3.2 University Societies

When asked what advice students would give to new students, with the benefit of hindsight, making new friends was almost top of every interviewee's list, and 11 specifically mentioned the role of society membership. However, active and satisfying society membership seemed to elude more than half of the students. The majority of students (18 out of 26) had active university society membership but to varying degrees, three had tried membership but not persisted and five had not participated at all. The depth of engagement, as opposed to the number of societies joined, appeared to lead to a perception of successful membership. Two of the five students with only a single society membership were footballers: one played at the university but also, when she was back home in a different team, the other played at the university but also a local team outside of the university. Both had training sessions and matches and so the proportion of time taken up with such active team membership was high and appeared to have brought about a depth of commitment and strong connectedness to both sets of teams. Societies appeared to best serve those entering the university with an existing interest: often sports societies, as above with football, or sports related, for example, Cheer, as these offered the most enduring connectedness. However, for students who simply enjoyed an activity as opposed to wanting to compete or perform, sports-related societies were less welcoming because they were often about competing. One student felt some difficulty in being placed in an appropriate team in one sports club and a second described feeling that sports societies were not so welcoming to students in the later years because investing in them would not be of great benefit to a sports society. Finally, approximately one-quarter of students joined societies that did not appear to have great potential to broaden connectedness because they

drew from a narrower base of potential members, for example, entrepreneurship, or societies that perhaps focused on the student's ethnicity, for example, the South East Asian Society. This was less important if the student had other active memberships and, in the case of business-school-related societies, this was the case for four of the five. Students' practical experiences, expectations and the realities of membership did not always coincide and anxieties about not fitting in were realised for two students as they struggled to negotiate the process. One described such a situation:

> I joined up to (*Music*) Society hoping that I'd meet fellow musicians, start a band and we'd have some sort of music friends and that way just sort of continue on my hobby. The first sort of studio session I went to and I just didn't feel like I'd fit in – seeing as I brought my electric…my acoustic guitar and everyone else electrics, bass guitars, drums and everything. I didn't quite fit in with the style of music they were playing and yeah, I suppose almost… …because their ability was a bit better than mine, I felt a bit…. I couldn't quite participate and I felt, I don't know, I didn't feel like I wanted to be there (Toby, male, first year, Lower).

Societies did not seem to offer a good opportunity to make friends if you were already alone. One student had the perception that it was more difficult to try to enter an established friendship group by yourself. Some students were troubled by their indecision about societies and appeared have a sense of lost opportunities, as if the experience had simply escaped them but they could not explain why, although some comments related to their perceived degree of competence. One student explained her thought process:

> I would have joined more societies. I joined the (*Name*) Society which is like the biggest flop, and that was about it. …I would have liked to have done cheerleading, but I didn't. I don't really know why. Then when it got to second year I sort of felt like joining a sports society would then be weird, I don't know why I had that image in my head, it would just be

first-years or people who had done it for years and I was like 'no' (Leonora, female, third year, Lower).

For others, society membership was allowed to lapse because it was too demanding of their time:

> … I was heavily involved with rugby and athletics. I stopped rugby after first year and continued with athletics, but then I didn't really go to the tracks because I focused more on gym to get more physical and then this year I tried doing it a bit more but I realised it's going to be quite an intense year, so I then stopped it (Osaloni, male, third year, Upper).

Students entering the university without an existing interest, or those trying to attain or later recover connectedness, appeared to be most effectively served by identifying an activity that was completely new to them and one that required no previous experience. Providing they invested time in engaging with the members and the activity, it appeared that it could be very successful, as two students described:

> …we were laughing about the things that exist like Quidditch – that's a thing, and then we talked about (*name of sport*) because I was thinking (*name of sport*), really? He showed me a video and I was like 'oh that doesn't look that bad actually, that looks quite cool.' And then I was walking around the societies and sports fair and I went to (*society name*) and the membership was actually the cheapest one out of all the others. …I thought 'this is really fun' and I came every week and now I've got my own kit, I've got my name on the back of my kit… (Aahil, male, first year, Lower).

> I'd never done it (*name of sport*) before, I'd had no experience, and I got on with them already, but they just said 'come, it's a load of fun', like 'we'll teach you.' It's completely…it's not judgemental at all. We've people that have a lot of experience in it and we also have people that have

never done it, so, yeah, I literally just turned up, had a go, yeah, it was just a nice sort of atmosphere… (Hannah, female, fourth year, Lower).

4.4.1.3.3 Academic Connectedness

Nearly all students expressed the view that the programme and the learning experience was as they had expected and a couple indicated it was easier than they had thought. They estimated that they spent an average of just under nine and a half hours per week in formal study and just under fourteen and a half in self-directed study. Study patterns varied between years and peaked before exams or assignment deadlines but, combining the average data on study hours with the average data on employment hours of eleven and a half, from the above, suggests a student combined working week of thirty-five and a half hours. The formal time was spent on campus in study buildings but the self-directed study time was split amongst the library, other university study space and their accommodation. Nearly two-thirds of the students who expressed a preference for their self-directed study location chose the library as opposed to their rooms or other space.

Students' formal contact time with the programme was relatively low and the opportunity to build academic-related networks more limited because of termly changes of groups in group work. The students studying on smaller programmes based outside of the business school appeared to have ultimately stronger programme connectedness because they studied with the same core of peers throughout the programme. The final years of the business school programmes had no core modules. Group work did provide some connectedness opportunities but students moved modules on a termly basis; such transiency appeared to hinder academic-related connectedness, and several students indicated that this could be damaging to nascent friendships. A typical comment was as follows:

I've met loads and loads of people, but I haven't had the opportunity to actually get close to them, because as soon as you finish group project you move on, go to a different module, everyone changes because there's so many of us (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

One first year, who lived at home, met different people and actively used group work as an opportunity to forge a university social life. One third year, who had moved back home, after second-year accommodation difficulties, had also found that group work provided friendship opportunities as had social events with fourth-year finalists. One issue with group work was whether students chose their groups or were allocated to them. Where groups were allocated, one fourth year acknowledged the unforeseen connectedness benefits that could bring:

> I do enjoy the group work side of things and again the diversity aspect. I have met more people from being put into groups with them that I wouldn't necessarily expect myself to meet in a social situation at university (Michael, male, fourth year, Upper).

4.4.1.3.4 Tutors

Contact with tutors, of which there are two types, is the only one-to-one academic contact students routinely have with the institution. Students' strongest academic connections, to members of faculty, were via module tutors and all students felt they were accessible. The majority of those that contacted a tutor used email and most were satisfied or highly satisfied with the speed and content of the responses. Such contact was usually to clarify some administration aspect of the assignment or other point of learning and were not related to well-being issues. Conversely, approximately three-quarters of students reported a negative or non-experience, to varying degrees, with personal tutors (five never having met their personal tutors at all). Some students appeared to have little understanding of how they might benefit from personal tutor meetings, or even what should happen in a meeting. Some students had lost their personal tutor and had not been notified of who the replacement was. One graduating student, reflecting on his experience, felt as if he had missed out on a feeling of belonging by simply not having a tutor:

> I think having someone who would know who I was when I stepped
> through the door and know what I'm doing, you know, not the details, but

know, 'OK, he's actually looking for a graduate job, he's not going travelling and everything, he's done a placement', and know the basics of what I'm doing would make a big difference (Henry, male, fourth year, Lower).

Where students had tutors, the experiences varied. Some were negative:

…my tutor couldn't… my personal tutor can be quite abrupt with how he speaks to you, sometimes it can be a bit nerve wracking going to sit there and say, this issue which is minor in his head, but not in yours (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper).

He made a comment, I don't think he meant it in a horrible way, but I think I took it in a bad way because of how I was feeling, and he said I wasn't very outgoing and I seemed like I wasn't a very outgoing person, so I think I took that in the wrong way because obviously, I felt really down at that point as well, it was not what I wanted to hear. So, then I just didn't really want to go back and hear negativity from him, so I just avoided it, and I don't feel like it really helped me, so that's why… (Ciara, female, second year, Lower).

However, good personal tutor support, where it existed, was appreciated and recognised by students. Students reported discussing more than just academic challenges and work; they discussed their anxieties in general. Seeing the tutor enabled students to discuss various issues and they found that support offered a level of reassurance through encouragement that they were making good progress or doing the right things. Two students described just wanting some reassurance:

I would say talking to the personal tutor is more useful than the counsellor because the personal tutor gives me some reassurance that I'm doing the right thing whereas the counsellor was a bit less helpful I would say (Kecheng, male, first year, Lower).

I had to talk to him about my…I was really unsure about if I was on the right programme for me, because I said earlier that when I started off I thought it was really basic, so I went to speak to him about that and he really helped (Akila, first year, female, Lower).

4.4.1.3.5 Co-Curricular Activity and Volunteering

Nine students were engaged in co-curricular activities or were planning to engage in them in the near future. Students could take non-remunerated positions of office at university, or volunteer to carry out university-related work, calling campaigns or open day representation, for which they were remunerated. Participating students liked the flexibility that these quasi-volunteer roles afforded but appeared not to view them as anything other than another job. Most students engaging in such work remained in a work pool of students available for university-related work, choosing when and when not to work and so engagement was sporadic. Half of the roles fulfilled were, in some way, related to halls and so perhaps reinforced the connectedness to social groupings related to accommodation but were indicative of fairly strong co-curricular engagement. The ambassador roles were more aligned to the business school than the university and so, potentially, enhanced connectedness to the business school not the wider institution. Some students had roles where they mentored new students. There was nothing to suggest that any roles played a significant role in connecting to the wider institution because the strongest connections mainly continued to relate to the accommodation base. Seven students volunteered in the more traditional sense. Such unpaid volunteering activities of students varied from working in a charity shop to assisting with sport in schools to working on various awareness campaigns and charity events, such as fun runs. These did not contribute to intuitional connectedness but to general levels of connectedness. The prime motivations for their engagement, in volunteering, appeared altruistic and not social.

In summary, the preceding five sections summarised findings relating to the student lifecycle past initial transition, students' employment situations, their

university society membership, their academic and tutor connectedness and co-curricular activity. Many students worked both in external paid employment and in university-related activity. A minority volunteered externally. Students' connectedness to academic module tutors was both active and successful but their connectedness to personal tutors was, on the whole low, and unsatisfactory.

4.4.1.4 Mid and End Transition Connectedness

This section presents the specific findings relating to the experiences of years two to four as the mid and end stages of transition in the model

4.4.1.4.1 Second-Year Students

Students usually moved into smaller, off-campus, shared houses, with friends, upon entering the second year. Second-year accommodation was sometimes problematical because students had to choose their second-year housemates, within a couple of months of arriving as first years and had misjudged their compatibility as housemates. The unpleasant memories of some of the worst second-year accommodation situations could still be recalled amongst third and fourth years. One student described such behaviours:

> We got a house in November (*of the first year*) which was only a couple of months of living together. By the end of the (*first*) year, the flat was divided and we'd already signed a contract and everything. We went in there knowing that there was kind of one group, two groups, three groups and yeah, yes conflict has developed a lot… if they walk into the kitchen and see me in there, they'll look at me and then shut the door and walk straight back out so they don't have to be in there with me, and it's just like 'what are you doing?' (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

A third year had returned to live at home, at the end of the second year, as a direct result of such second-year accommodation traumas. She was still making new friends but from individual modules but had become relatively disengaged from

the institution and was looking forward to moving on. She remembered how unhappy this time had been, recalling:

> ...it all kicked off with one of the boys and the house just completely divided and then I found it really hard to go home, go to uni home. Like unhappy because there was this intense atmosphere and obviously with nine boys when there's a fight going on, there's a fight going on forever. and then come to uni and be stressed, …at that point I wanted to leave uni, cos I was like 'I just hate it' (Arabella, female, third year, Lower).

Even in the second year, when accommodation was satisfactory, the prospect of placement could start to raise post-placement accommodation anxiety concerns. One student described indecision and concern about accommodation changes and how to tackle them:

> My two close friends aren't doing a placement year, so they will have left. So, I don't know. Ideally, I would like to get a studio, but they're very expensive. Um, so possibly going back into halls, but I don't want to be in halls with first years that want to go out all the time because my last year's going to be very important and I want to focus and do well, so it's…I don't know, I don't really know how you can get around that, but we'll cross that bridge when we get to it (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

4.4.1.4.2 Third-Year Placements

During placement, all but one fourth-year finalist had had a positive new connectedness opportunity with both placement peers and work colleagues. Students spoke of programme- related friendships they had forged on placement due to finding themselves with programme peers. This finding perhaps demonstrates the scale of the programmes. Having spent two years on a programme it was possible to find new programme peer friendships through placement. One student described such a process:

I think there were four of us from the university went on the same placement and I wasn't friends with any of them when I went on placement and then I became friends with them and it wasn't necessarily that I was…. So basically, my first friendship group and these I met on placement didn't know each other, so it's kind of like another set of friends that I had away from the first set that I had (Daisy, female, fourth year, Upper).

The placement friendship group was a small replica of the accommodation friendship groups of the first year and yet another transition. Students on placements with students from other universities also found new, enduring connectedness opportunities. One student remarked:

I still see my colleagues and friends from my placement still. I'll head into London and have a night out with them, and see them still, so, although that was just a nine-month term, like work experience, I'd still say I'd want to continue seeing them, to build those friendships (Joe, fourth year, male, Lower).

4.4.1.4.3 Third-Year Finalists

Third-year finalists appeared to be in especially low states of well-being. Findings showed some evidence of renewed focus on legacy friends, post-graduation plans or the parental home location. As they approached their finals and the end of the student life, all third-year Lowers expressed some regrets and reflected upon how the university relationships could have been better:

There does seem to be like a lot of fake people I've met at uni which I just didn't realise existed… Like fake friendships. People that like… like my housemates are a prime example of people that sort of like…they're just not really like people that I click with as such (Leonora, female, third year, Lower).

So, anyone else now is just kind of… like… compared to my current best friends from home. And it's just difficult to like find people that I get on as well with (Craig, male, third year, Lower).

I try hard to be like everyone's friend, but no one's like real friend (Arabella, female, third year, Lower).

More than half of those interviewed would have preferred a placement but had not found a suitable opportunity and the situation had had an effect. Typical comments were:

…Like with the placement as well, I think that might have knocked my confidence a little bit, for applying for jobs… and then I'm applying for grad jobs now and not getting them and my friends are getting really good ones (Sophie, female, third year, Upper).

This guy who was my like best friend here, we both applied for placement. I applied for like three and I only wanted to do ones that I like really wanted to do because I thought I don't feel like there's much point like wasting a year on something I just hated. So when it came to that he got a placement, like right at the last minute and I didn't. So then I, cos I left it late I was 'oh like, it doesn't matter, I'll just move in with some like, anyone (Craig, male, third year, Lower).

Lastly, despite their being an equal balance of third and fourth years, third years seemed slightly overwhelmed by the returning, confident fourth years with whom they now shared classes, as this comment shows:

It's harder with the fourth years because obviously, they all know each other, and it was like sort of them like re-uniting, so I think for third years it is really difficult to like bond with the fourth years …group work is very difficult, especially… I don't want to say with the fourth years, but it kind of is. They're very… since they've been out to work and then they've all

come back, they've all sort of, I don't know, they just think that they're a lot better (Leonora, female, third year, Lower).

4.4.1.4.4 Fourth-Year Finalists

Fourth-year finalists seemed to feel limited connection loss, upon returning from placement. Many of their non-programme friends, formed from first-year accommodation, had graduated by the time the fourth years came back. The online survey scales showed fourth years to be in states of well-being which were twice that of the third years. By the time fourth years return to university they had had more accommodation changes than any other group, both in and out of university, one describing the numbers of changes she had undergone:

> So, I was in (*name of hall*) with….so it was eight of us. There was me and three other girls who were on the same course and then there were four international students, two of which we saw a lot of and two which we didn't, but there were no issues. And then after I was there I moved into a six bed house with those three girls that I lived with in halls and then two other girls that I met through the course and through clubs and things and then we all went off on placement and then I moved into my third house whilst I was on placement and then after that I moved back to (*name of another hall*) and I live with now two of the girls I was living with in my second house, no three of the girls I lived with in my second house, three other girls and four boys (Daisy, female, fourth year, Upper).

To summarise, the above sections covered the connectedness lifecycle experience over the four- year period, from pre-transition to fourth-year finalists and addressed the first part of Research Question One. All students retained strong legacy connectedness, with family but also school friends and some with parental home location employers. First-year students sought quantities of new friends upon arrival, forming relatively weak friendship bonds but sustaining sufficient friendships to plan second-year accommodation. First years who failed to secure hall places or who lived at home had to actively seek friendships through the

modules or the programme activities. Students on small programmes found a ready-made prime friendship group from their programme but this was not the case of the business school's programme because it was too large and too fragmented. Half of the students became engaged with university societies with varying degrees of success. The most successful were sports club memberships where higher degrees of commitment and an element of competition were present. Students' interface with their academic study contained limited co-curricular activity, very accessible connections to academic module tutors and a varied set of experiences with personal tutors, which in the main were lacking. There was limited evidence of volunteering but it was not a connectedness force of substance across most students' lives.

Some second years faced difficult accommodation situations, having made early accommodation decisions which did not work well. Third-year finalists were in the lowest states of well-being, partly feeling they had failed regarding securing a placement but also overwhelmed by studying with the confident fourth years. Fourth years found a variety of new friends while on placement; some related to the professional network but others were fellow placement students. Upon returning, fourth years were in enhanced states of well-being when compared to their third-year finalist peers. Both third and fourth years provided evidence of planning past graduation and that included re-joining legacy friends in some cases.

4.4.2 Research Question One: Theme Two: Diversity and Difference

The next section brings together only the connectedness factors identified by students regarding fitting in and belonging. They raised issues of language and culture, ethnicity and friendship, disability and social class, schools and wealth diversity.

4.4.2.1 International Students and Language Capability

The most prominent finding in this section related to students who were referred to as 'international' or 'international students' by the other students but this was difficult to define. Four parameters were taken and applied to all 26 students to try to further investigate what being an international student meant to the interviewees. Out of the 26 students interviewed, 15 were born in the UK, were British citizens and were non-white. For the purposes of discussing diversity in the findings, the other 11 students are identified and classified in Table 10 below. This group will be referred to as the 'Group of Eleven' for clarity in the following section.

Table 10: Interviewed Students who were either not born in the UK, not British citizens or non-white (the Group of Eleven)

Pseud-onym	Upper or Lower	Gender	Country of Birth	Ethnicity	Nation-ality	Parent Primary Home	English Language Ability
Aahil	Lower	Male	UK	Asian Bangladeshi	British	UK	Native
Aaron	Lower	Male	Wales	Mixed	British	UK	Native
Akila	Lower	Female	Pakistan	Asian Pakistani	British	UK	Native
Ali	Lower	Male	UK	Asian Indian	British	UK	Native
Craig	Lower	Male	Germany	White	British	UK	Native
Eneas	Upper	Male	Cyprus	White	Cypriot	Non-UK	High
Gino	Lower	Male	Italy	White	Italian	UK	Native
Kecheng	Lower	Male	Malaysia	Asian Chinese	Malaysian	Non-UK	High
Nadiyah	Lower	Female	Algeria	Algerian	French	Non-UK	High
Segun	Upper	Male	Kenya	Black African	Kenyan	Non-UK	Native
Osaloni	Upper	Male	UK	Black African	British	Not Known	Native

Some students spoke of difficulties integrating and making friends amongst white British people. The interviews attempted to clarify whether this finding implied cultural or ethnic barriers, language capabilities or domicile-related issues. One male of Asian Bangladeshi ethnicity had been born and raised in the UK, spoke native-level English but had been racially abused by a school peer, prior to entering university:

> I was racially abused badly… I didn't handle it well enough cos I got in a fight with him, cos couldn't handle it, he said one thing, I thought I lost it, I attacked him, I hit him. Then we both got into trouble, but he got excluded. …. I think the only punishment I got was being in the support unit for two days and they were really nice to me there to be fair (Aahil, male, first year, Lower).

He had managed to rationalise and deal with the coming to terms with his reaction, learning from it and moving on. When he was asked how his situation was at university, he viewed it as completely different:

> I think it is very easy to meet people and talk to people, you just need to do that yourself. I keep telling them like, you meet so many different personalities and different people and it's so good, it's just so many different people and they're all nice… (Aahil, male, first year, Lower).

Despite being of non-white ethnicity, he appeared not be suffering any kind of integration issues at university; in fact, quite the opposite because he had managed to successfully join a society, integrate into it, had made a wide range of friends and, by the time of his interview, was very happy. Another first-year Lower in the Group of Eleven, clearly felt he was not any kind of outsider either:

> I remember just being on the phone to my mum saying, 'I've just met a boy from Argentina, a boy from France, a boy from Portugal' and all this. So, it's just…you don't realise but when you sit down and speak to people you just… everyone's backgrounds are completely different. It's not like

when you're in comprehensive school when everyone lives in the same area, everyone's doing the same thing, it's just quite interesting to find out how people have ended up here, as well (Aaron, first year, male, Lower).

Of the interviewed students, eight of the Group of Eleven spoke native-level English, the remaining three spoke and understood English very well but not at native level. Of these three, one was an Upper and was relaxed about his degree of integration; the other two were Lowers.   One was an Erasmus student and felt that she had needed to be more obvious about wanting to make social contact with British people but was integrating well academically. The other found it difficult to integrate with non-white British students but also had identical disappointments with peers from his own country. This student intended to complete only his first year and then leave university and return to his home country; such was the disappointment of his whole experience:

> I actually met my fellow (*peers from his own country*) and like, I tried to make the initiative to make friends, so I was lucky enough to like to be able to find the people sitting next to me were from (*my country*) then, I was like 'Hey, I'm from (*there*) too' and I sort of like introduced myself and they introduced themselves, so that started off well. But it sort of died off there, they sort of just talked amongst themselves and like excluded me, so that sort of discouraged me, if that makes sense? (Kecheng, male, first year, Lower).

One Lower, who spoke native-level English, felt less comfortable trying to integrate with British students, but he was much less happy generally and narrowly integrated socially and academically, as his comments show:

> I've found that interacting with other international students, they're more friendly in a way towards me, compared to like fully English students that came from a very English system, since I've only been to international schools, so people in my house – ones from Croatia, ones from Poland, ones from France, so. I don't know, for me, I feel like it makes me feel

more comfortable since everybody's from different places… (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

He saw himself as an international student and an outsider:

> In the first term of first year, we were in (*hall name*) and there was like different floors and we all kind of went out together and there was – on one floor there was a group of international students and on the other floor there were English students. And for the first term we were all going out – I, actually from the first day, it just kind of died down. And then when it really clicked, when I realised, cos it all… it all died down, was when we came back for the second term of first year and then the international students and the English students didn't go out anymore, there was no like…it was just extremely very separate in the end (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

In describing his friendship group, it became apparent that he formed relational networks with students he perceived to be similar:

> …an Iranian guy and someone from the Philippines, but he lived all his life in Switzerland. For example, he was my best friend, I was very close to him last year because, again, he kind of grew up in the same scenario that I did. He was from the Philippines and lived in Switzerland. I lived in Switzerland. He was…he went to an international school, so he was, he was…how would I say…he was exposed to a lot of different nationalities as a child, so I feel like he was extremely open minded, as I feel (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

Gino felt, as many others of the Group of Eleven students did, that it was easier to integrate with those of more diverse origin and upbringing; students more like themselves. Both Gino and Kecheng perceived themselves to be outsiders and felt that others saw them as such despite both speaking English well. These two students shared one other characteristic that appeared to have an impact on their

social connectedness. Both were avid gamers and spent substantial amounts of time gaming online, essentially alone in their rooms; a fact that neither of them felt particularly comfortable describing. Gino described connectedness sacrifices he had made, being economical with the truth with friends, claiming he needed to complete academic work when in fact he needed to accommodate his need to game:

> For example, yesterday I went to have lunch with my housemate that I'm really good friends with and he brought his two friends, course mates. So we went to have lunch and then we came back and then they went to watch a movie, but in my head I was like 'I'd rather be upstairs doing my own thing'. So… 'I'll see you guys later, I have some stuff to do'. In that sense, some people view that in a bad way, but personally it's just…I give myself priority, if it doesn't benefit whatever we're doing doesn't benefit me. I know it sounds really bad (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

British white Uppers seemed to perceive no barrier to others being included and were actively interested in diversity and culture differences. Typical comments were:

> I was able to learn a lot of different things – like there was two people from (*country*), so they like to cook their type of food and there was a boy from (*another country*) and so, we um, we sort of done like different dinner nights, so that was quite good to like to learn different things that people. And even like (*name*), who's gone back to (*country*) now, but in first year he was one of my closest friends. And then, so he was really religious and I've never really experienced having a close friend that's really religious before, so that was quite nice, like learning about him. And then there was a boy from (*a third country*) who had views that like I'd never heard before. He was so like, just unique and so different. He wasn't actually that popular, but I quite liked him, like listening to him (Sophie, female, third year, Upper).

... like back home nobody is as interesting as these people who have lived all over the world. …so there's quite a few, lots of French people in my halls and quite a lot of Cypriots, and that's quite interesting, like the different ways they eat, it's like even in my flat we've got three vegetarians, like that's quite interesting just being … I didn't know what Quorn was made out of until I came to uni. And there's practicing Muslims, so like no pork and praying how many times a day? Five times a day? It's very interesting (Charlotte, female, first year, Upper).

Whereas when some white Lowers expressed a view they were more introspective and believed that, despite other nationalities being interesting, their own tendency was to gravitate towards those of the same culture and background; an example of such a view being:

I think like the university tries a lot to get people integrated and stuff, but realistically I don't think happens, which is fair enough. Like I completely understand, if I was to go to a foreign country to university, I'd feel comfortable around like other English people, cos if you're in like a country that you're not that familiar with, like you're gonna want to mingle with people you feel are culturally like you (Craig, male, third year, Lower).

Craig's comments could have been made by Gino and vice versa because both felt that, despite the atmosphere and any encouragement, students gravitated towards those who were similar to them. Arabella's comment about conformity and the formation of like-minded cliques served to further reinforce the point that other types of people might be interesting but, in the end, integrating with them to any great degree was, she felt, for some reason uncomfortable:

I mean it sounds bad, but we joke about the (*English County*) Bubble, and that everyone in the (*English County*) Bubble – there's like a certain like… it sounds bad, but like class, style, family background. Like everyone is literally the same, like, and coming here, there's people from

like Nigeria and I'd be like… They'd be like 'Have you ever been to Nigeria?' I'd be like 'No.' It's just like so different. And then like, them being able to speak like five different languages, and I'm like 'ooh, I can just about speak German.' I can pluck a few words out like... So, it is quite different and it's quite interesting, but it's quite hard then to also find a common ground. Like there are a few people who, like, I know back from home as well, who've come here, like not knowing they lived near me. And then we all are very similar, and I still feel like it's quite cliquey, even at uni, you still sort of hang around with the people are like home-comforts. But you're just forced into groups with people who aren't (Arabella, female, third year, Lower).

Osaloni (male, third year, Upper) had chosen his housemates based upon his previous foundation course friends and appeared to seamlessly connect on the programme, with peers and with tutors, wherever he needed to. He had been educated in England and spoke native-level English but was of black African ethnicity. Despite him not articulating any views on his comfort level with similar students to himself, he had set himself up living and socialising with students who were similar to himself in that they had been on his foundation course.

Four out of the 26 students openly held strong views about the drawbacks of working with students with poor language skills and the impact that might have on group work results. Despite students being positive about the degree to which more diverse ideas are generated in mixed groups and them embracing the concept, when it comes to the practicalities of report writing, native English or near native English speakers found students with poor language skills frustrating and a drawback. A typical comment was:

But I have had issues with, especially Chinese students. The level of English is just not to the standards that's sometimes fair, and I know that sounds really nasty, but I just think you can't share the workload with somebody whose English is so low a level. …So, I think you do carry sometimes, foreign students you have got to carry them just cos their level

of English is low, not cos they're not smart enough. I don't believe that they're not smart or not clever, but I just think their level of English is sometimes not up to the point where it's fair for the others (Daisy, female, fourth year, Upper).

4.4.2.2 Culture Challenges

Students might have cultural norms that they bring with them to university, perhaps directed by family, which might inhibit, perhaps more specifically, female connectedness. One female student was already a late adopter of Facebook due to family restrictions:

> People had it at school but I just didn't feel like I needed it. I mean once I made it for the group work I did go and add people from my secondary school so I could see what they were doing and keep up to date with them, but that wasn't the main reason. In school, no one really told me that I should have Facebook, mum really minded that I didn't have it so I didn't make it (Akila, female, first year, Lower).

However, her male sibling had not been similarly discouraged:

> My brother and my dad have Facebook. My brother's had it for…since he was quite young but he didn't really want me to be on that platform, he's really overprotective, so I didn't ….at first I didn't mind, but afterwards I was just like 'whatever' (Akila, female, first year, Lower).

She had been strongly encouraged to attend a university near her home and to live at home. She regretted she had not been able to leave but was making plans to study abroad, during her programme to leave the family home. In a different position on the cultural spectrum was one white British student, Arabella, who expressed a view that she did not want to be engaged in an alcohol-drinking culture and had found it a barrier to connectedness in playing sport in the university:

…like it was too drink focused, whereas like I'd done sport at quite a high level when I was at school and obviously for me, I only cared about the sport, I didn't care about the... I want to get to the top team, whereas like everything I had to do, they were like 'why aren't you coming out?' They were like 'You can't join in the events if you aren't coming out'. I was like – 'oooh, I want to play the sport' (Arabella, female, third year, Lower).

These cultural issues are quite different: one was based on a home culture and involves different traditionally-held values where the student was negotiating a path between the two; the other was a negative element of a university-based culture that did and could prevent society belongingness.

4.4.2.3 Disability

Two male students had disabilities: one second-year male had an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Asperger's Syndrome) and a fourth-year male had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The first male had embraced all the support he had been provided with, had connected with his note taker and seemed to be genuinely very happy. He had deliberately chosen to live in his parental home and was very comfortable with why such a decision enabled his study:

Initially to begin with it was a little bit hard, but then slowly, slowly the misunderstandings went away and then we became close. I have widened my circle a little bit because I met a couple of new students this year, so now, you know, I've made friends with my new note taker, and she's really nice (Ali, male, second year, Lower).

The second student was somewhat irritated by constant emails from the disabilities office and had chosen to ignore any interface with them. He had chosen to manage some of his symptoms by a self-imposed discipline of a

rigorous work ethic and, despite being a Lower, described a rich set of work-related friendships:

> Uh… it sound horrendous but I don't feel like I've got it, just because I've got ADD and I find it like, I dunno like, the- them emailing me from a disability thing makes me sound stupid I've got dyslexia as well, so it doesn't- I- they seem to class it as a disability but I never had in my own brain, maybe I should but I don't so- that's probably why I don't like getting help because I like to think that I can do it by myself which when I was at school I never had the opportunity to. Like it was always like 'oh you've got this you need to come do extra lessons, you need to do this' and stuff, which was quite demoralising. So, now I've come here and sort of like, I can do it myself I don't- I don't need help (Joe, male, fourth year, Lower).

One student was very open about his disability and wanted to connect for support; the other quite secretive and quite hostile to the offer of support. One student was in his first year and the other student had been on placement and had successfully secured a professional network for his entry into the world of work. Both students appeared to want to judge their own needs and, despite there being no similarities in their approaches, both were content; one with a lot of support and the other with none at all.

4.4.2.4 Independent or State School

Of the 22 students who had received secondary education in the UK, seven came from independent schools. There was no difference in the school types between Uppers and Lowers. Two state school students identified that students were aware of each other's educational backgrounds. Two of their comments are as follows:

> When I came to uni one of the first things a few people asked me was 'what kind of school did you go to?' and I found that very weird cos that

would never even have been in discussion before I come to uni (Louise, female, fourth year, Lower).

Quite a lot of people from private schools which is quite a big change for me cos I went to a state school. It's quite interesting how we've all just blended with each other… (Charlotte, female, first year, Upper).

One student from an independent school felt it to be disadvantageous to university life, due to lack of preparation by the independent schools for life at university and cited the fact some friends from school had dropped out as university was not appropriate for them because of a lack of preparedness. Some students in the Group of Eleven had primary international parental homes and, as a result, some had been sent to study in places where they were taught in English and so these were discounted from this last part of the analysis. Of the remaining 15 white UK students, one Upper, the one who had remained living at home, had been to independent day school but five of these Lowers had been to independent school.

4.4.2.5 Social Class

Two students commented upon apparent social class and a potential wealth and spending divide. Arabella's earlier reported comments alluded to similarities in students from where she was from and other students cited differences, but also the fact where they were even raised:

…a few times a few people say, 'oh you're a bit Essexy' even though I don't live in Essex, Yeah, although I wouldn't say I am like posh, I think I've got everything I want and never want for anything, but I don't know, sometimes I just think like, when I've got like thirty quid in my account and I'm like 'mum, I need money for food please.' And they're like going out on the booze, drinking loads every night and everything and I think 'how do you do that', you're so, not lucky, but like, it's a different world, it's a different view of things (Daisy, female, fourth year, Upper).

…like, you just meet different people, like people who I met people who
are super into horse riding cos they've done it in their areas (Aahil, male,
first year, Lower).

The impact of the graduate parents and independent schools was considered in
this factor. Nine of the Group of Eleven, those identified as either not born in the
UK, non-white and/or British nationality, had two graduate parents and the
remaining two had a graduate mother, so all the group came from graduate
households. Of the remaining 15, those born in the UK and non-white, only five
had two graduate parents, one had a graduate mother but nine had neither parent
as a graduate and so the white UK students, in the present study, were coming
from generally, formally less well-educated households. Of the 15, five had been
to independent school and, of these five, three had both graduate parents and two
had no graduate parents.

In summary, the diversity and difference section has brought together a range of
different factors which could impact connectedness. Fifteen interviewed students
were non-white, had been born in the UK and were British citizens. The
remaining 11 students were of a different ethnicity, country of birth and/or
citizenship. A number of students had commented upon perceived barriers to
being friends with non-white British students. Other factors of difference were
language ability, culture, disability, social class and independent or state school.
Each factor of difference had its own characteristics and issues and could act as a
barrier to integration.

4.5 Research Question Two: Differences between Uppers and Lowers

In this section, specific connectedness differences, between Uppers and Lowers,
in two specific areas – personal attitudes, attributes and characteristics; and the
quality and nature of connectedness – will now be presented. These findings relate
to Research Question Two, which was concerned with how the connectedness
attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of well-being compare to those
exhibiting lower levels of well-being. Any differentiators between these two

clusters, already identified in the preceding sections, will first be summarised before moving on to additional findings. From the online survey, Uppers were generally less likely to have graduate parents, as stated earlier, from the 164 respondents, 50% of Lowers had at least one graduate parent, whereas only 36 % of Uppers. The data for the interviewed students is shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Number of Interviewed Students with Graduate Parents

	Uppers (*n*=8)	**Lowers (*n*=18)**
Both parents graduates	3	11
Neither parent graduate	3	6
Only a graduate father	0	0
Only a graduate mother	2	1

It has already been seen that Uppers were more positive towards diverse working environments. Three out of eight Uppers were in the Group of Eleven, identified in the Diversity section, but even with these students excluded, all but one Upper saw the benefits of studying in a diverse environment. Approximately half of the Uppers observed that they had a tendency to socialise if they used the library and, when needing to exercise self-discipline, they needed to be alone. Seven Uppers had society memberships, and all had at least one sporting membership. All were more likely to persist with membership. No Uppers were engaged in university-remunerated work but six were currently engaged in non-remunerated volunteering. Only one lived at home but she was primarily studying on a small non-business-school programme and, unlike the other seven Uppers, had no society memberships.

Similarly, for Lowers it has already been seen that eight out of 18 Lowers were in the Group of Eleven, identified in the Diversity section, and were much less open to studying in a diverse environment, often citing language skills. Eleven Lowers had society memberships but were less likely to persist and, of those failing to join any societies, all were Lowers. Three Lowers were paid to act as Business

School Ambassadors or Open Day Representatives for the university and seven were currently engaged in non-remunerated volunteering. Lowers had been more likely to engage with volunteering during their school years but much less likely to at university. Students who had studied in an international environment did not have the volunteering opportunities that UK students have and this had an impact upon the school volunteering data. For example, three of the Uppers had had no school-based opportunity at all. Three Lowers lived at home.

The next two sections, along with the above, relate to Research Question Two and will present findings for the differences between Uppers and Lowers in their personal attitudes, attributes and characteristics, in section 4.5.1, and the quality and nature of their connectedness, in section 4.5.2. The findings in these two sections were arrived at through the interviews using the semi- structured interview guide. This is why there are not always 26 responses to any given area of questioning because students sometimes did not define their view or had no specific opinion.

4.5.1 Personal Attributes

4.5.1.1 Introversion or Extroversion

During the interviews, students were asked whether they thought of themselves as introverts or extroverts: five out of eight Uppers considered themselves to be extroverts as did five out of 18 Lowers. One Upper and eight Lowers identified as introverts and the remaining students felt they adapted depending upon circumstances apart from one Upper and two Lowers, who reached no conclusion. Those adapting to circumstances attributed the fluidity to the need to present group work confidently or to sometimes appear socially confident and extroverted but overall felt they were not extroverts. If this assumption is correct, then a total of three Uppers and a total of 11 Lowers might have been introverts or latently introverted.

4.5.1.2 Time for the Self

Uppers and Lowers appeared to have quite different attitudes to time spent alone. Four Uppers described using the time alone to clear their minds, like a mindfulness exercise, and relax, consider or reflect upon matters. One example is as follows:

> I'd say that I'm quite a deep thinker anyway and then now maybe like I apply it more, so this year doing like Business Ethics and CSR, it's made me like really look at like stuff like what's wrong and right, obviously, that can go on forever and that can make you really think. Things like how you're contributing to the world and things like that, so I'd definitely say it's changed my thinking in that way. And like the way people buy things and like the ethical side, so I think it's made me definitely think about them sort of things more (Sophie, female, third year, Upper).

Two of the Uppers also described themselves as procrastinators, perhaps the downside of reflecting and thinking, specifically noting that group work was a useful impetus for tackling academic work. Three Lowers, on the other hand, found time to think as time to potentially become anxious. A typical example is as follows:

> I feel like maybe because I don't really feel like I know anyone like here, that's sort of a little bit like by myself, maybe. And that's why I don't like it, I always feel like if you're away from it, you don't really think about it as much whereas when I'm here and I'm like 'I've got an hour to kill and I don't know what to do with myself (Leonora, female, third year, Lower).

In his interview, one Lower used the word 'escape' six times in relation to his situation, and described how turning to his gaming as a way of not thinking:

> Two weeks ago I was feeling very down and tired, but then the thing is, when I say I try to console, like, to fix it with my game, it's like an escape so I don't have to think of my problems (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

4.5.1.3 Empathy with Others

The majority of Uppers had been exposed to more severe difficulties than many Lowers but Uppers tended to articulate observations about how others might feel more readily than Lowers and reflected upon the situation from the other person's point of view. Typical comments were:

> If I'm living with someone and I ask them, I know that they could be stressed out and I'm just kind of adding to their stress by talking to them about my stress (Michael, male, fourth year, Upper).

> …just understand peoples like learning process – people can learn differently. For example, I had a boy in my group in first year who had really bad learning difficulties, and now I've got so much more patience, like I've learnt from that (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper).

Lowers described situations that related to accommodation or friendship disappointments but more from their own point of view or more as an observation than one requiring any deep reflection. Two such comments were:

> And there's some people I rarely see come out or just be on their own. And obviously, I don't like…I can tell like, OK, it's understandable it's probably a different environment for them, especially for like international students coming over here, they're on their own, and I know an international student lives on our floor that…she was homesick for a while, we talked to her and she seemed fine after … (Aahil, male, first year Lower).

> … she never hangs out with us, she never has dinner with us, like if we're having dinner around 7 o'clock, people in the kitchen having dinner at the same time as you and if she makes dinner she takes it back to her room, which never used to happen at the start of the term, or the start of the year,

I mean, but it does now. We've actually discussed it as like a flat, but we can't figure out why she's done it (Toby, male, first year, Lower).

4.5.1.4 Personal Characteristics

Approximately half the Lowers exhibited some personality characteristics and behaviours identified in literature as being associated with lower levels of well-being, resilience and self-esteem. They were more likely to hold back, generally seemed more pessimistic, more anxious and more reluctant to try to address connectedness deficiencies. Lowers expressed regrets with issues like society membership not working out. Lowers' explanations of holding back part of themselves were taken to mean a more measured level of self-disclosure, as a kind of self-protection mechanism; symptomatic of a lack of trust or a vulnerability or immaturity of friendship. Two students' descriptions of how they held back are as follows:

I hold back a bit from them… I like to keep stuff a little bit reserved to be honest. …I've never really been a confident person, and definitely with *(name)* being my best mate, always be the centre of attention and I never really was, I was always the guy on the side (Toby, male, first year, Lower).

I very rarely let my guard down. I think that probably has something to do with my anxiety, it's like a…it's almost like a fear I don't want to let people in (Ana, female second year, Lower).

Coupled with that, Lowers appeared more pessimistic about themselves and their situations and did not necessarily seek ways of resolving their feelings, perhaps turning more and more inwardly focused. Two such examples are as follows:

I learn about myself slowly, day by day and like, in university I learn more and more and more about myself and I thought about what I'm wrong, how I'm not good enough, and I started to think how… who can answer

why I'm like this? So, before that I was usually, I usually dealt with this on my own. I think I'm fine like this, so I just let it be, I didn't think about it that much, so, not until university I did not take counselling (Kecheng, male, first year, Lower).

(*Upon being asked whether he could think of a difficult period in this life and what he did to resolve that*) That's a really hard question. The thing is, I think why it's hard is because I've had a lot of times where I've felt like oh, does anybody care? Like what's the point? Yeah, I've had a lot of times like that, so I guess it's hard for me to pinpoint one exact time (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

Lowers seemed to be more likely to have the personality trait related to anxiety. All but one of the Lowers described situations of stress and, in many cases, substantial amounts of it. During the interview, three female Lowers disclosed that they had been, or were actively being treated by a medical practitioner for anxiety-related conditions and a further was about to seek help. No Uppers disclosed similar information relating to anxiety. One Lower described using illegal drugs as a form of release at the height of her social anxieties and disappointments.

4.5.1.5 Attitudes to Group Work

All but one Upper felt group work to be beneficial, five Lowers felt similarly, eight Lowers were ambivalent as was the remaining Upper. Uppers also saw it helped prevent some of their procrastination. For both Uppers and Lowers who saw its benefits, they felt it led to greater creativity, generation of better ideas, an opportunity to learn from each other, to reduce some of the stress, providing the team connected effectively and they would achieve more as a group than alone. However, two of the lowers were clear in why felt group work had advantages:

I think I would probably do better working with other people because they bring up ideas that you wouldn't have thought of, and then you can

integrate that into your own ideas and make your work better (Akila, female, first year, Lower).

Group work is something which should be done by everyone because I volunteer at a charity shop and we do group work all the time there, so… It helps us make the task much easier to do and it helps me interact with people a lot better (Ali, male, second year, Lower).

Several students identified personal benefits, as well as task-related benefits, in terms of self-development and interpersonal skills in group work:

…it has prepared me to deal with different people, obviously with so much group work. I now know that I have to be a bit more patient with people (Arabella, female, third year, Lower).

I learn more from other people's – like I've actually learnt like knowledge off other people, whereas in first year I was very single minded, no my work, my work's the best work, and I need to be myself… (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper).

Even students who felt positive towards group work had frustrations, feeling that some group members were not contributing adequately or fairly. One reason, already discussed, related to language skills. This influence was discussed under diversity and difference in 4.4.2. One first year saw a group work learning curve and another first year viewed their own group's lack of organisation and structure, in hindsight, as responsible for some of the difficulties. The four students who expressed an active dislike of group work, preferring to be individually responsible for their own work, were all Lowers and three were male. Lowers found it difficult to trust others with academic work and felt that they would achieve more individually because others might be less diligent. A typical comment was:

> I don't always trust people to do like the work that they're supposed to do.
> I don't always like…I can't completely rely on someone to come through,
> and to be like up to the standard that I might want it to be (Craig, male,
> third year, Lower).

4.5.1.6 Managing Problems

The majority of Uppers had suffered severe life-changing adversities, and all had
already showed resilience by appropriate readjustment. Nearly all Uppers
appeared to be better task-focused problem solvers but also took care of others to
support and overcome adversity. For example, an Upper who had been bullied at
school had enlisted the support of his brother. Together, they had moved countries
and it had made them closer and he was very open to connecting. Two of the
Uppers had lost a parent during their late adolescence/teen years. One Upper had
experienced several close familial bereavements, one felt that it was only at
university that she had finally come to terms with the loss of a much-cherished
grandmother and one had had a parent with cancer, now in recovery. The
importance of perspective seemed to be in evidence. These Uppers seemed to be
using a comparative lens to judge the relative severity of other life events. For
example, one Upper described having a 'Shit Pile' and metaphorically putting
routine setbacks on it and then laughing about them with her friends. All the
Uppers who described a specific life-changing or tragic event described feeling
that, as a result, they had changed in some way for the better. Students described
how they had looked to themselves as a first line of resource, perhaps taken some
responsibility, had learned how to manage and rationalise such events, had made
changes within themselves and perhaps had become more confident. Three
Uppers' comments are as follows:

> Yeah, I did do some fund raising at home but that was purely for a kind of
> like a walk that we did and I run the half marathon every year for Cancer
> Research as well, in (*name of town*) and then I do some fund raising for
> that. Cake sales and all that kind of stereo-typical fund-raising activity, cos
> my mum past away from cancer kind of 12 years ago, so since I have been

the age to do fund raising, I've tried to. I think I've raised about £6,000 now over the course of about four years, which is good, and I do enjoy doing it. Yeah, that's pretty much what I've done. It's a good feeling, really good feeling (Michael, male, fourth year, Upper).

I think I had a bit of a bad experience in first year, my mum was ill, she was diagnosed with cancer in my first term, so that was kind of a big… a bit of a pivotal point in my life, I think I did change quite a bit and I had quite bad…. after she was diagnosed, it was quite a long process, she had to have chemotherapy, radiotherapy, it wasn't very nice. Um, and I got quite bad depression from it and I went really…. that summer of first year, I had a really, really bad time with myself, I was like I didn't leave the house, I was very down. Then I think it changed me because when I popped up again and I became back to myself I was different, I was a lot more confident (Daisy, female, fourth year, Upper).

I guess that's (*the loss of his father*) something that helped me grow up a lot faster than most people because I think most people would say I'm a bit mature for my age at that time. So, I would say, yeah, I had to become a man and my family was the best thing. It's made me closer to some of my cousins that I normally wouldn't be friends with (Osaloni, male, third year, Upper).

Uppers appeared more self-sufficient, self-directed, perhaps more self-reliant than Lowers in the tackling of issues and taking their responsibilities for their academic problems. Uppers focused on describing stresses, dealing with the source of the stress and often using words which denoted taking responsibility for finding a solution and moving on. Typical comments were:

I feel sometimes the best way to deal with a problem is just to forget about what's just happened and move on, moving forward (Osaloni, male, third year, Upper).

I think that helped me sort of improve myself... I'd like properly look into it myself and like try to get it... I'd sort of get round it myself – enough research you can get there in the end (Sophie, female, third year, Upper).

I'm quite sensible in that way that I'd try my best to sort it out on my own (Charlotte, female, first year, Upper).

I'd solve the problem myself, try, before I could find someone else and solve it for me (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper).

…I think that helped me sort of improve myself, like I want to be a little bit more like them maybe as well, like feeling 'these organised people on top of life and knowing what they're doing' and I think that made me think. Also, I'm doing something a little bit wrong, I need to sort of get a little bit more on top of things… (Sophie, female, third year, Upper).

Lowers, too, had suffered issues of some considerable adversity but many had unresolved outcomes or lingering anxieties; the descriptions of the issues and problems were not accompanied by any kind of catharsis, or perhaps reflection that might be considered appropriate to addressing the problem. Aaron described a difficult cycle of events from school, due to his health and the challenges he had faced. Despite having survived this ordeal and getting to university, he reflected on how difficult he would find it to address something similar a second time. Ana was one of the Lowers who had suffered from debilitating continual anxiety. Despite receiving medication Ana was still very aware of the impact of the anxiety and her ongoing need to manage it. She had found a solution that enabled her to cope and her anxiety was contained but her regrets over societies, making friends and her university experience left her quite wistful for the experience she might have had as opposed to the one she could perhaps now have tried to achieve:

I wish I'd have joined a society at the beginning and met friends through that because my course there about 300 people on it and its very hard to

actually make friends, cos there's so many people, everyone's got their little clique, whereas if I'd have joined a society first year I think I would have made friends and probably lived with them (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

Two students reported the impact of parental disharmonies, with the implication that these were not resolved and therefore the students' difficulties were not far from their minds. Both described the impact:

> My relationship with my dad is interesting because, just because of various different reasons, um, you know sometimes he's there and sometimes he's not, so maybe that…that's probably the most difficult part of my life at the moment. (William, male, first year, Lower)

> Sixth form was a bit rough for me, like, I … in the first year my parents basically split up.
> Yeah. So that was obviously quite hard, and then that had like a massive toll on me, I ended up doing pretty bad that year, so I retook it. …I didn't really get on with my dad for like quite a while, but then they got back together and he moved back in, home was just like not nice at all. …I was a year back and I made like good friends in the year below, but my kind of best friends moved off to uni, and I was still there. So 6th form was hard as well, it was tough like academically as well (Craig, male, third year, Lower).

Craig described how he finally entered a period of counselling but still did could not move on:

> …and then he (*his general practitioner*) set me up with this woman who I talked with and I know it could have gone further than that, like more like talk and therapy whatever, but like I said, like I think it's just something I don't think I'd be able to do. So, I think when I talked to her, I sort of like, kind of like faked that I was feeling a bit better so that it didn't go any further because I knew I just wouldn't be up for that.

Some first years appeared to be exhibiting nascent characteristics of Uppers despite having tested as Lowers. For example, Aahil, a Lower, who had suffered from racial abuse at school, had managed to process and manage his ordeal effectively and was able to reflect upon it. Despite being excluded from school, he explained that he was now able to politely acknowledge the perpetrator as he now perceived the abuse was attributable to his perpetrator's immaturity. This student appeared to exhibit more than one characteristic of an Upper, despite having appeared in the Lower cluster from the initial online survey. Upon arrival at university, he had joined a sports society, had become engrossed in its activities and had not self-identified as an introvert when interviewed. A second, second-year, student, despite being a Lower, self-identified as an extrovert and had also joined a sports society. The group work section above also demonstrated that there were a number of first-year Lowers who were positive towards group work; again, something in common with the Uppers.

Upon encountering non-academic problems in their lives, students accessed contacts, families and/or professional support services, to try to solve them. Students deciding to use university counselling services did so, usually after discussing it with their parents. Several students seemed aware of their own parents' challenges with mental health issues and relationship breakdown difficulties and so an open dialogue with parents appeared to have been impossible in many cases. Uppers tended to involve their parents only in more complex issues and tried to be more self-reliant with lesser issues; Lowers tended to protect their parents from complex issues. The reason Lowers cited for not involving their parents was not wanting to cause their parents any anxiety or cause for concern. Such comments concerned avoiding worrying their parents:

> The last thing I want to do is have my mum worry about me. If I do something I always try and avoid telling her, I'll get her a bit worried, cos if she's worried she'll just go…. she just…mums go mum-ish and….especially my dad as well (Aahil, male, first year Lower).

I had a panic attack which I didn't have for two years, so it was kind of surprising. But I didn't phone my mum directly because I know she'd freak out, I know her (Nadiyah, female, third year, Lower).

4.5.2 Quality and Nature of Connectedness

This section is in two parts. The first part deals with findings relating to the quality, nature and diversity of connectedness in general and the second part discusses specific issues relating to social media use, where there are differences between Uppers and Lowers.

4.5.2.1 Limiting, Closed, Unhappy Relationships

All students reflected upon the desirability of broader circles of friends from the outset. It has already been seen that, when asked what advice students would give to new students, making new friends was almost top of every interviewee's list. Nearly one-third of the Lowers had difficulties in this respect because they had made limiting decisions or had ended up in situations which limited their friendships. Limiting decisions were evidenced by early decisions to have closed friendship groups or individual single friends, as evidenced in the following comment:

> Obviously like you know like everyone kind of around you. I think that's another problem as well because like me and my house were like really close from the start. We probably didn't branch out as much, they'd probably all say the same, and I think we have like talked about it before, we didn't really branch out that much at the flat, cos we were kind of like – we were all quite similar actually, which was good (Craig, male, third year, Lower).

Two students, in their first years at university, had limited their friendships; each having only one deep friendship with just one other student. The close friendship, in both cases, for different reasons, had disappeared, leaving the student isolated.

One student had had a close friend who dropped out, the second had a close friend who entered an intense partnership relationship and the friend focused her time and efforts into her relationship partner at the expense of her original friendship. Both students were female and described their situations:

> In the first year, one of the girls that I was living with, she was on my course and we were sort of like best friends, and then…I think that's probably why I didn't really get that many other friends on my course cos I always had her. But then she didn't make it into second year, so she had to drop out and then in second year I wasn't living with anyone on my course and I haven't lived with anyone on my course in any of my years, so… I have got like friends on my course, but I'm not in like a group… (Louise, female, fourth year, Lower).

> I kind of feel like because she's got a boyfriend now and everything as well, its kind one of them friendships where, without sounding horrible, you kind of just use each other when it's appropriate, in the sense that she'll only message me if she needs something (Ciara, female, second year, Lower).

The influence of the placement and accommodation changes at the third-year point was a situational influence which could also reduce connectedness. Students who remained were more likely to report such loss, rather than returning fourth-year finalists, because they were the ones left behind whereas placement peers had gone to new lives. One such comment was:

> I would say that it is harder to enjoy it now that I am like sort of by myself more because you don't really have people to like discuss things with. Like I have like one friend, but I wouldn't really say she's like a friend, friend, I think just say like a basic, course friend, that we sort of discuss things with. But one… actually, there is a girl that is in the fourth year that I am friends with, who went on placement, but I knew her from before and she's been like a massive help in like introducing me to other people and

like the group space where you have to pick your own group – that's really difficult (Leonora, female, third year, Lower).

Limited and limiting relationships are an issue throughout the lifecycle but the importance and impact varies. One Lower described how she had got it wrong and if she had her time again she would know how to get it right. Such issues might be attributable to the first-year accommodation situation, the second-year conflicts, placement or finalists' structural connectedness losses. Some third- and fourth-year Lowers spoke of strengthening legacy friend ties, looking past graduation; rationalising the decision not to address their university connectedness because it was now not worth addressing. For them it was too late.

4.5.2.2 Lifelong Friends from University

The university experience came complete with expectations regarding making lifelong friends, as one student described:

> I mean, there's only one other cousin of mine who's gone to university and he said 'oh I made lifelong friends there', so I think that almost put a pressure on 'ok, if he does, then surely I've got to go along and make lifelong friends', you know, 'oh, who were they?' 'They were my halls mates from first year.' So, instantly you're thinking 'right, ok' and I think therefore I had quite a, you know, 'let's go out and make these big friendships' (Henry, male, fourth year, Lower).

Two Lowers, both males, had not made any close friends in the university environment and were identified earlier as avid gamers. One felt that his gaming caused him not to be available to others to develop and maintain relationships, which was one reason he had no close friends or a relationship; the other appeared to game as result of his loneliness. Two female Lowers, who had had limited friendships early on, were pessimistic regarding their long-term prospects for enduring friendships from university. Both felt that any university friendships were likely to wither and both felt their enduring friendships would be school

based. However, the majority of students felt that they would retain some friends from university. The typical numbers of close friends being referred to by first-year students were six to eight. By the second year, this number had reduced, based on the success of the house share. By graduation, two or three was typical, for both Uppers and Lowers.

Students of later years viewed making a plethora of initial accommodation-based acquaintances – an integral part of the university experience –but, with hindsight, differentiated between those acquaintances and friends:

> Obviously living in halls in the, in the first year, I think is a big must. That's where you're gonna meet- meet your initial friends, yeah? I that but I've- I probably only speak to one of the people that I lived with in halls um still. Cause you sort of then branch out and get your own sort of friends in your course and elsewhere so, but it is a big, sort of facilitator to meet friends, I think (Joe, male, fourth year, Lower).

> I had this conversation with my friend the other day and we were talking about how at the beginning of first year you just make friends with everyone and anyone you can because it's such a different…you're just in the deep end. So, now we're friends with about three people out of those twenty (Gabrielle, female, second year, Upper).

4.5.2.3 Social Media Relationships and Authenticity

All 26 students had a Facebook account, 19 were Snapchat users, 18 were Instagram users, 16 used Twitter, nine used WhatsApp and seven were currently using Tinder. Lowers were very sceptical about the reality and authenticity of social media postings, exemplified in discussions of 'Likes' on Facebook and the narcissistic potential of Tinder. Many students appeared very conscious of the detrimental, rather than aspirational, connectedness effect that it might have on others. Typical comments included:

…I do hate social media because I think it does sort of like give a bad impression and I think it makes it look like everyone's happy but probably they really aren't (Leonora, third year, female, Lower).

I think a lot of dissatisfaction personally, comes from seeing other people's best versions of themselves and none of their rubbish. So, you see all of yours, but you don't see theirs (William, male, first year, Lower).

Of those expressing a preference, five Uppers and 12 Lowers preferred face-to-face contact, and more than three-quarters of males preferred face-to-face socialising, whereas only approximately half of females did. It might have seemed more important in first year to make new friends and so the disproportionately high number of first-year males may have impacted the finding. Males envisaged and related to situations of social contact in their responses:

In terms of my personal view, in terms of me, I don't think it's getting in the way of anything. I still like to go…go literally to a pub and have a pint, have a drink with my friends and chat (Toby, male, first year, Lower).

…like if I were to talk to someone I would prefer one hundred per cent to talk to them face to face instead of, 'let's chat'…I've noticed that since I've made a lot of friendships throughout my life – guys become friends over doing things while girls become friends over talking and like… (Gino, male, second year, Lower).

We can talk and we can do stuff together. But that's not going to be that hourly, you know, companion, like you're going to get closer and closer with. So, I believe that to become good friends with another person, you have to spend a lot of time together, that's what I believe (Eneas, male, second year, Upper).

I think we probably meet up less than we would if we didn't have it. But on the other side of that coin that it's much easier to organise stuff, and

you can message someone, and they'll get it straight away and, be like 'oh yeah, I'll come over' (William, male, first year, Lower).

4.5.2.4 Extent of Active or Passive Usage of Social Media

Students were asked to self-classify as heavy, average or light users of social media, when compared to their friends and colleagues. On average, Uppers used more different social media systems than Lowers. Lowers were less likely to use Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter than Uppers. More Lowers classified themselves as lighter users of social media, whereas Uppers were more evenly distributed. The interviews contained discussions of how students engaged with social media, to determine where each resided on the continuum between active posting and outgoing communication compared to passive more observational behaviours when compared to their peers. The extent of passive or active engagement appeared unrelated to gender or year of study. Lowers appeared to be more passively engaged with social media than the Uppers, who were more actively posting. Many students described their own or their friends' endless passive checking and smartphone scrolling for updates on social media through perhaps boredom, compulsion or as a procrastination tool. Uppers and Lowers appeared equally distracted by the attractions of social media.

4.5.2.5 Social Media Levels of Sharing and Privacy

Oversharing on social media and the potential impact on connectedness, as an issue, was identified only by Lowers. Four students identified oversharing of insignificant information, for example, the restaurant meal you have ordered, or continual streams of information about themselves or what was happening to them, for example, holiday travelogues, as a negative force to connectedness. Such comments were:

I think, horrible as it sounds, I don't care, I don't want to know about what you've eaten, and I don't think other people want to know about what I'm

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doing so I don't really share that, that much (Ana, female, second year, Lower).

People that like Tweet stuff every ten minutes, people that just always like active, I just kind of think like, do you not have anything else like better to do and its quite cynical of me, but people who Tweet about every hour or something, just about what they're doing, it's like actually, who cares that much? (Craig, male, third year, Lower).

One student felt so negatively about oversharing that it had caused her to reduce her one-to-one communication with a member of her friendship group:

…a lot of people I wouldn't speak to now because I can see what they're doing. Like my friends... my friends are like 'I want to study abroad in China' and I'm like 'well I don't need to talk to her because she posts like her Snapchat story or photo on Instagram every day, I know exactly what she's doing all day… (Arabella, female, third year, Lower).

4.6 Summary

In summary, in this Findings chapter, legacy and new connectedness have been studied across the student lifecycle and how they relate to the academic, social and cultural spheres. Students strongly maintain legacy connectedness upon entry to university and this is a distinct change when compared to the traditional model of leaving home and going to university. The specific year-related connectedness issues to this programme have been explored. Students' reflections of what is most important at university indicate that it is the making of friends. The impact of diversity and difference and the challenge of identifying what the nature of the factors affecting inclusion have also been explored. Competency in English is a key factor.

The last part of the findings presented the differences between the Uppers, those in high states of well-being, and the Lowers, those in lesser states of well-being.

Uppers had positive personality traits associated with well-being, were more open to diversity, connectedness and group work and were less anxious and concerned about social media. Lowers appeared to be more anxious, introverted and less open to group work and diversity but were concerned about aspects of social media, including authenticity. Uppers were more likely to have suffered some severe adversity and were active problem solvers. Lowers had also suffered adversities but, in most cases, to a far lesser degree. Lowers were less likely to resort to active problem solving, relying, perhaps, on emotion-based coping. Uppers were comfortable with time alone and Lowers appeared less so. Of those who felt they were less likely to form long-term university friendships, all were Lowers. Uppers were avid users of social media and appeared tolerant of its lack of authenticity and its triviality.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Overview

This chapter will now compare the findings of the present study to the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter Two. An online survey of 164 students enabled a sample of 26 to be selected for interview, enabling both sets of findings and some additional data to be brought together in the discussion. As already identified in Chapter Two much of the student lifecycle literature relates to initial transition. In the interviews, only six students, five males and one female were in initial transition. Students of later years did venture opinions on events in their earlier year or years but these views were with the benefit of hindsight, which gives a more rounded view of their initial transition. This discussion will be structured by research question and in line with the sections in the Findings. The first section relates to Research Question One, the lifecycle, and is in three parts. It will firstly discuss legacy and new connectedness, employment, academic engagement, co-curricular activity and volunteering. It will then discuss specific issues relating to second, third and fourth-year finalists in post-initial transition and the third part will relate to diversity and connectedness. The second section of the discussion relates to the differences found between Uppers and Lowers, which is presented in two parts: the first regarding attributes, characteristics and attitudes; and the second concerning the quality and nature of these students' connectedness.

5.2 Research Question One

- How is connectedness realised and how does it develop through the lifecycle of these undergraduate students?

Research Question One focuses upon connectedness across all the processes of transition in the student lifecycle. This was presented in Chapter Two and is reproduced in Figure 5.1 below.
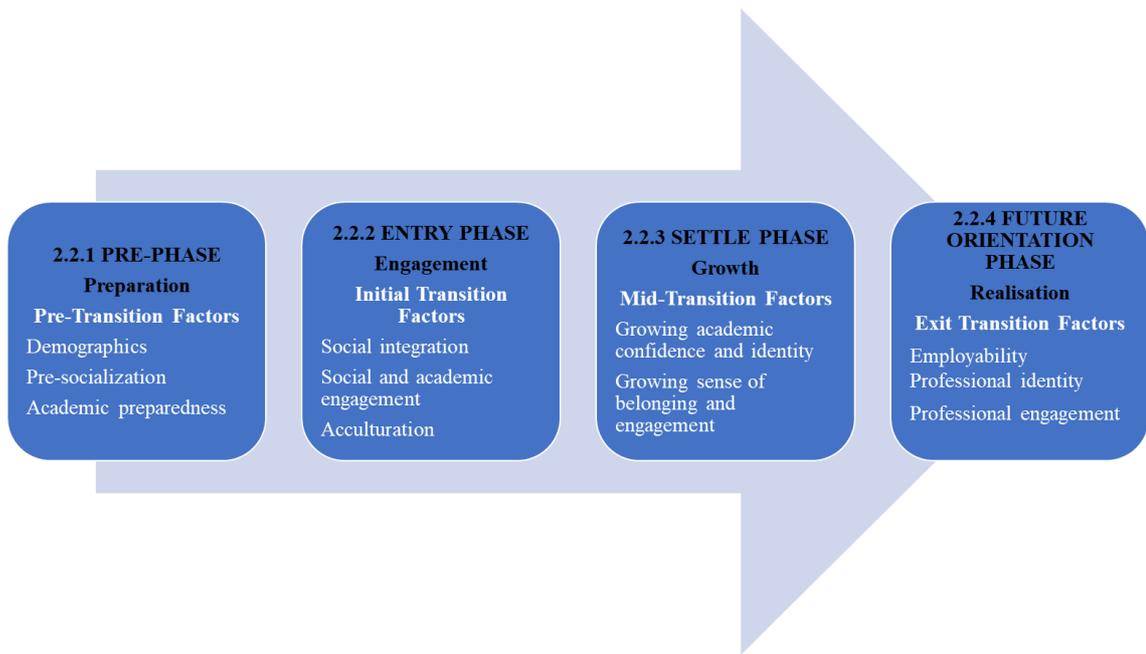
Figure 5.1: Stages of the Student Lifecycle (Based upon: Tinto, 2012; Wayne et al., 2016)

The study focused primarily on the middle two stages of the lifecycle because its objective was to understand connectedness at university. However, the study was informed by findings related to the preparation phase and the realisation phase. The findings showed that placement students went through three transitions – initial transition, placement transition and re-entry transition – and potentially two realisations: placement and graduation. Therefore, it is the lifecycle of a third-year finalist which is represented in Figure 5.1 above, but that of a fourth-year finalist, in light of the findings, has been adapted further and is presented in Figure 5.2 below. Lifecycle phases did not necessarily coincide exactly with the academic years of study as, for example, second years were thinking about placements for third year during their second year. Additionally, second years would not have known whether they were going to secure a placement and become fourth-year finalists, or choose not to, or fail to, and become third-year finalists, until nearly the start of the third year.

PRE-PHASE	ENTRY PHASE	SETTLE PHASE	PLACEMENT ORIENTATION PHASE	RE-ENTRY PHASE	FUTURE ORIENTATION PHASE
Preparation	Engagement	Growth	Orientation	Finalisation	Realisation
Pre-Transition Factors	Early Transition Factors	Mid-Transition Factors	Semi-exit Transition Factors	Re-engagement Transition Factors	Exit Transition Factors
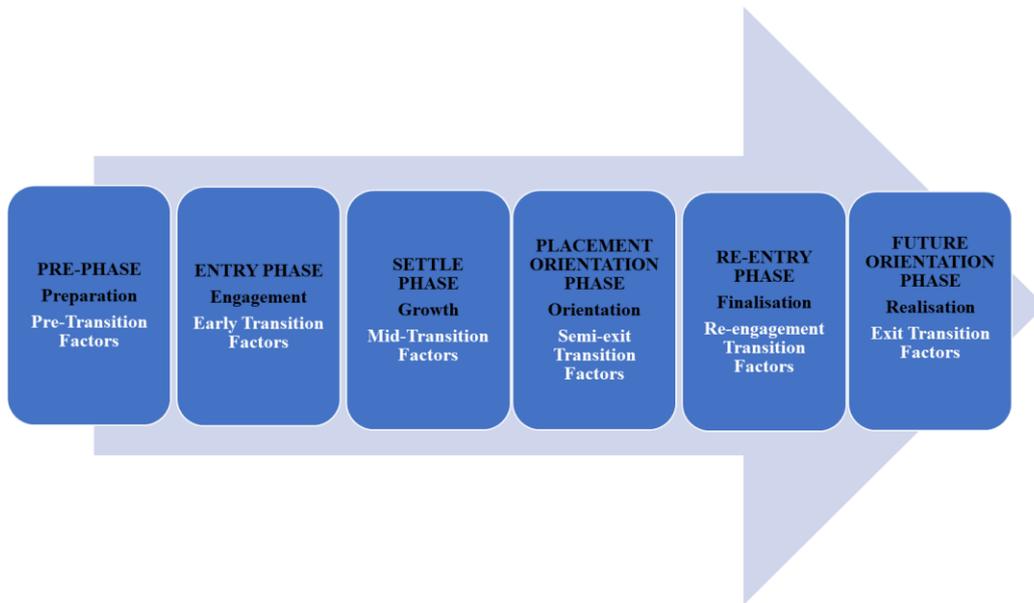
Figure 5.2: Stages in the Four-Year Student Lifecycle (Based upon Tinto, 2012; Wayne et al., 2016)

The present study is concerned with the effects of connectedness upon well-being. One of its key findings related to the amount and types of change that students in this programme experience, regardless of whether they undertake the third or fourth year programme. Such changes resulted in continual shifts in students' connectedness. This discussion will link the literature which identified the personal characteristics and attributes of individuals to the constructs of well-being and will discuss the positive impacts of connectedness originally identified in the conceptual model in Figure 2.4, of Chapter Two, and repeated below.
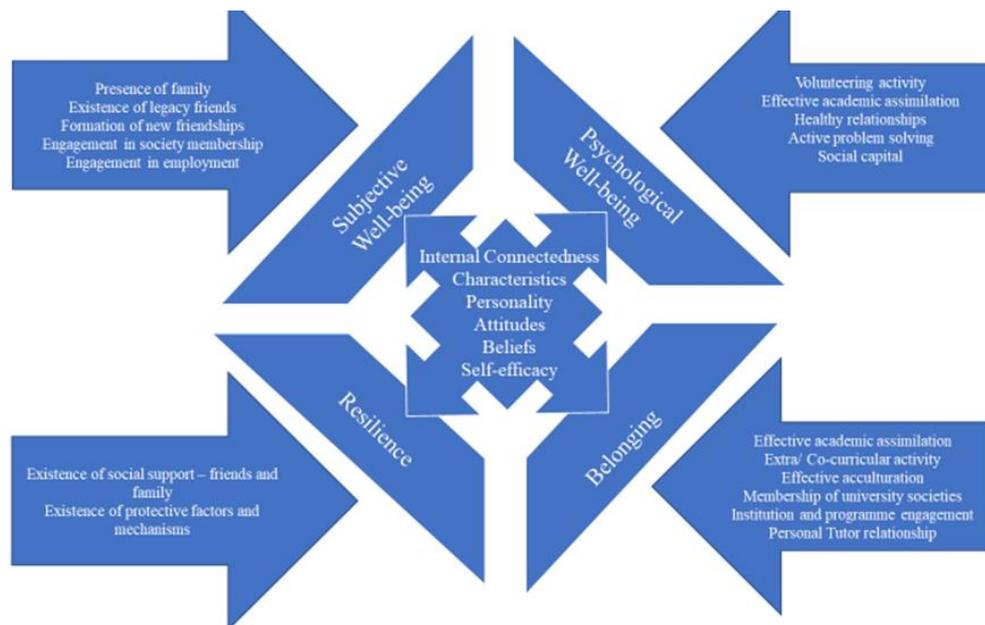
Figure 2.4: The Effects of the Factors of Connectedness Upon Well-being

5.2.1 Entry Phase: Early Transition

5.2.1.1 Legacy Connectedness

All students remained well connected to their immediate, and extended, families and to school friends, as identified in US studies; most of whom seemed to be following a similar educational path through university. The 16 students who were both UK domiciled and classed as living away from home were in relatively easy reach of the parental home and visited often, even to the extent that they had home-based employment. The move to university, for the interviewed students, did not necessarily involve going away and leaving the past behind (Gennep, 1960; Tinto, 2012); it continued to include it. Students' university attendance models appeared to be hybrids of the traditional semi-permanently leaving home model to start afresh at university, as a rite of passage (Earwaker, 1992) and semi-weekend commuting supporting Tinto's (2012) idea of it being possible that going to university could be more phenomenological than physical. A more contemporary approach to transition to university has centred upon the role of mobility and what that means for university students ** . The students in the

study were flexible in their connections to home, paid employment and even academic work. As the proportion of the UK population progressing to university has grown, more recent UK studies show a breadth of lifestyle choices ** Students used retained school friends as sounding boards and confidantes at transition, saw them frequently, hosted visits and some even intended to house share with them post-graduation. The facilitator of the quantity and quality of communication required to support the maintenance (Valkenburg & Jochen, 2009), as opposed to initiation, of such social and familial contact is social media, and systems of social media have facilitated a step change in student connectedness to the past. As a result, the boundaries between the microsystems and mesosystems within the students' ecologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) might be blurred because they operate multiple, relatively compartmentalised, friendship groups (McCabe, 2016).

Initial transition is like an immersion process, and legacy contact has advantages and disadvantages. An advantage to retaining strong family networks and legacy friends to support transition (Goodman, 2006; Whitlock et al., 2012) means that social support would not need to be built upon arrival because it already existed (Earwaker, 1992). Social support provides external protective factors of well-being (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Emmy E. Werner & Smith, 1982) and supports transition (Goodman, 2006). All of the students cited parents and/or friends as some part of their approach to problem solving activity, often with regard to sensitive issues, and so were actively using their legacy networks as support (Whitlock et al., 2012). However, in the present study, where initial social integration was compromised, turning back towards legacy contacts as a substitute might have been supportive of a level of disengagement; potentially an emotion-based coping strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). One disadvantage of reliance on a strong legacy support system may be that that task-based coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is reduced where students invite, or allow, a high degree of parental involvement in the management of minor issues, as seen in students in the Lowers group of the present study. Legacy connectedness may, therefore, inhibit the development of a sense of connectedness and belonging to the university environment (Paul & Brier, 2001; Strayhorn, 2016). US literature

argues the desirability of forging new links at university and loosening those from the past (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gennep, 1960; Tinto, 2012). Such weakness in belonging and connectedness to the institution (Strayhorn, 2016) is argued to lead to integration failures (Paul & Brier, 2001) and is a factor of attrition (Bean, 1983; Tinto, 2012). Furthermore, US literature differentiates between residential and commuter colleges with regard to the importance of social and academic integration; arguing that social integration was found to be more important at four-year residential institutions (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). The residential four-year setting is, arguably, more akin to the traditional UK model of going to university. However, such are the physical distances involved in the geography of the US, that going home may be comparable to the resource constraints of travelling across Europe. Therefore, the UK students in the present study may more closely resemble US commuter college students because many, for example, have cars (Hardwick, 2012), which enables them to journey home with relative ease. Students with balanced and healthy levels of university connectedness were not inhibited by legacy contact networks; they acted as complements to their friendship networks at university.

5.2.1.2 New Connectedness

Initial transition success was judged by students according to their perceptions of their own comparative social integration. Such success was generally highly dependent upon being accommodated in traditional halls, arriving at the start of Freshers' Week and making a substantial quantity of friends. Students seemed to view these early friendships, in hindsight, as pools of acquaintances which they reorganised and used selectively to, for example, choose second-year housemates. Factors through which friendships could be judged initially were duration and frequency of interaction (Starzyk et al., 2006). Since this was a time of change, the duration of the new friendships was very short because they were new, but the frequency of interaction was very high, because they lived together. The longer-term factors for judging the value of friendships, for example, knowledge of goals and self-disclosure, may have come later as friendships matured. In the present study, students themselves reflected on this evolution of friendships and

friendship groups from the first year. Students used the term 'friendship group' in the interviews when referring to, say, friends in a university society, to differentiate them from flatmates. The majority of the students in the present study appeared to operate as "compartmentalisers", with clusters of friends; occasionally, students operated as "samplers", with disconnected single friendships, but none operated one single network as "tight-knitters" (McCabe, 2016, p. 6). The sampler pattern, also found in the present study, of single isolated friendships had the potential to be detrimental because the loss of an isolated friendship removed an opportunity to be accompanied or supported to socialise in a larger network. Compartmentalisers, also found in the present study with several friendship groups, were in more robust connectedness positions than samplers because they were at less risk of such friendship systems loss. Academic group work also caused compartments because students participated in two to three different module groups per term and all were separate. One benefit of group work was that it could be a place to seek new friends if connectedness deficits had been identified by the student and there was some limited evidence of connectedness recovery through this.

Living at home had an impact on making new friends. Literature argues that remaining at home might mean that some social aspects of development are not triggered (Earwaker, 1992) and empirical evidence from a study of 7,571, four-year residential institution US students, found that students living with parents were more likely to drop out (Ishitani, 2016). In the present study, there were four students who lived at home; ostensibly for different reasons. One student had chosen to remain at home to accommodate the needs of his disability; one had returned to living at home, for the third year, to alleviate the pressures of difficult second-year accommodation; the first-year student had been persuaded, by her parents, to remain at home, much against her better judgement; and the motivations of the fourth were not identified. The disabled student friendship group was far narrower than that of other students; providing evidence that the need for social capital is highly personal (Kroll, 2011) and a matter of perception (Whitlock et al., 2012). The fourth student was an Upper and on a small programme as opposed to a large-scale business programme. Her primary

friendship group was that of the programme. She appeared to be happy and well integrated amongst her programme peers. There appeared to be a definite difference in programme connectedness between students of small programmes and those of the large-scale programmes of the business school in terms of opportunities for programme-facilitated social integration. The issue for the first-year student was based on culture – not wholly her decision – and finding the path between home culture and peer assimilation (R. M. Lee & Davis, 2000) was tinged with some frustration. Living at home seemed to be a matter of achieving a personal balance and it seemed easier if the students had made the choice themselves.

5.2.1.3 The Impact of Employment

Increased student engagement in paid employment is a contemporary influence in students' connectedness and model of attending university. A UK-based study found that 70% of university students work as well as study and that many working students spent a minimal amount of time on campus (Leese, 2010). Such findings may be partially institution dependent because Leese's data were from a new university. The present study found just less than half the students were engaged in paid employment but some of that related to the university directly and so it could be argued that it contributed to belongingness via co-curricular activity (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Three students worked flexibly over the university town location and their home location for the same employer; a further indication of students' fluid model of having gone to university, involving the maintenance of legacy links to employment and the home location.

5.2.1.4 University Societies

University societies, or rather the idea of them, seemed particularly important to most students. Strayhorn's (2016) work on belongingness suggested that approximately five hours per week was the average time invested in playing team sports, the use of university recreational facilities or working in a campus-based organisation but greater frequency engendered a greater sense of belonging. The

US students in Strayhorn's research put forward the view that they only felt a part of the organisation if they were involved in some such activity and the US also has a system of fraternities and sororities, which affects sense of belonging. The students of the present study appeared to differentiate between societies, campus-based employment and the holding of campus-related office and societies. Sports societies seemed to offer the best connectedness and sense of belonging, whereas business-school-related societies did not seem to broaden connectedness or elicit great degrees of enthusiasm. Cultural-based societies could serve to narrow connectedness and reinforce ethnic groupings.

5.2.1.5 Engagement with the Institution, Programme and Academic Faculty

Academic assimilation is considered by literature to be one of the three key elements to success, alongside social integration and acculturation. However, in the present study, the importance of academic assimilation, institutional belonging and faculty member engagement did not seem to coincide with literature in many respects. Literature indicates that school leavers have difficulties in imagining how study will be at university (Briggs et al., 2012). Conversely, most of the students, in the present study, appeared to have had some insight into university life, from parents, siblings or older school friends. When asked about the challenges of their academic lives, almost every student reported that the challenge of their academic learning was as expected, despite it being a substantial change from school. Briggs' (2012) research, based on students at a similar UK institution, but using a combination of some secondary and primary data which were approximately 10 years old, focused on the very early days of initial transition and argued the importance of the development of a learner identity at initial transition. The findings of the present study tended to suggest that, even for first years, where time had not had the opportunity to dull their early memories of study, either they had much more insight into study at university, it was not as different or challenging as they thought it would be, or for some reason they were not appropriately engaged. Engagement was taken to mean "quality of participation, investment, commitment, and identification" with the environment and institution (Alrashidi et al., 2016, p. 42). None of the students seemed to be

under extreme academic-related stress; possibly related to the timing of the interviews when no exams were looming, and no assignment deadlines were in evidence. None seemed neither particularly absorbed nor disengaged from learning, apart from one Upper commenting on her reflections on the rights and wrongs of business ethics. Co-curricular activity could be remunerated or voluntary. Literature does not differentiate generally between remunerated and non-remunerated roles but Strayhorn (2016) identified that belongingness benefits from involvement with any campus-based organisations. Remunerated co-curricular activity, such as open days, were regarded as a source of convenient and flexible employment for students, whereas non-remunerated, elected or volunteer roles, such as halls president or mentoring, appeared to be driven more by a personal sense of responsibility or engagement to the institution.

The importance of faculty engagement to students in both personal tutoring and module teaching was strongly evidenced in the findings. Students' module-related interaction tended to be of the wholly academic-related type and satisfaction was related to its efficiency and efficacy, whereas personal tutor engagement was the interface which provided students with a sense of mattering and belonging and in literature caused students to persist with their studies (Bennett, 2003). Literature indicates that non-native speakers may prefer electronic communication with their academic tutors because they feel less anxious by not having to speak, but this may decrease their sense of engagement (O'Keeffe, 2013). The present study showed that most students, regardless of language competence, emailed tutors in preference to trying to speak to them by phone or to see them in person. Literature argued that more personal relationships with faculty were consistently demonstrated to be beneficial to students: sound relationships with faculty members contributed to decisions to persist (Bennett, 2003); more support from academic faculty helped students to fit into university life better (Leese, 2010); and initial social experiences with both peers and academic faculty were key to social connectedness (Hausmann et al., 2007). A seemingly prominent issue in this research was the lack of much meaningful faculty engagement with the students, in personal tutoring, in the way the students expected. The findings showed that students were not sure about what they might expect, and this may be

a case of students having one view and tutors another but perhaps neither side understanding the other's expectations or role particularly well. However, three-quarters of those students interviewed reported a non-existent or negative experience, so there was a definite gap, and this impacted students' connectedness experience negatively.

Throughout the programme, an environment of continually changing academic work groups appeared to provide little stability or support for a learning community because group work was often troubled. Students reported not knowing their module peers and, because of the number of module options, not encountering the same peers from one term to the next. Social relationships which complemented or preceded learning communities, as identified in literature, seemed to be a missing element (Patton et al., 2016; Whiteside et al., 2014). In addition, some students questioned the point of striking up any friendships with new module colleagues because, at the end of the term, these module colleagues would be re-dispersed. Observations made on the learning curve for group work or the need to get organised may be symptomatic of poorly socialised groups. Students studying in smaller consistent groups, in non-business-school programmes, appeared to have more opportunity to establish a learning community with their peers and to experience a greater sense of belonging.

5.2.2 Specific Year Factors

5.2.2.1 Settle Phase: Mid-Transition

Students either recalled or were experiencing some second-year challenges which were specific to that year. Two had failed to meet their own social connectedness expectations in the first year and were considering how to rectify that, whereas others had found themselves in difficult accommodation situations. During the third year, approximately half of the students undertake placements. During the second year students have to try to find placements and have the added pressure that grades start to count. The social connectedness situation and the accommodation issue appeared to be in line with Schaller's (2005) move from

random to focused exploration because second year seems, in many ways, to be a turning point. Schaller describes a process of self-reflection for students as they consider how they need to change and the sort of friends they want in order to achieve their goals. Since students make second-year accommodation decisions within approximately two months of meeting each other, it is not surprising that, ten months later, students have started to develop and change and find themselves not as compatible, and consider how to reorganise those relationships (Maunder et al., 2013). Students who experienced difficulties with their initial accommodation or who made choices to limit their friendships were in a similar position as they reflected upon the situation and considered whether it could be rectified. Tobolowsky's (2008) research found programmes tailored to second years to promote social exposure to new peer groups in US universities helpful but there was no equivalent at the institution of the present study. Some students with accommodation and connectedness issues appeared to try to talk to their personal tutors or attended the counselling service and this may strengthen the argument that, had they had peers to connect to, this may have alleviated pressures on the support services (Bales et al., 2015; Thoits, 2011a). In line with literature, the goal of graduation had obviously become more important than the short-term gains of leaving for less happy students, so no student intimated that they were considering leaving (Tinto, 2012).

5.2.2.2 Future Orientation Phase: Realisation

Finalists appeared to have quite different situations depending on whether they were third- or fourth-year finalists. Third-year finalists scored especially low in the resilience, happiness and connectedness scale measurements in the online survey. They seemed to be suffering from two issues, perhaps feeling they had failed in some way if they had wanted to secure a placement but wanting to complete as soon as they could so that they could leave and get on with their lives. In addition, they felt overwhelmed, even dismissed, by what they perceived to be the more confident fourth-year finalists. The ways in which they described their situations were pessimistic and regretful. They seemed less able to overcome the adversities that they felt they were facing and appeared to be at a social

connectedness low. Third-year finalists showed signs of lacking self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981), for example, giving up on some things and using emotion- based coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), returning home to live or seeking enhanced legacy contact for social support, and as a result, withdrawing and becoming isolated (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006).

Fourth-year finalists seemed generally confident and optimistic when compared to the third-year finalists, following their placements. In practice, fourth-year finalists undertook a two-year programme, had a working gap for up to 15 months and then returned. Therefore, returning fourth-year finalists had then, in effect, become post-experience students and were studying with the pre-experience third-year finalists. The outlook and experience of a pre-experience student and a post-experience student is markedly different. Conventional pedagogical practice in postgraduate business school programmes, for example, an MBA, would not mix such groups. Fourth-year finalists' social worlds had broadened because they had new placement friendship groups (McCabe, 2016) and professional contacts; sometimes new university-related peers. They too seemed ready to finish and move on but were optimistic and hopeful. Fourth-year males seemed especially impatient to complete their studies and return to work. Some had left behind some university friends and, often temporarily, changed their living arrangements to undergo placement, then returned to study, usually with further living arrangement changes. Placement is a transition but students had the initial transition to university as a previous experience to help them get through the experience (Goodman, 2006). During placement, students continued to act in a cumulative manner towards social contacts. They retained their legacy contacts from school, their friends from university because they would expect to be studying and/or living with at least some of them again in a year's time and had increased their numbers of compartments of friends (McCabe, 2016). Finalists appeared to have started to 'trim' their closest university friendships to a handful of two to three people and had then retained a collection of relational networks of potential flatmates, potential module colleagues, group work peers and students who had been at the same placement as acquaintances to be called upon as needed (McCabe, 2016). Once a student had secured a firm placement in second year,

they may have moved into Schaller's (2005) tentative phase and commitment phases with greater clarity for the future, for example, securing graduation jobs with placement organisations.

5.2.3 Diversity and Connectedness

Less performant language skills have social and academic connectedness consequences for both native and non-native speakers (Andrade, 2006a; Huon & Sankey, 2002; Tas, 2013). Academic group work was an obvious source of frustration for some native speakers in the present study, whereby non-native speakers were perceived not to have sufficient language skills to contribute effectively. Some students recognised that non-native speakers' lack of effective report writing or presentation skills did not mean that the benefits in terms of substance, different ideas or creativity from them were also lacking (Antonio et al., 2004). Although some students had raised the issue of the frustrations of other students' language ability, none of the interviewed students were of low English language capability. This may be because any students challenged by their English language capability were less likely to complete the original online survey and, as a result, could not have been interviewed.

Integration issues in the interviewed group tended to be more culturally based. The student living at home and balancing the peer and home culture issue had not found integration straightforward but she that felt that she would find her way; exactly the process described in the literature (R. M. Lee & Davis, 2000). Overall, the two students from the Group of Eleven with challenges of integration appeared to be the avid gamers. They may have been using gaming, perhaps regarded as problem behaviour, to try to alleviate stress because they were not integrated (Tavolacci et al., 2013). Gaming might also have been related to trying to cope, using a negative emotional style to isolate themselves (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); perhaps signified by one of the two students frequent use of the word 'escape'. This could also be a sign of attachment avoidance, which, in empirical studies, related to compromised mental health (Wei & Zakalik, 2005). It may also simply have been a coincidence that these two students, engaging in a

particularly absorbing web-based activity, were found to be struggling to integrate. These two students had volunteered this information, but gaming was not discussed with other students and so there was no way of knowing whether the two were atypical. One gamed with his legacy friends but the other gamed with fellow professionals of the game; essentially strangers. Both students had narrow institutional and current connectedness; they were not members of societies or involved in other co-curricular activity. One had actively tried, but not persisted with, different programmes and making friends with different people; possibly providing evidence of low self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

Other potential factors of exclusion did arise in the study. Of the 15 white UK native students, one expressed homophilic views (McCabe, 2016) but most students seemed open and positive towards other races and cultures. McCabe indicates that students may be comfortable with their own kind but that there may be a vast difference between being open, whereby others are definitely not being excluded and students are being fully inclusive and actively welcoming those who are dissimilar in terms of race, gender and academic orientation into their social and academic networks. The comments made by some of the remaining group of 15 students regarding it being hard to integrate with the white ethnicity English, tends to suggest that dissimilarity is a barrier to social connectedness amongst these students. However, the student who had previously been subject to racial abuse at school felt very comfortable and settled in the university environment, which seemed to indicate that the culture was not inherently racist.

The culture balancing issue was discussed above, whereby one student was negotiating a path between two cultures relatively successfully. However, the lifestyle conflict of the sport-loving student, who was uncomfortable in a society with a culture of alcohol consumption as a part of its socialising, was unexpected. The conflict was not based on a fixed set of cultural beliefs and values related to, say, an organised religion, and it felt wrong that the student could not make such a harmless private lifestyle choice. Literature speaks of the cultural fit of a student to the university facilitating persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999) and students' adoption of the university culture (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gennep, 1960). In

choosing to consume limited or no alcohol, this student felt excluded because she was in a minority. The two students with disabilities indicated no kind of discrimination or exclusion as a result of their conditions, but neither had physical disabilities and so their conditions were not obvious. The social class, wealth and school type discussions with interviewees indicated that there was a degree of discomfort for some state school students being asked about their schools by other students. Demographics and socio-economic situations were both identified as factors affecting transition (Goodman, 2006).

5.3 Research Question Two

- How do the connectedness attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of well-being compare to those exhibiting lower levels of well-being?

Research Question Two is directed at identifying the connectedness characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of students with higher levels of well-being so that they might be compared to those exhibiting lower levels of well-being with a view to informing Research Question Three. There were two main categories of findings relating to personal attributes, attitudes and characteristics and quality and nature of connectedness.

5.3.1 Personal Attributes, Attitudes and Characteristics

Extroversion and optimism are key personality characteristics associated with well-being (Bouchard et al., 2018), resilience (Block, 2002; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2012; Wachs, 2006) and successful transition (Goodman, 2006). Both characteristics were part of the online scales and all were asked in the interviews about introversion or extroversion. A greater proportion of Uppers identified themselves as extroverts than Lowers. Extroversion was a characteristic which some students saw as desirable; evidenced by their discussions about increased confidence and wider social networks. Pessimism and trait-related anxiety (R. M. Lee & Robbins, 1998) appeared more prevalent in

Lowers because they made more pessimistic observations of themselves and more Lowers than Uppers raised issues of anxiety and stress. Mechanisms of holding back, typically associated with low self-esteem or maybe lack of self-disclosure, could be associated with more superficial relationships (Starzyk et al., 2006), were discussed by Lowers but were absent from Uppers' narratives. Uppers appeared, inherently, to have characteristics that literature associates with social competence (Williams & Galliher, 2006). Uppers appeared to consider and reflect more deeply, about some topics, than their Lower counterparts, from what they needed to change about themselves to the impact that modules had had upon them to how to manage their challenges. This also relates to internal connectedness (Whitlock et al., 2012) and accords with the discussion regarding internal protective factors of resilience and self-efficacy (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013). This inner connectedness seemed coupled with empathy towards others, such as module colleagues or more diverse students; possibly indicating superior social competence (Williams & Galliher, 2006).Uppers' abilities to reflect were also used profitably when they had time alone. Whether planning to take a short nap or a walk or seeking out quiet study spaces, Uppers seemed to use some of that time as an opportunity to reflect and recharge. Planned or self-imposed isolation not only gives the individual time to think but can be a protective factor of resilience (Larson & Lee, 1996); also potentially a support towards their self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Interviewed Uppers had made better academic progression by the end of Year Two when compared to Year One. This might suggest that in Year One they were forming networks and settling in. However, the interviewed Lowers outperformed the Uppers in every year.

Uppers were more socially open to studying in an international environment and generally more open to both group work and diversity and less critical of language skills. The only Upper expressing ambivalence towards group work was a first year and from the Group of Eleven, those who were either not born in the UK, not British citizens or not white. Openness to diversity and the academic benefits it brings is desirable and proven (Antonio et al., 2004). Eight Lowers were ambivalent to group work and some indicated a preference for choosing their own group work colleagues, often because of language issues, but it may also point to

wanting to be in a group with friends and a degree of homophilic comfort, as discussed earlier (McCabe, 2016). Such behaviour would work against the interests of Lowers if left to form their own academic groups for group work because they would not capture the benefits of wider diverse thinking, as identified in literature (Antonio et al., 2004) nor, in the case of the Lowers who wished to work alone, the synergies of team-based learning (Michaelsen et al., 2002). This could partly explain the Uppers making more progress than the Lowers because they recognised the benefits of both group work and diversity and capitalised upon it.

Some Uppers had experience of far greater adversity than the Lowers. Uppers' resilience may be evidence of the steeling effects of severe adversity (Rutter, 2012); a tribute to their healthy coping styles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and evidence of their self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Lowers had also had issues but, from an external viewpoint, they appeared, for most, less severe but individuals perceive their severity and their ability and likelihood of coping with them from their internal perspective (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Uppers may have been able to differentiate between the different levels of their problems more pragmatically because they had experienced a wider range of issues. Uppers appeared to use task-based methods of coping whereas Lowers sometimes had a tendency to use negative, emotion-based methods, becoming more anxious, withdrawn or isolated (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Tackling challenges is a learning process which can build resilience, and learning how to cope with issues has a positive impact on transition (Goodman, 2006). The data for the benchmarking of Uppers and Lowers were taken across an earlier cross section and some of the lowest scorers had already dropped out of the university by the time interviewees were selected. Therefore, all the interviewed students had already tackled substantial change in the form of initial transition and were persisting (Goodman, 2006). It is argued that students might be better prepared for initial transition had they encountered similar transitions previously (Goodman, 2006). Examples from the present study were having being sent to boarding school, having parents in the armed forces or living in dispersed parental

homes. Students who had experienced such were present in the study and previous experience did appear to have some learning impact. That independent school prepares students less well for university than a state equivalent was an interesting observation made by one ex-independent school student in the study. One-third of the 15 white UK Lowers interviewed had been educated at independent schools. Perhaps independent day school provides a particularly consistent, very settled, environment to enable children to focus on their studies and this then disadvantages those children as they face low levels of continual change at university because they are unprepared.

Well-being at university may be affected by social integration, academic assimilation and acculturation but how well-being evolves and students become more resilient is also affected by personality characteristics and personal choices. Initial transition is associated with random exploration and, as students develop, a stage of focused exploration when they may reflect and reorganise their friendships as part of a wider process (Maunder et al., 2013; Schaller, 2005). This may also suggest that first years may have greater opportunity to change their behaviours and develop differently during their first year but, maybe later on, the potential is more limited. For example, one Lower, a first year from the Group of Eleven, highlighted in the interview findings, had joined a sports society on his own and had suffered previously deep adversity, appearing to be a nascent Upper. He may have entered his focused exploration stage earlier than the majority, perhaps due to the learning process or steeling from his adversity (Rutter, 2012). This first-year student appeared to have reached decisions which positively affected his development, greatly supported by some early reliance on positive legacy friends (McCabe, 2016). Two other first-year students spoke of wanting to change themselves upon entering university; wanting to gain more confidence and better social networks. The outcome of such a decision depends on using a task-based approach to the challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) taken by the potentially nascent Upper, as opposed to the range of available emotion-based approaches of being absent by going home more often or missing classes, focusing on life after university or legacy friends, or resorting to problem behaviours seen amongst Lowers of later years (Tavolacci et al., 2013).

5.3.2 Quality and Nature of Connectedness

Uppers were more successful with society memberships and were more likely to join and persist; all Uppers with society memberships had at least one sporting membership. Most, but not all, of the attempts to join societies were made in initial transition and Uppers were potentially advantaged by managing this integration early. Later society membership attempts were made by students attempting to recover connectedness after some type of change. No Uppers reported the inclusion issues, felt by some, in society membership, despite three of them being in the Group of Eleven. It is unlikely that all Uppers were inherently sportier, entering university with considerable ability in a specific sport. Uppers might simply have been more open and willing to participate in sport at school because they connected to different things to experience them. The experience and friendships they made, as a result of sport engagement at school, may have enabled them to benefit from the university connectedness opportunity more easily. Uppers may have been more likely to persist with societies because they were more optimistic or had had experience of how to survive, persist or succeed in such groups previously; possibly related to their influential capabilities or control styles (Hawley et al., 2002). Early limiting closed or very unhappy relationship experiences were found only amongst Lowers in the study, and that included them not joining or failing to persist in societies. More negative social connectedness experiences were, at least partially, contributed to by less traditional accommodation set-ups at initial transition and through second-year accommodation conflicts. However, society membership is independent of accommodation and presents a potential opportunity for a new friendship group; an opportunity to enhance connectedness. Uppers may have also found themselves in difficult accommodation situations but had managed them differently by connecting to a broader range of different networks. Of the interviewed students, only Lowers had such unresolved issues. This may again relate to the issue of self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981) that, having encountered a difficulty posed by accommodation or society membership, the internal belief that that can be overcome leads them to persist.

Uppers were much more comfortable with social media connectedness. Uppers used more social media platforms, more frequently and more actively than Lowers. Social media as a mechanism is often regarded as a negative force for young people and arguments that it may be replacing our ability to converse face to face and socialise in person have been made (Turkle, 2015) but no consensus view has been arrived at via empirical research. Social media systems acted as a positive bridge from school to university (Jacobs, 2010) for first-year students in the present study; enabling students to encounter some of their new flatmates virtually, providing they were in traditional hall; an example of Tinto's "Anticipatory socialization" (2012, p. 98). For Lowers, who may have had greater levels of anxiety and the personality characteristics to accompany that, social media could be an opportunity to reinforce self-doubt and lower self-esteem (Freitas, 2017). For both Uppers and Lowers, there was a healthy regard for what to post where and how to choose and set up private social media networks where trusted friends exchanged private messages; often to augment their face-to face-activities. Uppers accepted social media for what it was and used it without too much thought about its superficiality, whereas Lowers were troubled by inauthenticity in social media and to some extent in relationships generally. This may relate to a more general positive attitude to relationships, which are characterised by trust and reciprocity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Lakey & Cohen, 2000; Putnam, 1995; Thoits, 2011b). As discussed earlier, some Lowers consciously held back and were less trusting generally, whereas Uppers were more accepting of a wider range of human behaviours. Lowers seemed acutely aware when they had friendship failures, in quality or quantity, whereas Uppers did not articulate similar concerns. In Chapter Four, Lowers were identified as exhibiting lower self-esteem as a group, were more anxious, were less likely to address connectedness deficiencies and were more prone to regret. Individuals of higher connectivity have higher levels of social self-esteem (R. M. Lee & Robbins, 1998).

5.4 Summary

This discussion used both aspects of connectedness in the conceptual model and the transition models to discuss connectedness as a support to well-being across the lifecycle. It also discussed the differences between Uppers and Lowers. Key issues from the discussion will now be brought together to provide the basis for Research Question Three.

Legacy connectedness appears to be largely beneficial to all types of students and has an impact on subjective and psychological well-being and resilience, as defined in the conceptual model. Students appear to be largely operating a collection of relational networks, which is positive in that it reduces connectedness risk and also enables tailored support to be sought in times of need. The view that going to university, for UK-domiciled students, is associated with semi-permanently leaving home may be outdated and the institution may need to consider how it might react to that. Students appear to be choosing to live within a manageable distance of home despite their legacy friends having dispersed to other universities. The ability to live within a manageable distance of home may be facilitated by the fact that business and management undergraduate programmes are available at most universities, whereas a specialist discipline might be available at a more limited range of institutions. Students choosing to live at home may do so for personal reasons. Recognising such commuter students early and supporting their integration, where appropriate, would be helpful.

These students are exposed to numerous changes, some simply as a result of being students, but it may be possible for the business school to reduce the amount of change with regard to students' academic work. Activities relating to academic assimilation can affect both belonging and psychological well-being, as defined in the conceptual model, as students try to fit and achieve their goals. For example, the business school could provide an academic dimension to some part of their programme that involves them having a smaller self-contained peer group to capture the belongingness benefits seen of small programmes in the research. Since group work and team- based learning both benefit from diversity, it may be helpful for the business school to consider how integration may be better

engineered to achieve effective acculturation and belonging. Better integration may also impact English language skills issues, causing a virtuous rather than a vicious cycle. It is not only first years who are challenged by changes; different year groups have their own issues and the specific connectedness needs of second- and third-year finalists should be considered to help them to engender better belonging and connectedness, as defined in the conceptual model. At the institutional level, societies and the students' union could be made more aware of some of the difficulties that students may face in joining societies, what it may mean for the wider student experience and how belonging, acculturation and connectedness, in line with the conceptual model, support a better experience for everyone.

Based on the above conclusion, Chapter Six will turn its attention to Research Question Three:

- How might the findings from this doctoral study inform the institution, the business school and personal tutors' approach to promoting well-being amongst undergraduate students?

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusions; Contribution to Professional Practice

6.1 Overview

This chapter draws together the elements of the present study by discussing the background and indicating why the need for such research existed. The research questions are each presented and findings for the first two summarised. Research Question Three is addressed and the conceptual model revisited to identify areas for enhancement by the institution. The implications for the institution and the business school are discussed. The contribution to knowledge is indicated. The study is reviewed, and its limitations discussed. Recommendations for further study are identified, the contribution to professional practice is discussed and a final summary reflects upon the study.

6.2 The Background and Context of the Study

The study set out to explore the external social connectedness of students within the student lifecycle in the context of well-being. It explored social connectedness within the lifecycle and then set out to establish why and how some students connect more effectively than others. Well-being literature was reviewed to enable a holistic view of the constructs which were implicated in the study: subjective and psychological well-being, resilience, belongingness and connectedness. Student development theory was used to identify three key components to success at university – social integration, academic assimilation and acculturation – and the study looked at how these were facilitated by connectedness. The whole lifecycle of transformation, from initial to the subsequent transitions, was explored using established models of attrition (Bean, 1983; Tinto, 2012) and a model of transition (Goodman, 2006). The study then considered the connectedness needs and demands of each stage of the student lifecycle and how they delivered the three key components of student development in light of the models. The conceptual model considered how wellbeing is positively affected by internal and external connectedness, based

upon literature. The methodology had used clustering of the online survey participants to identify better connected, happier and more resilient students to enable them to be compared to the least well connected, least happy and least resilient. Where adverse environmental lifecycle factors were identified, these were discussed in the context of Research Question One, whereas where different characteristics, attitudes and behaviours were identified these were discussed in the context of Research Question Two. Research Question Three will be addressed in this chapter by identifying the implications of the findings for the institution, the business school and personal tutors.

6.3 Existing Research

Research in the area of student connectedness exists but it is often nested within studies regarding attrition or transition and so it is often treated as one factor amongst others. It is less usual for it to be researched alone or longitudinally and so it is difficult to appreciate the daily practices which relate to student connectedness as each student progresses through their programme. Most connectedness research focuses on initial transition because this is the time when most students are likely to desist and, as a result, the challenges of the later years are very rarely considered in a lifecycle approach. Historical research into student engagement, transition and attrition is mainly US based; as is research on diversity. The history of diversity issues, models of attending college, fee financing and the impact of traditions, such as room shares and Greek societies, make a substantial difference to some aspects of US student connectedness and so the UK would benefit from deeper indigenous research. In the UK, international students are generally under researched despite them being an increasing part of the UKHE sector. Research which considers students failing to integrate, academically assimilate and/or acculturate themselves tends to be driven by a desire to prevent attrition. Participation is widening, the model of university attendance is evolving, the number of international students is growing but the sense of belonging in these programmes seems to have been eroded and there is little existing research to support institutions to better engender a sense of belonging and support connectedness.

6.4 The Research Questions

The three research questions and how they relate to each other will now be re-presented.

Research Question One:

- How is social connectedness realised and how does it develop through the lifecycle of these undergraduate students?

This led to the second question, which concerned itself with the connectedness characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of students with higher levels of well-being so that they might be compared with those exhibiting lower levels of well-being.

Research Question Two:

- How do the social connectedness attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of well-being compare to those exhibiting lower levels of well-being?

The findings from Research Questions One and Two were then used to identify areas of the conceptual model which relate to how the institution might be better informed in its support of student well-being and the implications that may have. This is the basis for Research Question Three.

Research Question Three:

- How might the findings on connectedness, from this doctoral study, inform the institution, the business school and personal tutors' approach to promoting well-being amongst these undergraduate students?

6.5 Summary of the Findings for Research Questions One and Two

6.5.1 Research Question One

- How is connectedness realised and how does it develop through the lifecycle of these undergraduate students?

Chapter Five summarised and discussed the findings relating to Research Question One. Students retained legacy connectedness but forged new connectedness upon entering university. The model of university attendance is evolving with some UK-domiciled students operating as semi-commuters, whereas others choose to remain at home. International students have little choice but to adhere to the traditional semi-permanently leaving home model. The optimal connectedness conditions at initial transition were: prior engagement in pre-socialisation; arriving on time for Fresher's Week; being accommodated in hall; and being open to socialising. Accommodation situations were a key influence upon well-being and connectedness throughout the lifecycle, even where a commuter or semi-commuter model had been adopted. Students who chose to live at home, already at a connectedness disadvantage, had to take positive action to address any perceived shortfalls. Students failing to make a quantity of social bonds at the outset by maintaining a limited friendship group were at risk of damaging their university experience. University society membership mattered to the majority of students but volunteering activity was limited. Students who joined sports-based societies, at the outset, had better enduring connectedness than students of other types of society. Continual change, both academic and social, was a way of life for these students. Students did not tend to make strong programme-centred connections unless they were accommodated with programme peers and had little sense of programme or institutional belonging. Third-year finalists were measured as being the least well connected, the unhappiest of all students from the initial online survey and appeared overshadowed by their reconnecting fourth-year counterparts. Group

work was a source of continual academic change, whereby students pursued multiple modules with different peers without being socialised beforehand.

Two key diversity issues emerged from the study. Competence in English was an essential condition of social integration and vital to academic integration. A significant proportion of students in the present study expressed difficulties working with students of less proficient English in academic group work and felt frustrated by it. The second area concerned the diversity-related findings based upon the Group of Eleven and the remaining 15 students. The 15 were white ethnicity, UK-born students and, once findings from this group were brought together, the extent to which some of these students were most comfortable with students who were most like themselves became evident. The group of 15 was also less likely to have had graduate parents and so were more predominantly widening participation students. Some international students found it difficult to develop relationships with white ethnicity British students. Some international students also sought connections to those they perceived to be similar; perhaps fuelled to a degree by an element of exclusion.

6.5.2 Research Question Two

- How do the connectedness attributes of students exhibiting higher levels of well-being compare to those exhibiting lower levels of well-being?

The most resilient, happiest and most well-connected students, the Uppers, tended to share specific characteristics, attitudes and attributes, which contrasted with the less resilient, happy and less well-connected Lowers. Uppers generally exhibited more positive personality traits, for example, they were more optimistic and tended to be extroverted. They were generally more empathetic to, and accepting of, others, more open to diversity and saw benefits in group work. They were sociable but happy with time alone, used active approaches to problem solving and only involved their parents in the worst of their issues. Several of these

characteristics were indicative of internal connectedness (Whitlock et al., 2012) or internal protective factors of students (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013). Uppers were more likely to volunteer, more likely to stand for university office in leadership positions and more likely to have successful society memberships. Conversely, Lowers were more likely to use emotion-based coping, by subtle withdrawal, holding part of themselves back or limiting their friendships or focusing on life after university. Lowers protected their parents from the worst of their issues but were more likely to have had graduate parents and achieved marginally better overall classifications but made less academic progress than Uppers. The Lowers were troubled by some aspects of social media, from 'Likes' on Facebook and Tinder to what they saw as superficiality and a general lack of authenticity. Uppers used it to connect more widely and actively, capitalised upon its utility and accepted its drawbacks. Overall, students preferred face-to-face contact to initiate friendships and relationships but were comfortable maintaining them virtually.

6.6 Research Question Three

- How might the findings on connectedness, from this doctoral study, inform the institution and personal tutors' approach to promoting well-being amongst undergraduate students?

6.6.1 Revisiting the Conceptual Model

This section will now identify the implications of the findings, from Chapter Four, and the discussions, from Chapter Five, to answer Research Question Three by assessing external connectedness deficiencies identified in the conceptual model, Figure 2.4, developed in Chapter Two. The conceptual model captured the ways in which literature indicated external connectedness supports student well-being. However, some deficiencies, where the institution could influence positive change are now in black in the revised model, below in Figure 6.1
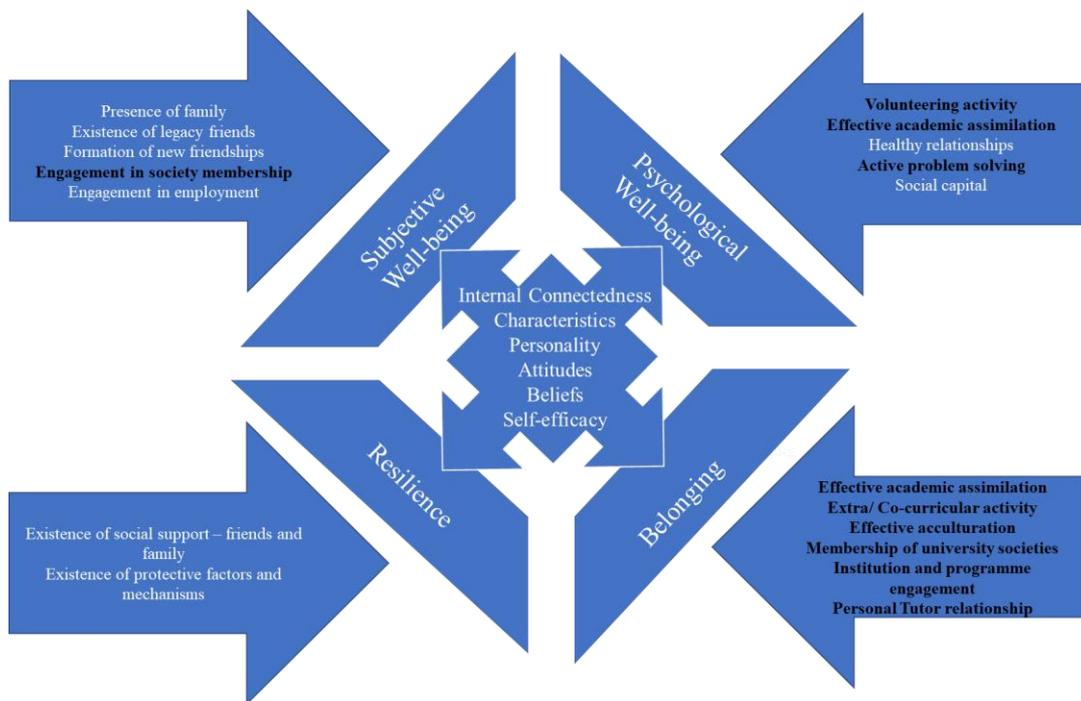
Figure 6.1: The Factors of External Connectedness Open to Enhancement

6.6.2 Implications for the Overall Institution

There were several areas where external connectedness could be enhanced by a part of the institution. Engagement in society membership, volunteering activities and extra-curricular activity may have an impact on institutional connectedness and acculturation. More effective academic assimilation and acculturation, within the business school, may be brought about by increased co-curricular activity and closer programme engagement. Lastly, enhanced personal tutoring, also within the business school, may act upon individual connectedness and active problem solving. Interventions in the first two areas would start to affect the identified diversity issue holistically. Connectedness is a state of mind: operating diversity filters which inhibit receptivity to less similar individuals has both academic and social costs to all students (Whitlock et al., 2012). Diversity awareness clearly needs to be increased but the benefits of academic and social diversity may become inherent from within the learning and other extra- or co-curricular activities. The second issue, relating to diversity, was language competence and its impact on connectedness. Greater support could be provided in view of the higher fees levied upon international students, although the nature of the support

needs to be guided by non-native speakers' needs and support given by non-native speakers.

6.6.2.1 Implications for the University

Engagement in society membership, volunteering activities and extra-curricular activity were identified as having a potential impact on institutional connectedness and acculturation. Students were keen to engage with societies but students' disappointments seemed to relate to their perceptions that they entered as outsiders and needed to penetrate pre-existing cliques. The most valued societies, connectedness wise, are often focused towards sport and not all students enjoy sport. The institution could help elevate the status of volunteering to be equal to that of society membership to enhance a sense of belonging, related to a university community. Volunteering has a proven role in enhancing connectedness because it enables meaningful activity to take place in an environment of reciprocal exchange of care and trust (Whitlock et al., 2012). The university provides an achievement award framework with various elements, one of which is volunteering, but the findings showed that the interviewed group of students had little engagement with such extra-curricular activity. Increased co- or extra-curricular activity led or encouraged by the university would be beneficial if it were to generate a greater sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2016). Co-curricular activity, for example engagement in the curriculum framework, which is related to the programme, would be a connectedness equivalent to socialising with work colleagues and may also enhance academic integration.

Compassionate universities in the US provide ideas related to connectedness; elements of which may be adoptable in the UK. The first compassionate university in the US, Spalding University in Kentucky, was named as such in 2011 and has different initiatives and programmes to support inclusion, college access and transition. It has an impressive record of community volunteering. As society diversifies further, such institutions do provide a different learning culture and perhaps a real choice in HE in the US. The potential for such an activity, in the UK, may be illustrated by the following example. In his report of how critical

thinking and cognitive development may be enhanced, Gilbert (2017, p. 1) defined compassion, for the HE context, as "noticing distress or disadvantaging of self or others and committing to reduce it". An example might be how one student might support another's learning or how non-contributors could be encouraged. A similar characteristic was seen amongst the Uppers. A compassionate approach has been applied in the learning environment at the University of Hertfordshire, the University of Edinburgh and the Royal Veterinary College with the result that there is now no significant attainment gap between white and ethnic minorities versus an average gap of 18% UK wide. Gilbert asserts that embedding compassion promotes social connectivity and eases the challenges of multicultural and international cohorts; one of the issues of this research. The University of Hertfordshire's website ('New university trial showcases the benefits of crediting compassion as part of the Higher Education curriculum', 2018) confirms significant increases in student academic performance on modules that are teaching and assessing the micro-skills of compassion. The approach may have been especially successful in addressing the achievements of more diverse students because it was achieved in the academic English department. However, similar approaches may be embedded in appropriate ways in other departments, including the business school.

6.6.2.2 Implications for the Business School

6.6.2.1 Programmes and Year Groups

Students appeared to have limited affiliation to the institution, at any level, and academic programme belonging was low. One reason why business school students have little sense of belonging to their programme could be the large-scale modular approach taken. Students of smaller programmes, such as modern languages, also have years abroad, equating to placement absences, but manage to retain a feeling of cohesion. The pursuit of operational efficiency in a climate of limited teaching room resource has potentially fuelled the loss of programme intimacy. Appropriate degrees of social integration with academic faculty, even administrators, may deepen academic connectedness and the sense of belonging.

The establishment of year groups to provide an additional learning community would be a proactive step. Many of the positive developments for different kinds of support identified during the late 1990s and early 2000s have already been implemented more widely by institutions, for example, earlier and more comprehensive exposure to careers information, pre-induction support, academic learning tools and techniques via virtual learning environments (M. Yorke & Thomas, 2003) and peer mentoring (Earwaker, 1992). However, the explosion in mental health issues tends to suggest that either the provision that has been made is not delivering effectively in the current climate or, alternatively, as Sir Simon Wessely (Turner, 2018) has argued, we are partially misreading the problem. If the issues of the present study are considered holistically, then a proactive model of support which also impacts academic assimilation could be considered. First years are most in need of early attachment and, potentially, a secondary social community and perhaps the space to reinvent themselves. For example, a single credit-bearing module could be devised with the objective of developing students in a number of ways. A class of, say, a maximum 30 students, taken by the students' personal tutor, could run throughout the first year, in the same manner as a year tutor at school. The academic engagement of students could be supported by a single tutor and their attendance monitored, for early signs of withdrawal or isolating behaviours. This would enable the establishment of a small personal-tutor-related learning community to operate, in tandem, to other communities that had been formed. The content of such a module would enable both discipline- and non-discipline-related but highly essential first-year work to be embedded in one place, perhaps using formative assessment, and thereby reducing any academic anxieties. For example, areas such as learning how to study, writing essays, using the library, referencing software, how to contribute as a group member, how to understand other people's viewpoints and appreciating diversity could be useful and could start to address some of the issues which prevent better connectedness and a better university experience. A focus on collegiality and community could be incorporated, perhaps even with a volunteering element, and the first-year groups could be encouraged to graduate at the end of Year One with a series of their achievements and successes. This provides an alternative type of structure to which students could belong. The advantage of such a group would be that it

would be mixed: there are only approximately 140 students per annum and so this means only approximately five groups per annum. Whether and how that might continue past the first year to start to support the second and third years is also a manageable situation because, over a four-year programme, it would only occupy 15 personal tutors.

6.6.2.2.2 The Personal Tutor

Students in the study would have liked to understand the role of personal tutoring and felt that it could have been positive for them. Many students in the study felt some level of stress, perhaps feeling that things were not quite right, and wished things were different but were not always sure who they could talk to. Chapter Two referred to a study of 9,836 US adults, whereby perceptions of social support reduced an individual's likelihood of engaging with a professional mental health service, and researchers concluded that the mechanism might either be that social support can help individuals with less serious conditions or social support might act to postpone the need to use professional services (Thoits, 2011b). This reinforces the value of social connectedness but also indicates the value of personal tutoring as a first line of discussion. Several of the students from the interviews of the study stayed after their interview time to ask my opinion or for advice on various issues. None of these students had ever consulted with a professional service at the university. Any such students were encouraged and supported to contact the right service for their need, and two said that just talking, reflecting and being honest about themselves had been helpful. Some students' issues need immediate channelling to professional support services, but personal tutors may help less serious issues by acting as a sounding board, as they did for some in the study, and ensuring students know what options they may have. In general, when students tutoring personal experiences went well they felt very satisfied. In addition, not every tutor should be or wants to be a personal tutor and it would appear students in the present study perceived that. While the HE sector is prepared to accept teaching-intensive staff and research-intensive staff, it appears unable to come to terms with the fact that some staff may make better personal tutors and may enjoy the role more than others. Institutions generally

appear to have no mechanism for measuring it, recognising it, rewarding it or valuing it, apart from perhaps an annual student vote. This is in marked contrast to the measurement systems it operates, as a sector, on teaching performance or research.

6.7 Contribution to Knowledge

The present study has contributed to knowledge which relates to this programme, in this university, in several areas. The study has identified that the traditional model of semi- permanently leaving home and going to university applies to international students more consistently than UK-domiciled students. It has identified that all students retain multiple social ecologies, strong legacy contacts, both friends and family, but most also incorporate some new university and placement friends. UK domiciles tend to return home several times per term: they do not return home to see friends because their closest friends are also at university but to see family and sometimes to work. The study has identified the critical importance of the environment of appropriate and happy accommodation but not just during initial transition. It has identified different challenges of the latter years of the student lifecycle and how the students with the greatest difficulties are in fact second years and third-year finalists. The study has identified that students with poor English language skills may struggle to integrate because they may be the object of some frustration and exclusion. Students who are non-white and/or not British may find forming social relationships with white ethnicity English students challenging. Findings indicated that such large programmes of many optional modules seemed to provide little opportunity to form a sense of belonging to the programme or business school or to develop an alternative friendship group to those groups based on accommodation. The online survey showed that, for these students, resilience and connectedness were moderately correlated, but both happiness and connectedness and happiness and resilience were strongly correlated. Having graduate parents may adversely affect well-being and resilience. The study has identified that a positive personality and high levels of connectedness, resilience and well-being are generally related. Students who were open to connecting, volunteering, accepting social media for

what it is, recognising the value of working in groups, embracing diversity and taking task-based approaches to problems but were happy to spend time alone and reflecting appeared to make the best academic progression.

6.8 Review and Limitations of the Present Study

6.8.1 Methodology

The activity of benchmarking was used outside of its more usual context of business analysis and performance metrics but proved invaluable. The decision to use both clustering and benchmarking is a relatively novel method in educational research. Research Question Two required the available population to be sampled in such a way as to be able to identify whether there were students who could be considered of higher and lower well-being and, secondly, whether they could be benchmarked against one another. The online survey attracted a disproportionately low number of males and a disproportionately low number of third years. However, the online survey data did provide the opportunity to develop three distinct and appropriate clusters. Cluster analysis has to ensure that it does not suffer from inbuilt bias from its population choice (L. Cohen et al., 2011). In this case, inbuilt bias would have been present if all the online survey students had been depressed, stressed and unhappy. Benchmarking would then have only compared the very deeply depressed to the less deeply depressed. However, the outcomes of the study tend to suggest that there was a connectedness spread within the population and the range of numerical scores appeared to confirm that. It became evident during the research that no data had been collected from students who had a relatively poor command of the English language, and this was an omission. These students could have been amongst some of the very worst connected because they may have struggled to integrate more than any of the others, but they were probably not captured in the online survey and so could not be incorporated. Therefore, with regard to this particular characteristic of the population, there was an inbuilt bias. The Uppers cluster was sampled for two of each gender, from each of the four years, to try to eliminate gender bias. Lowers were sampled, as closely as possible, using the same formula

of equal numbers from each of the four years and with equal gender splits per year. Between conducting the online survey and the interviews, several first-year Lowers had left the institution but none from the other years. The ideal gender split could, therefore, not be achieved amongst first years because only one female was willing to be interviewed. The number of first year interviews was raised so that six from the first year as opposed to the four from every other year were interviewed. This enabled slightly more case data to be collected for what was assumed to be a particularly critical stage of the lifecycle. The study was anticipated to have a strong gender component but, upon analysis, this turned out to be of minimal importance and so the first-year gender imbalance was not critical.

The study included one Erasmus student and one non-business school student. Some business school modules can be taken by non-business school students and emailing the link to students had to be done by module groupings. This caused the non-business school students to be inadvertently, but serendipitously, incorporated in the research. The Erasmus student was in the institution for only one year and so had a completely different connectedness environment to the others, and the non-business school student was on a small language programme, elsewhere in the institution. Both provided special insights to the study. The Erasmus student data helped inform the diversity section, and the small language programme student, who coincidentally lived at home and was an Upper, was especially useful in areas related to the benchmarking.

The analysis of the interviews was facilitated by computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. This was helpful in that it enabled data and literature pdfs to be keyword searched and research thoughts to be captured as the process was undertaken. There were a number of different cycles of coding, taking several months, and organising those was definitely well supported by the use of the software. At the same time, I felt that there could be a loss of sensitivity in analysis, had I been entirely reliant on software, perhaps due to my inexperience. Constructing relationships between broader ideas was sometimes better achieved, for me, using pens, highlighter pens, sticky notes and flip chart paper. There was a

large quantity of data: the transcripts ran to more than 500 pages and not all of it has been used. I felt that there were many more opportunities for analysis within the data which had been left untapped.

6.8.2 Findings and Analysis

The most obvious limitation is that these findings pertain to undergraduate students in a UK business school with a campus university in the south-east of England, and 164 answered the online survey but only 26 students were interviewed. Its findings may not be replicated at other institutions. For example, data in Chapter One were used to identify differences in the model of university attendance for Russell Group universities and those with highly-specialised programmes versus the others. The topic of diversity had some noteworthy findings overall but, once the population was split into the Group of Eleven and the remaining 15, further points emerged. Members of the Group of Eleven were not the first in their family to enter university but some of those in the remaining group were. The limitation on diversity, as identified in section 6.8.1, was that no students who could have been regarded as the object of language frustrations in group work ended up in the interviewed sample and so their voices were not heard. The omission of these students was probably as a result of them not completing the online survey and therefore not entering the possible interview pool. They were unlikely to have been Middles. The connectedness perspectives of these students would be of great value to inform the present study of how universities may change to better accommodate their growing international populations.

6.9 What Recommendations are there for Further Study?

The concept of what a graduate education might mean is changing. UK-domiciled students may be changing the traditional living model, commuting, spending a reducing amount of time studying and often a fair amount of time working and retaining strong legacy friendships. With apprenticeship degrees offering a graduate-level education, particularly applicable for such practitioner-related

disciplines as business and management, the model may shift further. However, international students have little option but to pursue a traditional model because they need to semi-permanently leave home and often cannot work. Research for the future should consider how two such diverse groups might most effectively co-exist at university because this has potential to be a new dynamic and point of difference in the diversity environment. Student individualism is increasing and, as the number of international students increases, diversity is rising. In the last year, UK universities reported racism-related incidents of very significant proportions (Busby, 2018). At the other end of the spectrum, the example of the student in the present study that suffered a low degree of society exclusion, due to a lifestyle choice, to drink limited amounts or no alcohol, demonstrates that greater awareness and sensitivity in line with societal developments may need to be considered by the institution. It is recommended that research further explores what might be done to integrate students who are in any way different. However, such research needs not to focus on language or acculturation support and how students may need to change to integrate but what the institution may need to change about itself and its practices by taking a more bi-directional assessment. Smaller learning community units may be beneficial. The findings from the present study pointed to a potential range of social and learning benefits, accruing from the connectedness of smaller programmes, but these would be at a cost of module options. It is recommended that the connectedness advantages and disadvantages of longer-term, smaller learning communities be compared to those of larger-scale programmes where the only stable learning community is temporal and at the modular level.

6.10 Contribution to Professional Practice

6.10.1 Plans for Immediate Practical Development from the Findings

Following discussions with the head of well-being services at the university, initial discussions were conducted, when the study started, as to whether the findings from the research would contribute to a new Life Tool for the university's suite of tools would be appropriate. Some students in the research

indicated that they felt that their university experience was suboptimal because they had not made wider connections, met more people or joined more societies. On an individual basis, a Life Tool could be developed which would cover learning why enhanced connectedness is not only something to practise at university but a lesson in how society functions more widely, in terms of jobs and opportunities and social and professional networking. Coping skills and sessions on stress are already units in the programme. An earlier discussion between the head of well-being and the Deputy Dean of Faculty indicated that some change in student experience provision in the business school needed to be considered, that there was an appetite to do so and that the present study could provide useful input.

6.10.2 Impact on Personal Professional Practice

One reason why I chose to undertake an EdD as opposed to a PhD for higher study was the opportunity to explore and further develop an area related to educational practice, which was outside my own academic disciplines of strategy and marketing. I am an experienced personal tutor and am always heartened by those couple of emails that come at the end of the academic year – that I am sure every personal tutor gets – whereby students tell us that we made some difference to their lives. This research has broadened my knowledge of student situations to the extent that I feel better informed by the evidence of the present study to be able to listen more effectively and contribute to wider debate on personal tutoring. I sit on the student appeals committee for the institution, and the present study has informed my knowledge and decisions in this area and has taught me to be more objective about institutional failings. When I see the situations which lead to appeals, at whatever level, it feels as if a minority of the cases could have taken a completely different course with the right personal tutor support. The data, not all of which were used in the study, have raised many additional questions for me about how I might approach group work better in my own teaching and how I might manage group work disputes which arise. Ultimately, many of these are connectedness related.

6.11 Final Summary

The present study set out to explore the impact of social connectedness upon well-being, throughout the student lifecycle, in undergraduates at a UK business school. It found that positive mental health is supported by students' broad social ecologies of parents, tutors and friends and that these act as protective factors in challenging times. Social connectedness may support students' learning environments so that they can learn more effectively than they would by themselves and, as a result, may remove some of the stresses of study. Social connectedness facilitates acculturation to enable international or widening participation students to adjust and develop a sense of belonging. When connectedness is damaged, limited or non-existent, students may feel lonely or isolated and may focus on getting through the process of university, so they can leave as soon as possible. Students who perceive that they are not well-connected regret not being more so and have a perception that it would make them happy, if only they could achieve it, but may not be sufficiently receptive to opportunities to effectively address the shortfall. The three key areas of connectedness for students are social, academic and cultural connectedness but they are not independent. Students are more individually responsible for their social connectedness, but the institution has a role to play because it provides the environment. The institution has the responsibility for leading social and academic connectedness to learning and an educational role to play in cultural connectedness, by recognising it as a bi-directional issue. Institutional resources are concentrated towards early transition and, to some extent, realisation, with strong careers support, but the stresses and strains of each year need to be better understood and supported. The traditional semi-permanently leaving home model of going to university has been eroded in this business school, for UK-domiciled students, but these students have chosen to retain parts of it. The study model for international students is more like the traditional model and, as the proportion of international students rises, the implications of the co-existence of the commuter and residential model have to be considered. The institution has a responsibility to accommodate the models that students are creating to enhance the experience that individual students want. On a personal note, the interviews with students were

very worthwhile. The sadness relating to some students' situations was that some friendly advice and support, from friends, parents or a personal tutor, coupled with a small leap of courage, would have solved many of the connectedness deficiencies and would have enhanced these students' well-being. This provided the starting point for the present study and validated the need for it.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval Form

University of Reading: Institute of Education

Ethical Approval Form A (Version May 2015)

(Amended May 2018 to comply with Connor Davidson licence** and to remove the name of the Business School***)

Qualification: **Ed D**

Name of applicant (s): **Georgina Kilner**

Title of project**:   Exploring the Impact of Social Connectedness upon Well-being in Undergraduates at a UK Business School**

Name of supervisors **Dr Helen Bilton, Dr Simone Knox**

	YES	NO
Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:		
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	√	
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	√	
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	√	
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	√	
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	√	
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	√	

g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	√	
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	√	
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided	√	
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants	√	
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	√	
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	√	
Please answer the following questions	√	
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	√	
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	√	

3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?	√		
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx)?	√ See below		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?	√		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	√		

	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?			√
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?	√		
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			√

10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data[1], or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?			√
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			√
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		√	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			√
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?		√	
13b) If the answer to question 13a is "yes", please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.			√
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		√	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is "yes":			√

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[1] Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

Please complete **either** Section A **or** Section B and provide the details required in support of your application. Sign the form (Section C) then submit it with all relevant attachments (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules) to the Institute's Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

A: My research goes beyond the 'accepted custom and practice of teaching' but I consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	√
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc. Up to 600 undergraduate students	

Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:
    1. title of project
    2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
    3. brief description of methods and measurements
    4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
    5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)	

6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with then.

7. estimated start date and duration of project

Title:

A study of connectedness amongst undergraduates at a UK business school

Purpose:

Generation of a doctoral thesis which enables better understanding of student connectedness (e.g. to family, virtual and face to face social activity, academic tutors and administrators, spiritual engagement, cohort colleagues, other fellow students, students union, flatmates, engagement with voluntary work, paid employment, the campus itself, the locality, clubs and societies, professional and career related activity.)

Student connectedness is widely evidenced as a positive factor in sound mental health. Students may rely on connectedness as a protective factor or use it as a part of their coping mechanisms. There may be a lifecycle of connectedness – its focus and locus may evolve. Understanding this should help us to be more effective in our support for students most especially in the elements of connectedness which are directly related to their academic studies and programmes.

Methods and Measurements

Stage One

Initial questionnaire distributed electronically. This will use the Connor Davidson Scale and the Campus Connectedness Scale. This is attached. These instruments will be used to select students, of different profiles, for qualitative semi structured interviews.

Stage Two

Semi structured connectedness questionnaire. This is attached.

Participants

Stage One: All 600 students studying modules which belong to the BA in Business and Management and BA in Management and Business at

***Business School, University of Reading: all will be invited to respond to a questionnaire which uses Qualtrics software. The questionnaire will take between 25 and 30 minutes.

Stage Two: Selected students (appropriately split by gender, year of study, resilience score and connectedness score) will be asked to participate – this will be a minimum of 24 students. Interviews are likely to take between 45 minutes and one hour.

Consent

Consent statements will be present at the start of the electronic survey. This survey cannot be anonymous because it is a selection tool. However, the only purpose of obtaining the name of the participant is to enable selection.

For the interviews, a written sheet of information will be given so the student can later withdraw and is aware of how to. The students will be given a consent form and this will detail how the data collected from the interview and university records may be used and they will be asked to sign two copies and will be given one for their own records and I will retain one. All the sheets and forms are attached.

Ethical Issues

Participating may cause students to reflect and evaluate their situations. They may then wish to discuss that with a professional. Regardless of whether they are selected to go ahead into the interviews, the electronic form gives options about what to do if participating has raised questions for them. Questions that students may be asking themselves could relate to how resilient they are, how will this affect them and what could they do about it? They may be asking themselves whether they are less or more resilient than their peers and what the ramifications of that might be. The options presented on the information form reminds them they may contact, confidentially, student well -being services – counselling, their medical practitioner, their personal tutor or the researcher directly as they prefer and they may avail themselves of electronic self-help resources. The details they will be given are stated on the information sheet.

During the interview process, deeper questions may arise, especially with students who appear to be less well connected or resilient. I have already discussed this with the Head of UoR Counselling services and I would ensure that if they wished to enter the counselling system, I would be proactive in helping them to do so and with their permission, introduce them directly.

Some of my own personal tutees may be participating and so would have the opportunity to discuss their feelings on more than one occasion. Students participating are being offered the chance to re-engage outside of the interviews for a discussion with me if they wish. This would enable me to signpost where to get support.

Start Date and Duration:

Data collection is planned for two terms in the academic year 2016/17 and will not take place in the summer term as students will wish to protect their time for exams. Stage One – Autumn (the survey will be open until December 16th and Stage Two – Spring Term. The questionnaire will be piloted at the start of the Autumn Term.

B: I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.	No

C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed: *GKilner*   Print Name Georgina Kilner   Date March 21st 2016

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

(**Signature not present as this is the amended form)

Signed: …………………………   Print Name……………………….
Date…….

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)*

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant to University of Reading, Institute of Education.

Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Information Security Training confirmation from *** Business School's resource manager for Georgina Kilner is given below.

From: Edith Rigby
Sent: 05 April 2016 13:20
As requested:

Faculty	School	Title	Name	Email	Job Title
*** Business School	Marketing & Reputation	Mrs	Georgina Kilner	g.kilner@henley.ac.uk	Associate Professor

Personal Ref	Data Protection	Freedom of Information	Information Security
896985	7/17/2013	7/17/2013	7/17/2013

Risk Assessment Form for Research Activities February 2014

Qualification: **EdD**

Name of applicant: **Georgina Kilner**

Title of project:

A study of connectedness amongst undergraduates at a UK business school

Name of Supervisors:

Dr Helen Bilton   0118 378 2683   h.o.bilton@reading.ac.uk

Dr Simone Knox   0118 378 4076   s.knox@reading.ac.uk

A: Please complete the form below

Brief outline of Work/activity:	I intend to access *** Business School undergraduates on the BA in Business and Management Programme and ask them to complete a short electronic questionnaire on resilience and connectedness. I will seek the approval of the head of programme before commencing. I will then use this data to select students to be interviewed using a discussion guide. The discussions will be recorded using a new Phillips voice recorder which is battery operated and was purchased for the purposes of interviews during my EdD

Where will data be collected?	The Stage One questionnaire will be administered using password protected Qualtrics software for which my school already has a licence. The Stage Two Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The recording equipment has been specifically and newly purchased for this research. The transcriber is an employee of *** Business

	School who has experience of this work and understands the need for confidentiality. The sound files will be transferred to her by secure university e-mail but the transcriptions will be executed outside of working hours so they may not be seen by colleagues. Partially completed documents will be temporarily stored on a secure memory stick until returned by secure university e-mail.

The Stage Two interviews will take place in my office on the university campus. The location has to be secure and private. When arranging the interviews my experience is that they will happen at different times during the week when students find it convenient to attend so they will be dotted throughout my diary.

If I book an outside room, it would be a different one each time and could be any location on the campus and both the student and I would have to waste time to find that. It is more convenient for the student to be interviewed in ***. I am at the end of the corridor, it is quiet and private.

When I speak to any student in my office, I never sit at my desk. I have a small table and I join them at the table as soon as they enter the room as I believe sitting behind the desk could establishes a barrier.

The data will be stored on a university drive in space personally allocated to me and protected by passwords |

Significant hazards:	None, in excess of normal daily office activity

Who might be exposed to hazards?	No-one, in excess of normal daily office activity

Existing control measures:	Standard H and S measures and procedures for University premises.

Are risks adequately controlled:	Yes

If NO, list additional controls and actions required:	Additional controls	Action by:
	Not applicable	

B: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

I have read the Health and Safety booklet posted on Blackboard, and the guidelines overleaf.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm risks have been adequately assessed and will be minimized as far as possible during the course of the project.

Signed: Print Name Georgina Kilner   Date March 21st 2016

STATEMENT OF APPROVAL TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR (FOR UG AND MA STUDENTS) **OR** BY IOE ETHICS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE (FOR PGR AND STAFF RESEARCH).

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

(**Signature not present as this is the amended form)

Signed: …………………………   Print Name……………………….

Date…….

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

Information Sheet for Stage One – The Electronic Survey

Qualification: **Ed D**

Name of researcher: **Georgina Kilner (g.kilner@henley.ac.uk) 0118 378 4041**

Name of Supervisors:

Dr Helen Bilton   0118 378 2683   h.o.bilton@reading.ac.uk

Dr Simone Knox   0118 378 4076   s.knox@reading.ac.uk

Title of research: **A study of connectedness amongst undergraduates at a**
                        UK business school

Please read through these terms before agreeing to participate by ticking the 'yes' box below. You may not participate in this research unless you are 18 years of age or older.

What is the research project?

You have been invited to participate and support research into student "connectedness". Connectedness, in this case, refers to the degree to which students feel psychologically and physically engaged with this university, its programme and its culture.

At the current time, the higher education field is very concerned about how it may support its students appropriately to help them thrive and succeed. Participating in this research will make a valuable contribution in helping us better understand the role and the extent of connectedness in our students' lives. Connectedness supports sound mental health.

You agreeing to participate can only be of positive impact to future students' support. This research is part of a professional doctorate (EdD) being undertaken at the University of Reading and contribution to practice is an integral part of how it will be judged.

Why have I been offered the opportunity to take part?

Your entire programme has been invited to take part in Stage One because it is a large programme where some students may have opted to take a placement, where

others have not. The ability to look at changes in connectedness across the four years is helpful.

Selected students completing Stage One will be invited to take part in Stage Two (see below).

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part in either stage. The decision is yours – taking part helps us but not taking part has no detrimental effect upon you or your studies.

If I agree to take part – what is the process?

The Stage One questionnaire aims to gain information on **a little of your personal background** and then estimate, through how strongly you agree or disagree with some statements:

- the level of your current resilience
- how you feel about your connectedness to the university
- the level of your current happiness

The questionnaire has been constructed using web enabled software and so you can access it easily.

There are no wrong or right answers. These tools are being used only to help to identify students, **with differing profiles (**some males, some females, some students who live at home, others who live on campus and so on.) to enable Interviews in Stage Two (see below) to be conducted with as **diverse** a group as possible. It would not help this research to interview students of identical or very similar profiles. Not being invited to Stage Two simply means you probably have a similar profile to another participant, it has no connotations of being identified as having high or low resilience or connectedness.

Is there any advantage or disadvantage in taking part?

The only advantage is that you will be participating in research which will aim to enlighten student support for the future. Taking part does not advantage you.

The only disadvantages will be the loss of the 20 or so minutes to complete the questionnaire and the subsequent loss of the interview time if you are asked to participate in Stage Two. Not taking part does not disadvantage you.

Will I get anything for participating?

Students satisfactorily completing Stage One of the process will be eligible to be entered into a prize draw to receive £100 in Amazon Vouchers, if more than 100 students complete Stage One, there will be a second £100 prize draw.

Students participating in the interview will receive £20 in Amazon Vouchers.

What happens to the data?

All data is stored in drive space owned by the University of Reading and password protected for the researcher's private professional use. The data may be used in published academic papers. It will only be used in such a way that individual participants could not be identified.

The Stage One questionnaires will be collected directly by the researcher using Qualtrics software. The Stage Two Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by a professional who has been briefed as to the confidential nature of the work and has previously worked with the researcher processing sensitive data. After the professional has transcribed, she is required to delete all working files and return a finished file to the researcher by secure method to be placed in the drive space as above.

All aspects of this questionnaire are confidential and the information is available only to the researcher and the researcher's supervisors who are identified at the head of this document and the transcriber, as above.

If you require a copy of your questionnaire or transcript at any time, these can be provided by the researcher by e-mailing your request to g.kilner@henley.ac.uk. Your request will be processed within 3 weeks.

Data will be retained according to the university's requirements for academic data retention.

What happens if I change my mind?

You may withdraw from either Stage One or Two or both at any time up until 09.00am Tuesday May 2nd 2017. I guarantee any data already held for the purposes of this research and which concerns you personally, will be immediately deleted and *rendered non retrievable.*

In Stage Two of the research, participants are interviewed. If selected for interview, you may decline at that stage, so, completing the Stage One questionnaire does not commit you to Stage Two. If you decline to take part in the interview, this will have no wider effect on you or your studies.

If selected you will be e-mailed to request that you take part. This will be at a time to suit you and will be in academic office space, to ensure privacy, within the *** Business School.

If you participate, attempting to withdraw on or after May 2nd 2017 would jeopardise the project as a whole because the Stage Two Interviews could not be repeated in time. If you wished to withdraw prior to this date – an e-mail to g.kilner@henley.ac.uk would be required, stating your e-mail address as supplied on the original Stage One questionnaire so your data could be identified, removed and deleted.

No parts of either stage of this research process can have any effect on your studies or be made available to anyone who teaches or administers your programme and withdrawing will have no effect upon you.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been subject to ethical review, according to the procedures specified by the University Research Ethics Committee, and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

This project has been subjected to a risk assessment as part of this process. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

What happens if I feel this project has raised issues for me?

If, after taking this questionnaire you feel you would like to discuss any of the issues it might raise for you, please feel free to contact me directly if you wish – my details are above.

I would also urge you to consider one or more of the following (all are confidential):

- raise this to me at any time, to me, the researcher, directly and I will take steps to ensure you are supported appropriately through the university systems
- contact your personal tutor, raise your issues and seek support
- approach student services in Carrington Building http://www.reading.ac.uk/osh-studentservicescentre.aspx or to seek confidential counselling support directly http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/counselling/cou-home.aspx 0118 378 4216 and 0118 378 4218
- partake of the 'Life Tools' sessions provided by students services which cover areas such as resilience
- make an appointment to see your medical practitioner if you feel anxious.

What happens if I have concerns about the research that I feel I cannot discuss with the researcher?

The members of staff supervising this project are as at the head of this sheet and may be contacted if you wish to verify any aspect of the ethical conduct of this project.

Dr Helen Bilton   0118 378 2683   h.o.bilton@reading.ac.uk

Dr Simone Knox   0118 378 4076   s.knox@reading.ac.uk

If I require further information, where may I obtain it?

Further information on the project can be obtained from Georgina Kilner directly on g.kilner@henley.ac.uk or 0118 378 4041.

Please note the following:

This questionnaire will take around 20-25 minutes.

The e-mail address you provide will be used **only** for the purpose of contacting you regarding this specific research and does not have to be your university address

Please tick to confirm you are 18 or older ☐

Please tick if you wish to continue and take the survey ☐

Please exit the survey if either of the above boxes is blank.

Stage One – Questionnaire

Note to Ethics Committee - formatting will change with the software set up and be user friendly.

1. What year of the course are you currently on?

First

If you answered First, please go to Q2.

Second

If you answered Second, skip Q2 and go to Q3

Third

If you answered Third, skip Q2 and go to Q3

Fourth

If you answered Fourth, skip Q2 and go to Q3

2. What were your A level grades?

How many UCAS points did you have?

After completing this question skip question 3 and go to question 4

3. Think of your most recent academic year – were most of your grades

First Class

2:1

2:2

Third and/or lower.

Continue to Question 4

4. During term time are you living: (tick all that are appropriate)

Alone

With a partner or spouse

With one or more other students

With other young people or friends not all of whom are students

In a shared house with different age groups

With my parents and /or siblings /other relatives

None of the above – please complete:

5. Outside of term time does that change from the above? If so how?

6. Did either of your parents go to university

Yes, both parents.

No, neither parent

Yes, my mother did but my father did not

Yes, my father did but my mother did not

I don't know

7. Do you have a paid job? If YES, How many hours a week do you work on average?

Yes/No

Hours?

8. Do you do any voluntary work?

Yes

If YES How many hours a week on average?

No

9. Please state the gender assigned to you at birth

Male

Female

10. Please choose <u>only one</u> of the following statements: choose the one which most closely reflects your views.

I would expect to continue to identify as the gender assigned to me at birth

I have changed or may change identity from the gender assigned to me at birth

Note to Ethics Committee

Responses to each resilience and connectedness statement (these will be laid out per question)

    Not true at all

    Usually not true

    Sometimes true

    Often true

    True most of the time

    Always true

The resilience section is based on the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale - the details of this are at the end of the section. The connectedness section is based on (R. M. Lee & Robbins, 2000) Campus Connectedness Scale and details of this are also at the end of this section. However, the scale predated social media and so this has been added in. The Happiness Scales is the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

1. **Resilience**

** Under the terms of Connor Davidson's licence the publication or dissemination of the questions used in the scale is not permitted. The original ethics form contained a list of these 25 questions when the form was submitted for approval but they have been removed prior to publication of this thesis

2. Campus Connectedness Scale

There are people in this university with whom I feel a close bond

I don't really belong around the people I know at this university

Social media is good for making new friends at university

I feel I can share my personal concerns with some other students

I am able to make connections to different types of people

I feel so distant from other students

I have no sense of togetherness with my university peers

I can relate to my fellow classmates

Social media makes me feel part of this university

Sometimes I feel disconnected from university life

I feel I fit in well in this university

I have no sense of community with my university peers

I don't really relate to anyone at this university

Other students, in this university, make me feel at home

I feel disconnected from life in this university

I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group in this university

Social media is a game you have to play at this university

3 Happiness Scale

I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am

I am intensely interested in other people

I feel that life is very rewarding

I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone

I rarely wake up feeling rested

I am not particularly optimistic about the future

I find most things amusing

I am always committed and involved

Life is good

I do not think that the world is a good place

I laugh a lot

I am well satisfied about everything in my life

I don't think I look attractive

There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done

I am very happy

I find beauty in some things

I always have a cheerful effect on others

I can fit in everything I want to

I feel that I am not especially in control of my life

I feel able to take anything on

I feel fully mentally alert

I often experience joy and elation

I do not find it easy to make decisions

I do not have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life

I feel I have a great deal of energy

I usually have a good influence on events

I do not have fun with other people

I don't feel particularly healthy

I do not have particularly happy memories of the past

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, I hope to make a difference to student support through this research.

Your e-mail address is needed so that you may be contacted for Stage Two of the research. This does not have to be your student e-mail address.

Please now provide your e-mail address:

Information on the Scales Being Used

Connor Davidson Resilience Scale

Researchers in the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder assessment developed this scale to try to measure resilience more effectively. After a search of the resilience literature, which for a long time was heavily influenced by contributions from the specialties of developmental psychology and child psychiatry, a 25 item scale was devised Psychometric data was used to establish the validity and reliability of the scale (known as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale or CD-RISC). The CD-RISC literature continues to grow: the scale has now been translated into many different languages and studied in a variety of populations, including large community samples, survivors of various traumas, Alzheimer's caregivers, adolescents, elders, patients in treatment for PTSD, members of different ethnic groups and cultures, and selected professional or athletic groups (e.g. university students, nurses, social workers, physicians, military medical personnel, medical students, missionaries, cricketers). The CD-RISC has been included in functional neuroimaging studies, studies which utilized genotyping and studies which assessed treatment outcome. Psychometric properties of the RISC hold up in nearly all studies, although its factor structure and mean score varies with setting. Information on the research and a full listing of how it has been used can be accessed: http://www.cd-risc.com/index.phpThe scale has been used in research regarding university students and many articles have appeared in peer reviewed journals. I have purchased an appropriate licence to use this, directly from the authors

2. **Campus Connectedness Scale**

The Campus Connectedness Scale (CCS). The Campus Connectedness Scale is a 14-item questionnaire that measures a student's psychological sense of campus connectedness. Between 1998 and 2002 a group of US researchers (see below for references) devised this scale and used it in university settings. I did not want to use accompanying scales which measured depression and social connectedness in my research as I considered it too close to being clinical. A measure of how closely connected to the university students felt was more in line with the aims of the educational doctorate and would provide a firm basis for sample selection.

3. **Oxford Happiness Questionnaire**

This inventory was developed and later refined by researchers at Oxford (Hills & Argyle, 2002) to provide a general measure of happiness and was a further development of an earlier scale known as the Oxford Inventory. This inventory aims to measure three components – the frequency of positive affect/joy, the average level of satisfaction and the absence of negative feelings. The scale has been used with students and has been found to be equally effective with both genders. Again, the scale does not use statements of depression measurement – a key consideration for me for ethical reasons.

Additional Information Sheet for Stage Two – The Interviews

Qualification: **Ed D**

Name of researcher: **Georgina Kilner (g.kilner@henley.ac.uk) 0118 378 4041**

Title of research: **A study of connectedness amongst undergraduates at a UK business school**

Name of Supervisors:

Dr Helen Bilton   0118 378 2683   h.o.bilton@reading.ac.uk

Dr Simone Knox   0118 378 4076   s.knox@reading.ac.uk

You already kindly completed the electronic questionnaire into resilience and connectedness and you are now being asked to take part in Stage Two of this research which consists of a semi structured interview.

The information given to you for Stage One of this process is attached to the e-mail sent to invite you to interview, to remind you of the details of the project. The information given here augments what has previously been provided to you.

Specifically, what is the interview about?

You will be asked to talk about what 'connections' you have and how you feel about them. Connectedness is concerned with feelings of belonging and mattering. Connectedness refers to the degree to which any individual feels they

are psychologically or physically engaged with someone or something. Examples are connections to families, old school friends, the campus itself, university or non-university clubs and societies, spiritual or religious groups, the students union, your academic degree programme, fellow employees, academic tutors, personal tutors, university administrators, flatmates, programme colleagues, study groups, volunteering activity, or training groups. Connections may be synchronous or asynchronous, digitally enabled or physically taking place.

This research is primarily directed towards understanding:

- your current universe of connectedness and how that is evolving
- whether and how you use your connections in challenging times

What is involved in the interview process? What about confidentiality?

If you agree to take part you will be asked to participate in an interview, using a guided discussion document, lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour. We will discuss your connectedness as a student and prompt you with ideas about your possible responses to the questions.

Some questions will ask you about how you spend your time at university – how much time studying, do you spend most days on campus and how often you see your tutor and so on. It would be really helpful if you could think particularly about that before the interview as it might be hard to work that out quickly with any degree of accuracy. For example:

In a typical week in a typical term – how many hours do you spend in formal study – lectures, tutorials?

In a typical week – how many hours do you spend in self-directed study, regardless of location?

In a whole week what is the total amount of time you spend on campus?

How much time per term do you spend in one to ones with the academic staff that teach you?

How many times in a typical term do you see your personal tutor?

The interview will be recorded and transcribed, in accordance with the information sheet you have already seen for Stage One but you will be asked to verify that you wish to continue before doing so.

You will receive £20 of Amazon vouchers for completing what can be fairly regarded as a full and comprehensive interview.

The interview will be thematically analysed. I may wish to use some of your comments directly within the project. If any papers are published and/or the doctorate is successfully completed, it will be published and if any of your comments are used, they will **not** be traceable back to you (pseudonyms are usually used for this purpose).

Data storage and confidentiality safeguards are defined in the guidance for Stage One.

Remind me about whether I can withdraw and when?

You can ask to see the transcript at any time and may withdraw from the research at any time up until 09.00 am on Tuesday May 2nd 2017. I guarantee any data already held for the purposes of this research and which concerns you personally, will be immediately deleted and *rendered non retrievable.*

I will ask you to sign a consent form to be interviewed at the time you present for interview and provide you with a copy for your records.

Interviewee Consent Form - Stage Two – The Interviews

Qualification: **Ed D**

Name of researcher: **Georgina Kilner (g.kilner@henley.ac.uk) 0118 378 4041**

Title of Research**:**   **A study of connectedness amongst undergraduates at a**
                        UK business school

Name of Supervisors:

Dr Helen Bilton   0118 378 2683   h.o.bilton@reading.ac.uk

Dr Simone Knox   0118 378 4076   s.knox@reading.ac.uk

Please tick all the boxes that apply.

I have read the information sheets relating to the two stages of this project:
Georgina Kilner has gone through them and explained anything to me which was
not clear.   ☐

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required
of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the
arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my
participation. ☐

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be recorded and
transcribed.   ☐

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to
withdraw from the project any time up until 09.00am on May 2nd 2017, without
giving a reason and without any consequences. ☐

I have received a copy of this Consent Form ☐

I have received a copy of the Stage One and Stage Two Information Sheets. ☐

Tick ONLY one of the following statements

YES, I consent to being interviewed, recorded and my interview being transcribed. ☐

NO, I do not consent to being interviewed and/or recorded and/or my interview being transcribed ☐

Interviewee name:

Interviewee e-mail address

Interviewee Signature

Today's Date

Researcher Signature:

Georgina Kilner

After the interview is completed

Please tick to verify that the £20 Amazon Voucher has been given to you

☐

Interviewee Signature

Stage Two - Semi Structured Interview Guide

Thanks for coming today, I am going to be asking you some questions about how your personal connections fit together in your life, here at Reading University. It's more of a discussion about your thoughts, views and beliefs - please just let me know how you feel about the areas we cover.

1. Living and meeting people

Using the information from your original questionnaire I see that you (live at home, with other students…).

Tell me about that:

Possible prompts – will depend on answer to first part.

Home

How often do you go home – is this your parents' home?

Do you think, when you leave, you will go back there? Is that what you would like to do or is it a case of financial necessity?

Do you still catch up with your old school friends and "life at home" or do you feel you are losing touch a bit?

Living with other students

How do you get on with your flatmates/hall colleagues? Has that had its good and bad "moments"?

Are you likely to remain in contact with them when you leave or move on?

Do you think it is easy or, actually, not so easy to meet people in this university environment?

OK so it is quite hard /quite easy – do you think the people you meet, generally, turn into real friends or not?

True friends? People you could confide in?

If NOT First year – ask

Is it your experience that the friends you have change over your time here or are you closest to the friends you first made?

2. Academic Life

Thinking of your academic and learning experiences, including your relationships and contact with tutors:

In general to date how do you feel about your overall programme of education?

Possible prompts:

Do you enjoy it?

Is it what you expected?

Are you challenged by it – in a good way – intellectually, in a less good way – perhaps administratively or just confused?

Has it changed the way you think?

Do you think it is preparing you for work?

In a typical week in a typical term – how many hours do you spend in formal study – lectures, tutorials?

In a typical week – how many hours do you spend in self-directed study, regardless of location?

In a whole week what is the total amount of time you spend on campus?

How much time per term do you spend in one to ones with the academic staff that teach you?

How many times in a typical term do you see your personal tutor?

Do you feel there are academics you can go to with your study/personal issues?

Do you talk to the administrators initially about issues you are having?

3. University Non-Academic Life

So you are a first/second/third/ fourth year… use ONLY ONE of the following:

a. First year

Your first year is full of changes. The transition from school to university is a major change, it can be a time of great excitement and a wonderful experience but it can also be a very challenging time. There is no one perfect formula for

how you might live your life as a university student – everyone is different - so, tell me about your life here, generally, so far.

Making friends…

Joining stuff (societies)…

Working…

Is it like you thought it would be?

Have you felt isolated or lonely here at the university?

a. **Second Year**

So, you successfully completed your first year – well done.   Tell me about your life, generally, in the second year.

How is the second year different?

Reflecting on when you first came were there good and less good parts?

If you were arriving today, what do you wish someone had told you?

If you were arriving today, what advice do you wish you had given yourself?

b. **Third Year**

So, you successfully completed your part ones – well done.   Tell me about your life, generally, in this third year – I am guessing a lot of your friends are on placement and life is quite different for you?

Is it getting harder or easier now the end is in sight? Why

If you were arriving today, what do you wish someone had told you?

If you were arriving today, what advice do you wish you had given yourself?

Over the course of your programme have the things and the way you connect changed?

c. **Fourth year**

So, you successfully completed your part ones and then your placement too – well done. Tell me about your life, generally, in this final year. I am guessing going on placement makes a big difference to how you feel in all sorts of ways when you get back?

Reflecting on your whole time here, from when you first came, in earlier years and now you're are coming back, how has the university experience been for you?

If you were arriving today, what do you wish someone had told you?

If you were arriving today, what advice do you wish you had given yourself?

Over the course of your programme have the things and the way you connect changed?

4. Diversity

Thinking of your life here at Reading University:

In general, to date, have you met a wider "range" or different types of people than when you were at school or not really?

Possible prompts:

More diverse – racially, politically, socially, spiritually,

Some people believe that participating in group work develops skills for work, encourages tolerance and develops team work skills, other people believe their degree is too important to be in the hands of others and they must be personally and individually responsible for their own results - There are many places you could sit on this continuum between the two ideas – there is no "right" or "wrong" – what is your view?

5. University Connectedness

Are you a member of any university clubs or societies?

How often do you engage with it/them?

Is there any element of (optional) volunteer work in your university programme?

Do you participate?

Do you tend to remain/arrive earlier to work on campus outside your formal contact times or do you prefer to be at/go home?

Is it easier to work at home or on campus?

Do you feel "at home"/comfortable with the culture of the university or not really?

Do you feel "at home"/comfortable with most of the other students or not really?

Do you think you spend more time with programme related colleagues or just a range of students –flatmates, friends you met from other programmes?

6. Non-University Connectedness

Are you a member of any non-university centred groups?

Possible prompts:

Sports clubs/gyms

Political movements

Spiritual societies

7. Social Media

Do you use social media (SM)?

Which?

How?

Compared to your colleagues are you a heavier user of SM or a lighter user of SM?

Some people think that we overuse it and, for example, might text the person sitting next to us instead of speaking to them and that we have lost the art of making friends and personal contact; other people think social media is great and has its place, life is evolving and maybe we are spending more of our time in virtual contact but it is efficient and does not change the depth and value of personal contact?

I think this is another continuum – what is your view?

Does it have its place in **academic work**/use?

Do you think it helps to connect you to the university?

8. Paid Employment

Do you currently carry out any paid work?

How many hours a week?

As what?

Have you/are you intending to work throughout university?

Same sorts of hours/jobs?

Do you enjoy it?

Why are you doing it?

Possible prompts:

Financial reasons, employability skills, something on my cv, people at work are good/fun/friends

9. Volunteering

Do you volunteer for anything (independently – meaning not as a part of the programme)?

as part of RED or other reason?

10. Problem Solving

When you encounter **study problems** – what options are there for considering them?

Possible prompts:

Identify the nature of the problem and the right academic/study advisor to sort it out - be proactive

Try and catch an administrator

See your personal tutor

Maybe you just cannot think – that's OK too!

When you encounter issues of "life" lost your phone, laptop playing up, car accidents, burglaries – what is your first reaction?

Call home,

Call a friend /go for a coffee or something stronger

Just deal with the issue as quickly and painlessly as possible

Pull the duvet over my head and worry later

If you feel fed up, stressed anxious, isolated or depressed – what might you do?

Possible prompts:

Does it depend what might be causing it or perhaps there is no direct cause?

Talk to my trusted friends

Go out with my friends for a night out

Shop – buy myself a treat

Call my parents

Go to my personal tutor

See the doctor

Sit in my room

Go to counselling…

Have you ever raised an ECF? Would you share a brief outline of what that was for? Please only share what you feel comfortable sharing with me.

Think of a less than happy time, at Reading or perhaps at school and tell me how you tried to come through that.

Thank them for their time.

Appendix B: Outline Characteristics of the Upper Students Selected for Interview

Study Year	Gender	Domestic Situation	Graduate Parents	Resil-ience Score	Connect-edness Score	Happin-ess Score	Average Score	Reason for Selection
1	Female	Student Hall	Both	3.52	5.00	4.00	4.06	Overall highest female connectedness
1	Male	Student Hall	Both	4.24	4.75	4.45	4.44	Highest scoring first year male on connectedness
2	Female	Parental Home	Both	4.40	4.56	4.21	4.36	Year Two and living at home
2	Male	Student Hall	Father	4.08	4.13	4.28	4.17	High scoring male with graduate father
3	Female	Student Hall	Neither	3.96	4.81	3.90	4.13	Highest scoring year three female
3	Male	Student Hall	Both	4.56	4.50	4.48	4.51	Highest scoring average year three with all graduate parents

| 4 | Female | Student Hall | Neither | 4.60 | 4.88 | 4.66 | 4.69 | Overall highest average female across scales |
| 4 | Male | Student Hall | Neither | 4.04 | 4.88 | 3.59 | 4.04 | Overall highest average male across all scales |

Appendix C: Outline Characteristics of the Lower Students Selected for Interview

Study Year	Gender	Domestic Situation	Graduate Parents	Resili-ence Score	Connec-tedness Score	Happi-ness Score	Average Score
1	Female	Parental Home	Both	3.76	3.25	3.00	3.33
1	Male	Student Hall	Father	3.72	2.00	3.41	3.20
1	Male	Student Hall	Both	2.60	2.19	2.59	2.50
1	Male	Student Hall	Both	3.12	2.88	2.93	2.99
1	Male	Student Hall	Neither	3.36	3.56	3.48	3.46
1	Male	Student Hall	Both	2.80	3.69	3.24	3.19
2	Female	Student Hall	Neither	3.64	2.75	3.14	3.23
2	Female	Student Hall	Neither	3.52	2.31	3.62	3.29
2	Male	Parental Home	Both	2.96	3.19	3.07	3.06
2	Male	Student Hall	Both	3.92	3.00	3.31	3.46
3	Female	Student Hall	Neither	3.16	2.69	2.52	2.79
3	Female	Student Hall	Both	3.36	2.75	3.38	3.23
3	Female	Student Hall	Both	3.72	3.13	3.62	3.54
3	Male	Student Hall	Both	3.28	2.31	2.72	2.83

4	Female	Parental Home	Both	3.00	1.88	2.86	2.69
4	Female	Student Hall	Neither	3.48	2.56	3.07	3.10
4	Male	Student Hall	Neither	3.40	2.06	3.17	3.00
4	Male	Student Hall	Neither	3.60	2.56	3.66	3.39

Appendix D: Transcripts Selected for Review by the Reviewer, in Order of Selection

Name	Gender	Year	Upper or Lower
Ciara	Female	Second	Lower
Hannah	Female	Fourth	Lower
Segun	Male	First	Upper
Solon	Male	Second	Upper
Boden	Male	Third	Upper
Chloe	Female	Third	Upper
Kecheng	Male	First	Lower
Arabella	Female	Third	Lower

Appendix E: Transcript of Aahil's Interview

GK

Ok, so Aahil, thank you for coming in today. Um, first of all I'd like you to tell me about your living arrangements.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'm currently living in *(name of street given)* which is an en-suite catered accommodation until like when term ends.

GK

OK, so when you say its en suite catered, is it… that's student accommodation?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes, sorry, yes.

GK

OK, so it's a self-contained unit within a

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes, about a 10 minute walk away.

GK

OK, and obviously within that there's obviously a heap of other students. What's the actual arrangement there, have you got shared kitchen? How does it work?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, we have our own bathroom which is really suitable for me. Um, no its fine, we all get along. We have in a communal kitchen, I go there sometimes to…I rarely go there to cook stuff, if I have some food I warm it up there.

GK

OK. So you've got a communal kitchen so you kind of bump into other people in that kitchen.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah.

GK

OK, have you been in there since you came at the beginning of the year?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes.

GK

OK. So when you arrived what was that like? Did you meet lots and lots of people?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

When I arrived it was weird. I got…well I said goodbye to my mum and my brother…my dad had to come the next day because he was at work. It was weird after I said goodbye I went straight to the talk with the Hall Warden, and after that we went and…everyone was in the kitchen and I was like 'ok, this is..' obviously I'd never met everyone before so I was saying 'hi', and then I went back to my room. I just started unpacking cos I was just…I think I saw like…I was sad a bit obviously leaving my mum and everything, but um, then my mate called me who was about to go to uni the next week, the week after I did, and he was telling me 'just go to the kitchen, start talking'. I was like 'yeah, alright' so I did, and we were there until like 2am just talking.

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

So it was really, really good.

GK

OK, so in your communal kitchen were there like 12 people using that kitchen or something? There's usually a lot.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

It was overpacked – there was people all around, I think. I think before we came to uni we had a chat with everyone and we just started talking and everyone that in that chat was in that kitchen, and we just spoke and now um..yeah, we're really good friends now. Like all the bunch of lads that was just…we hang out, go out everything, so together.

GK

OK. That's quite interesting that you said you kind of got there and you felt a bit needy and you went off to your room…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I said 'hi' and I thought, I was obviously uncomfortable and I think cos a lot of people went to the Warden talk before – there were 2 Warden talks, I went to the late one, which none of them went to, they all went to one earlier because they arrived like 4 hours before I did. So when I came back and they were already talking for about an hour or so, so they already got used to it and then I was just staring, and I was still like... I was still sad that I'd said goodbye to mum. I was like, OK, I said hello to everyone, what I'm doing. I said I'd be back but obviously I said I would stay there longer. Then my mate was just like 'go in the kitchen.' I was like, 'OK.'

GK

Did you phone your mate?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, he called me.

GK

Oh, did he.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

He wanted to know how I was doing.

GK

And he was at another university?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No he was going to university the week after.

GK

Oh, OK, and he said get out there?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, cos I was eventually, I don't know when I was, but I know I was eventually gonna go, I think I was just trying to just delay it, and then...

GK

It's quite hard, it's hard.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

It's like.. I wish I could see what just happened in the last, what - 2 hours I was here. And I went and like we just started talking, and it's normal now. It's weird to say it's been nearly a year since…so it's been nearly an academic year since I've been here. It's nearly Easter now which is really crazy. But…

GK

So those people – so you've got…some of those people you've formed very close friendships with – they're good friends now?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah.

GK

Yeah, OK. So what living arrangements have you made for your second year?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

We've already booked everything, we done it all in December, and yeah, I think, we did it a bit later, we're not going for a house now, we're going for Kendrick Court which is just like another en suite kind of accommodation outside and yeah, we're all going to be living there.

GK

OK. So, a whole collection of you, cos it's quite normal in second year…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

There's 6 of us, but we kind of split ourselves up butt we're near each other, which is really good, so.

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

We can just bounce back – because we were a bit too late so we had to kind of split up a bit, but we already found out we're gonna….

GK

Do you like that idea that you're all kind of together but apart, because people really like the house idea and moving in together?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, I definitely want the house idea but we didn't… the estate agents were saying like, you were here at the right time, but for some reason this year you're here late. Apparently for some reason everyone started booking from like October, which was really…I don't understand how people can book in October, less than a month after just meeting each other. I don't know how you can form that really strong connection that quickly, but they did, people had already started looking and… No, we were too late but it's done now and hopefully, we said, the ones that stay here after I come back from my placement, we're going to have a nice big house, hopefully.

GK

OK, alright. And so you've mentioned home a couple of times, home is, obviously we talked before the tape started, is *(home town named)*, which is a million miles away by road, with the traffic. But um, are you going home in term time or?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'm going home on Saturday, I've got 3 of my best mates coming over, ones coming on Thursday, two of them on Friday and we're going to go home together on Saturday.

GK

OK. They're not all at the University?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, they're scattered around the UK.

GK

OK, so you're just having a bit of a…everyone's getting together then you're going back to *(home town named)*.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, they said they'd come here, we'll go out, and since everyone finishes that time they'll probably go home in *(home town named)*.

GK

OK, so the friends that are coming – are they school friends? Old school friends?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, since year 7.

GK

OK, alright. So do you think…when you came to University, I mean, obviously you handled it really well, you did get into that kitchen and you did talk to people. Do you think it's actually quite easy to meet people?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Um, I think it's really down to you. I think it is very easy to meet people and talk to people, you just need to do that yourself. I used to be…I used to be quite shy a bit, from like 14. If I was in an area I'd probably be the one waiting until they talked to me first and I'd talk, but…I think getting the job in year…when I was 16, getting that customer service skills… I

said to myself I'm going to just kind of push myself to be a bit more confident and then from there I just…if I meet someone I'll be the one that starts first, I'll start a conversation. On that occasion, on that Saturday when I came here, I think I was overwhelmed by everything.

GK

Yes, so do I.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

So everything…it was just different…hence why I was really…I wouldn't say I was shy, I just wasn't up for anything to do. I wanted to go back to my room.

GK

You were just a sharp intake of breath and then launched in, so you've still got the skills. I mean it is uh, it is very, very hard when you come, I think. Do you think that you…you talked about being a lot more shy when you were younger. Do you think you're still quite introverted or do you…?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'd say there's always a bit of insecurities there, always. I don't think anyone who was like that could get that way, there would be some sort of element there. Um, but, no but I think that I can…I think I'm way more less insecure and introverted than I was before.

GK

OK, you push yourself.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I don't really care. Before I used to care what people think and I'd be like 'ok, its fine.' I don't really care as much. No, I think, yep, I think I'm a different person than I was, but you know...

GK

OK, so you've made some close friends, which is great. I want to ask you a bit about your course – so in terms of your academic life, how are you

currently feeling about the programme now it's coming to kind of the end of your first taught year? Do you enjoy it, is it what you expected?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'm mixed about it. I do enjoy it, but obviously, obviously I've said this to the applicants wanting to studying here (like I'm doing this calling campaign thing where I'm calling people who want to study Business Management) and I've said to them like, 'there's going to be something you won't like on this course, it happens with every course.' And there are some things I don't like about this course but there are things I do like and I'm enjoying it. I've finished that module anyway. But the course has been alright so far, I'm just going (sound sh, shu, shu) strolling on through it, just making sure… cos I know this year doesn't count for my degree but I don't really want to fluke this first year. I kinda wanna do alright, so I'm kind of focusing on doing alright. But I've kept a good balance of work and social life at the same time, so…I think that's important. Cos I know cos its freshers people in first year will be like…there'll be some people just don't want to work at all because they know it doesn't count to their degree. Um, but we kind of made an agreement like, we're not going to like - say if we wanna go out and have fun, we do that maybe once a week maybe max, it may not even be that. But yeah, no, I'm just trying to have a good balance and right now just trying to focus on work, it's kind of both for me.

GK

OK, so the friendship group that you described that you live with – are they also on the same course?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Um, I have 2 people, actually yeah, my next door, who's a close friend…I think we're closer because we found out we're more…we're on the same course, um, and then we have one person downstairs who does the same course as me as well, so, yeah.

GK

So when you're doing your work and play balance you…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

We're like – if we're working on an essay, working on an essay doesn't involve other people like a group or anything, if we're doing an individual assignment, we kind of work together or an exam – we'll probably revise together.

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

That's what we do, yeah.

GK

So your work play balance could be people that aren't even on your courses, but you all presumably have got deadlines at various times and have made the same decision about first year? It's not all play.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No.

GK

Its gonna be…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I do have some mates… a mate that has taken the social life more than work. I've helped him out if he needed a few times in terms of like getting him to do work and stuff like that, but, probably right now he's doing work cos he's got an essay due today. But yeah, no, it's just, I think everyone's doing alright in terms of focussing on their course, overall.

GK

Alright. So do you think the course is challenging you intellectually? You know, compared to when you did you're a Levels.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Oh, A Levels more pushing for ==stress base== (unclear from voice recording) actually. Cos one thing I like about this course instead of like A Levels and GCSEs is like that, actually no, not GCSE, A Levels, is that unlike A Levels when everything is based on that one exam at the end, whether you do bad in that exam because you had a bad day but you did well throughout the whole year, that's disregarded. Whereas this, like University right now is spread out and it's not just exams, its other things that you're assessed on, and obviously I'm not great with like essays, but I'm alright with projects and presentations than exams. I focus on that more than…I focus on…no, I basically have that as a strength, then if I do bad in essays I have that to kind of help me recover. Um, but I wouldn't…I think in terms of intellectually challenged, I'd say I've learnt a lot more skills from the modules, all I'd say intellectually challenged with it, I'm not sure, I can't answer it, I dunno.

GK

Skills like presentation skills or analytical skills?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Presentation skills, entrepreneurial skills, analytical skills in terms of financial stuff, yeah.

GK

OK. OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Be more vigilant in terms of spotting everything. Um, referencing helped a lot, learning about that – still getting used to it, but learnt a lot in terms of making sure everything you know is…making sure there is always a source for everything you learn, so yeah.

GK

OK. So, in a typical week in the last couple of terms, how much…how many hours have you spent in formal studies, i.e. sitting in front of a lecturer, or in tutorials?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I've been to every single tutorial I've had to go to because they're compulsory. Lectures – I've attended everything, but I may have left like half way through cos maybe I wasnt… I've a feeling that isn't…I've done the work or I could probably….cos I always do the work. Like if I feel like I've done the work there and I don't have anything else on I'll probably leave in the break or…

GK

So how many hours a week are you supposed to be in that formal ….?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'd say….it varies a lot. Cos right now some modules are ending so I don't have anymore lectures about that, so disregarding Maths cos that stopped in the last few weeks. Disregarding that its 8, 6-8 maybe.

GK

And so…outside of formal contact time, how much time do you think you spend studying by yourself, you know working in the library, at home, wherever?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'd say…I don't study every day but I study…well, I'd say maybe 4 – if there's something on a lecture I catch up on that, or obviously I'm working on my project right now, so I'd say I work…like last week I worked maybe 4 or 5 hours in a week, maybe more. This week I'll probably, this week just started, but this weekend I'll work probably 3 hours in my room.

GK

OK. Alright. Are you a library worker or a worker in your room?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Its both, um, room – it really depends on how the environment is around, um, library is always the best bet in terms of just go in there and sit…if you need to knuckle down and do straight revision or straight work, like I

sat down for nearly 11 hours straight. Just no eating, just a bottle of water, 2 bottles of water, just doing my essay. I managed to do it that day and probably wouldn't have done that in the room cos in my room I got a TV, my console, I got games I play around with…I can always have a little bit of distraction, but I do do some work in my room, but library's always the best bet for me. Yeah.

GK

OK, alright.   And how much time in the term have you spent with…do you see your personal tutor for instance?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Oh, that's something I regret ==oh== (unclear from voice recording) actually. Um, I'd say advise to like students, I say don't, I say use your personal tutor, I've seen her once and that was at the beginning, that's when I said hello to her. And I think I've emailed her once as well. I just, I kind of forget I have her, that's cos I never really up to ==town?== (Don't think this can be correct, unclear from voice recording) which I really think I should, and from next year I think…

GK

Was she helpful?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I haven't used her, so, she would have been if I did, because I know other people who have and that's what made me feel really bad, like, cos I should have – personal tutors are there for you. Um, I…when I was calling up I've always said to them, like don't make the mistake I did, make, make sure you keep up to date, if you ever need help, any little gripes, just talk to them. They're there to help you, so I think from next year, if we do get a personal tutor, I'm going to definitely use her. I should of, I should of, but I misused her this year basically, so yeah.

GK

OK. In terms of academic tutors for say modules, have you taken any modules and been to see an academic tutor about the work or…?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Um yes, after tutorials I kind of probably go to the tutor if I have any questions and concerns, like I just talk to them and they give me some good feedback, so yeah.

GK

OK, so they've been pretty active?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, they're always open to talk to you.

GK

Alright, so basically the first year is um, it's pretty traumatic in like you've already identified you've left home, you're not a child anymore but it's still quite a big thing to leave home, you've left behind your A Levels, the pace of works different, the expectations different, the teachers aren't there the whole time really bearing down on you. Generally speaking, when you look back now, having gone through these 2 terms now away from the school and home environment, how does it feel? Is it feeling like, do you feel quite good about it?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

It feels weird, like, cos I remember finishing A Levels, like the day I finished A Levels and unis 3 months away and I'm already… at the end of March. It's just gone ridiculously quick. It's been probably…I say it, we say it every year, but like year 13 was the quickest academic year, but this has gone ridiculously fast.

GK

OK. But it sounds like its good fast in that the works ok, the…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, but at the same time I kind of want to slow down cos….

GK

Because its good, or…?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, it's just I'm having a good time here and I don't want.. like I said I want to go home, I don't mind going home, I miss home, I do miss home, it's just kind of, I don't know if I made good use of the first year or not. The first year's nearly finished and I don't know if I…everyone needs to make a good use of their first year, that's where you start showing yourself like, joining stuff and I don't know if I did or not. That's something I need to think about more.

GK

Did you join things Aahil?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes, I have.

GK

What did you join?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I didn't think I'd actually enjoy it, (my friend told me to see how it was), Ultimate (name of sport), you know I thought it would be quite lame. I'm in the team now, yeah (interviewer laughs, interviewee joins in) , didn't think that would happen. I'm in the Film Society – I paid for the membership and been to one workshop – that's cos everytime they have something there's something else is on, the (name of sport) thing or we go out so, its… Next year if they change the timings round I'll probably be more active in the film society, cos I am a film geek. I wish I'd…

GK

So you're like your (name of sport) then – let's just look at your (name of sport) thing. So, you're friend told you to join (name of sport) this year

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

My friend at home.

GK

Oh, your friend at home said join (name of sport)?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, cos we were talking about what we can do here and we were laughing about the things that exist like Quidditch – that's a thing.., and then we talked about (name of sport) because I was thinking (name of sport), really?? (question intonation and humour) He showed me a video and I was like 'oh that doesn't look that bad actually, that looks quite cool.' (Interviewer laughs) And then I was walking around the societies and sports fair and I went to Ultimate (name of sport) and the membership was actually the cheapest one out of all the others. I was going to try out Football because I did that at school but I was like 'oh I'll go to the taster session' and I thought 'this is really fun' and I came every week and now I've got my own kit, I've got my name on the back of my kit… (said with mock pride)

GK

Oooh.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

…so it's a big kind of jump.

GK

It's a big deal now.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, and I'll have a go at anyone who takes the mick out of Ultimate (name of sport) mate, particularly now. My friends always do anyway, my flatmates do, they always mock me about it, but I'm like 'nah, it's a real sport, you'll see, it'll be in the Olympics.'

GK

No, that's good, cos…so you've got a new…I presume you've got like a new friendship group of Ultimate (name of sport).

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, I've got a few friends in (name of sport), they're good friends. Not as close as my flatmates, but we made good friends and they're all fun, really nice people. So, it's, yeah, again keep telling applicants, I keep telling them like, you meet so many different personalities and different people and it's so good, it's just so many different people and they're all nice, there's no one like…I haven't met anyone that's been, like, that kind of school, kind of, how do I say it? School kind of troll, school kind of bully, that kind of attitude I haven't seen around anyone, so it's a bit more adult here and everyone's been…

GK

What do you mean by the word different Aahil, do you mean like there's loads of different nationalities?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, different personality, everyone has just like… at home at school, because we were all from the same area we won't have any different personalities. We'll have….we know everyone, basically, here you don't know everyone, but you meet new people and new people just..they're different and they're great. I don't know how to word it actually, I know it sounds really bad, doesn't it?

GK

Did you feel at school that you were kind of limited to being perhaps the sort of person who fitted in at school whereas here you can just do what you want?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No. No, I definitely fitted in at school. School was…it's weird to say school's already ended but um, school was good…obviously, there were some bullies at school, like one or two in the early years, but it was good, but this one, you just meet so many different people and you get to meet new people and new friends. That's what I like about uni cos obviously there's like 17,000 people here, so it's just so big. So yeah.

GK

OK. OK. That sounds good, it sounds like it's going really, really well for you. So, basically one of the problems for first years is that they often can feel isolated…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Definitely, yeah.

GK

…not that there's anything wrong with them socially but you can just suddenly feel very isolated because it's not like home and…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I can definitely, I already know people who've isolated themselves in terms of like staying in their rooms all the time.

GK

Is that how they did it? Is it when you made that decision when your mate said get out there and get in that kitchen?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Um, I wouldn't say that if it wasn't for him I'd be isolated, no. I feel like I would have eventually done it cos I've always, I've always said to myself like 'I'll do these things' like keep my door open sometimes and when people walk past and talk and I've done that most of the time. No eventually I would have, but I feel like at that first day I'm glad I did on that first day cos everyone was in the same kind of boat as me. So if you just all talk, not on the second day cos…I feel like on the first night I was glad I did it. I glad he called to be fair, but I would have learned eventually, but I'm glad I did it early.

GK

Cos you said you went to the second warden talk so you were a bit kind of – they'd been to the first one so you're already kind of like a little bit disadvantaged in getting into that group straight away. I guess what happened is people leave it, you would eventually have fought your way out and talked to people. But I guess it becomes harder, even one

Wardens talk made you feel it was a bit harder so you kind of like 2 hours behind everybody else.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I know what would have happened if I missed that first warden talk. Apparently if my mum had left earlier… I think I didn't want her to leave earlier, I think I said I'd like to go to the second Warden talk, but if I went to the first Warden talk, I don't know what would have happened.

GK

It would have been straight away that you'd have met them.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Everyone would have introduced each other to themselves I think.

GK

But you're saying you have observed people that are isolated.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I've seen people that have kept…like obviously I have been…my window you see everything outside our halls and I rarely see people come out like… I know people that comes out quite often. And there's some people I rarely see come out or just be on their own. And obviously, I don't like…I can tell like, OK, it's understandable it's probably a different environment for them, especially for like international students coming over here, they're on their own, and I know an international student lives on our floor that…she was homesick for a while, we talked to her and she seemed fine after, but like…

GK

Is it harder for them?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Obviously, I can't tell how what they're feeling but I can tell they might be, yeah, leaving everyone at home, it probably will be alone.

GK

Its like you leaving everyone in *(home town named)*, but knowing you can go back, but for some it might be on the other side of the world.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I made a promise to my mum I'll come back like a minimum of every 3 weeks just to make her happy, um, I was going to say like once a month or maybe even more, but like every 3 weeks will do it for her, probably. I don't know how they do it, like, like one of my flatmates, she's there, she's from Guernsey and she doesn't like, she has to go home every actual term ending time obviously, cos she has to fly over there. Um, but yeah like people have to go at Christmas time, or Summer time or Easter time, so. I don't know I could stay away for that long on my own. I don't know how they do it, it must be really hard, but definitely I understand why people isolate themselves, obviously still, even 6 or 7 months in its still really hard for them.

GK

OK. In general, do you think you've met a wider range of people – you've talked about people being different – a wider range of people from school?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes.

GK

OK. A wider range just more international..?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

International and people different areas, different things they experience, cos people outside London don't experience the London vibe. We…everyone from London has their they understand like, just, how do I say it, they understand like things that happen in London are different from things that happen up north, or… So, like, you just meet different people, like people who I met people who are super into horse riding cos they've done it in their areas. And like they spoke to me about everything

so I learnt more things about that kind of area, they learnt more about London cos London's very multicultered, so yeah.

GK

OK. We talked about you being in your (name of sport) team…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes.

GK

Um, so in terms of the clubs - the Film Club, are you going to re-join next year and get more involved in it?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

To be fair, it was a fiver for a membership to be fair, so I wouldn't say I wasted it, but I wish I'd… All my friends are saying you should, you should really because they know how much I enjoy film cos I kind of want to go into film as an older, as an older, in the future, but it's just, I kind of realised other stuff and I changed my course round, but everyone said just keep film as a, keep your passion for other things. I was like 'yeah, I will.' I didn't really do this year because they kept…all the workshops and screens always like clashed with other stuff, I just couldn't…

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

…change it around but hopefully next year I will.

GK

OK, so did you do the Red Award or anything towards that?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No.

GK

Did you think about it?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I thought about it then I thought about it too late cos everyone's already started doing it, I was like 'I should do it probably next year', I'll probably do it then.

GK

OK. Um, do you think that you're probably…oh no, hang on I'm going to leave that. Right, OK, social media. Can I just ask, do you use social media platforms?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes.

GK

OK, what do you use?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Its very vital for anyone coming to uni right now, to be fair.

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Like before I didn't really use Facebook a lot, but Facebook's a massive thing now for making friends and talking to everyone, like obviously people…before uni you'd be in the University of (Institution Name) freshers group because you've all applied and maybe got a firm or an unconditional – I got an unconditional so I was in the early…. Um, so we made…we had a Facebook group there – they made a Facebook group about our halls, they made a Facebook group about our flat, so it was Facebook for everything, like. On our course, we have assignments for different people, make a Facebook group about that, so… And you make…and that's obviously how you make friends, that's how you keep in touch with other friends you meet. There's so many people I've added at different times, so… Social media's very important in terms of just making…you remember the friends you've made basically.

GK

OK, so in terms of adding people to Facebook, you've only added people that you kind of know (in inverted commas), people that you're working with, people that are in your hall?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, if I met someone and we got along, they'd be like 'Oh, what's your Facebook and I'll add you' but we're kind of doing this thing now, so..

GK

OK, so also do you do any Facebook with the family?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, no, no.

GK

No, not at all?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No. My family apart from my brother – I'm gonna add him but..my dad – they don't even know how to use social media, I don't think.

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Some parents of people do have Facebook, but I feel like social media's more a friends' thing family I don't need to have social media to keep on top of them.

GK

OK, so you've got a lot of people on Facebook in kind of different sort of categories. School mates on Facebook as well?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes.

GK

OK, so different friendship groups. Can you keep those all separate?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

What, in terms of like keeping a balance of who I speak to?

GK

No, just keeping…do you share different things with different…well obviously with your course group you probably won't share everything you do. But can you share different things with different people?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, 100%.

GK

OK, so maybe with your old school mates or your very close flat mates.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, my school mates are my closest – I tell them everything. Flatmates, I'd send them everything, yeah.

GK

OK, OK. Um, so you use Facebook, do you use any other things – Twitter, I don't know, Snapchat?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes.

GK

Talk me through those.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Um, Twitter is…Twitter is more like….I use it to read stuff, Twitter used to be a thing when I was in mid secondary school, you'd Tweet like everything you do throughout the day, but now I just read up and find news or videos, or... Same on Facebook to be fair, but like, yeah, and then we have WhatsApp which is basically to keep in contact with everyone.

Snapchat's to see how everyone's doing, they always document their lives there, so it's nice to see what everyone's doing there. So yeah.

GK

OK, are you a big kind of pusher outer of messages, or do you just tend to look at what other people are doing? Are you pushing out your own Snapchats and your own…?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, sure, I do it sometimes, and obviously I enjoy seeing what other people do in their unis, obviously to see what my family's doing, I'm not around basically. Um, but yeah, no, it's, yeah, I do post some stuff there as well for them to see.

GK

To you think compared to your colleagues in the flat or on the course or at home, are you a heavier or a lighter user of social media?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

We're all heavy users of social media, especially in this day and age, it's all we do, we're always on our phones. In our lectures, you won't see anyone that's not on their phone. Also, you see them typing on their phone, you can find out anything. So, yeah…

GK

Do you think that using social media in one way isn't a good thing? You've chosen to have physical, actual relationships with your family members, you go back and have that physical face to face discussion. Do you think social media's damaging what we do in any way or is it not a good thing in that sense?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

It depends on the type of people who are using it. People can use it…obviously you see new people use it to misuse it in terms of like posting threatening stuff, violent stuff and obviously that's bad and people just using it normally, just to look at news and Tweet about stuff but then

like…it really depends on people that's using it, that could be dangerous. If you use it too much and just block yourself out of society, then yeah, I'd say that's pretty bad, but if you're using it just to keep tabs on everyone, then yeah. I'm using it to keep in tabs with everyone. I rarely post on Twitter, I rarely post on Facebook – I just read stuff on Facebook and I message people on Facebook, so yeah…

GK

OK, you would find it difficult probably to keep in contact with the sheer numbers of people that you all keep in contact with today, if you were to…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Oh, I don't message – the people I message outside uni is…well we have a group chat with our best mates outside uni. We'll have another group chat with other groups and I individually message or I'll even call them - my best mates when I can, so….and they do the same.

GK

These are the people from school who've gone off to different universities?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah.

GK

OK, alright. Have you ever used any dating Apps?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, don't really feel like it really.

GK

OK, because you thing….obviously you've got these close relationships with your family and you've got close…I don't mean physical relationships, I mean face to face relationships, and you've got face to face relationships with your flatmates. Do you think you're more of a face to face person?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I always feel it's better to tell them face to face and say like if you want to tell them a message, yes, say it better face to face and…but I see people who want to tell bad news by messaging, I said know, I tell them face to face. If it's serious, I would call them or…so they can hear in my voice that I'm being real. If they need me I say, 'can we meet, I want to talk to you about something' then yeah. But I'd say face to face is more better in terms of communication than anything else. But that's the most strongest kind of communication you can have, but obviously messaging is always there, cos obviously it's impossible to always go and see them face to face, so yeah.

GK

OK, alright. Do you carry out any paid work?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Right now?

GK

Umm.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes, that's the calling thing I do.

GK

OK, sorry what do you do?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'm calling…the telephone campaign thing.

GK

For the University – the calling campaign?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah.

GK

OK. Do you do any other work besides that?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, not now, I did before, but not now.

GK

OK, did you do it when you were at school? You talked about being in a call centre.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

The first…the first job I ever had was after I finished GCSEs I worked in Hamleys for about 3 months, that was amazing, one…that was great. That kind of summed up one of the best summers I've had, um, then…

GK

This is Hamleys the toy shop?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah.

GK

Oh, right.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, I applied for a joke, I didn't…literally I was like, mum said to me try and look for a job and obviously been looking for a job I look at all the fun stuff like theme parks and Hamleys and Harrods. I didn't think it would happen, I just applied there for a joke, I wrote some rubbish stuff about why I'm interested in it, I got a call back from Hamleys saying they wanted to see me, did the interview and they called me back and said I was in. I was like, 'oh, wow.' I was the youngest one there as well which was really weird. Yeah, no that was incredible. Then the second job I had was year 13 or 12? Uh, year 13 I think, 2015. Yeah, so September 2015 I got a job at Argos until like January. So that's when I worked there as well and that's about it.

GK

OK. Do you think you'll do some more paid work, I know you're doing the calling, do you think you'll carry on doing other things?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes, I need the money and also my mums paid a lot for things like I didn't want to go catered because like its an add on to our student maintenance loan, I didn't want to do that. Mum said she'll handle it – I hate it when she says that, so I always said…I haven't told her yet, she'll be annoyed if I do, I always said I'd make money to pay her back. So yeah.

GK

OK. Alright, we talked about a whole range of things – we talked about the Red Award. Have you done any volunteering whilst at school or since you've been here?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah, I helped out like on those elections - you have the council election around, I helped out give leaflets out for like…I'm a Labour person so I was giving out to like Labour people. I volunteered…uh, what did I do? I volunteered to like, at school, I volunteered to help out like mentor year 7's and I was in like year 12, I think. Just to see if they needed help or anything. Yeah, that's all I can remember of the top of my head right now, yeah.

GK

OK. So do you think….I mean you've done you know, political campaigning, supporting political campaigning here – do you think you'll do other things while you're here or is that just a one off?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

My friend actually at Bristol told me to do more cos he's been doing a lot and he's kind of telling me you should really cos its really good and it gets you more contacts in terms of what you want if you have any problems in the future. So, in terms of like maybe next year, like, I could go up for like committees of my societies, right now they're doing committee

elections for like my (name of sport) in terms of who's going to be President, Treasurer, Secretary, stuff like that, so. If I get closer to the team next year I probably will do that. But um,

GK

You have structures in halls as well, don't you that like committee structures in halls, don't you?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'm not aware of that. I know we have Reps but that's for our course, I don't think we have halls reps. Do we have halls reps?

GK

I think you might do.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I think we might do actually, it rings a bell, I don't know about them, but I might do yeah, it's something I'm aware of, so, I think if there's an opportunity, I probably will take it, yeah.

GK

OK. I just want to ask you finally about issues, really. So first of all I want to talk to you about study issues. So basically you said to me you're pretty comfortable, you seem to be pretty comfortable with talking to lectures – if you've got something you want to find out you're pretty comfortable emailing, talking to them at the end of a lecture or whatever.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah. I'm not shy about that.

GK

So if you've got a study problem, you know, you completely together about that.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Unless I'm lazy about it, but no, yeah.

GK

OK. And you talk to your mates as well.

0

5 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yeah.

GK

That's fine. Ok, if you encounter a problem of life that's a bit of a pain, as opposed to being a total catastrophe or a disaster, so, I don't know, somebody's nicked your phone…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

That happened in December actually.

GK

OK. So how do you react to something like that? What do you do?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Um, memories. What happened? I was in the park and…it is partly my fault, but I'm not going to say partly my fault because it happened in like a minute. We were in a park and we were in one space for about a good 2 hours and we left to just go and get something and within a minute I realised it wasn't in my pocket anymore, I probably dropped it. I go back and within a minute obviously its gone, which is really _____ and my friends called straight away and it went to voicemail so he turned it off straight away. So that's when I knew it got stolen cos it can't of – my phone was obviously full battery, it can't just have turn off by itself, so, that's when I got the realisation that I lost it and it was so annoying cos I had everything in there since like year 7 in terms of pictures. And I kept…I had a memory card that I kept from my old phone to that phone to this phone here. I was really gutted, especially like last summer I spent loads of time doing stuff with like everyone in my school, now it's all gone as well. I was really…like my mum was annoyed but she was really bummed out for me, so, yeah. I had a little riot, but it's done, I can't really do anything about it. I did use this thing I was trying to see if I could locate it and maybe report it to the police, but it didn't work. Yeah, I

know. I got a replacement phone, a really rubbish one, I change my phone in future but that's sort of the first thing….I think that's the first time I got something stolen from me. I'm really good at keeping stuff, I was really annoyed about that, especially last year I lost my sunglasses in Turkey airport, so.. I actually left it in a cubicle for about a minute and it was gone. That could have been so avoided.

GK

OK.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

So this could have been avoided as well. Both the things could have been avoided easily, yeah.

GK

OK, so you talked to your mates obviously when you lost your phone and said 'panic stations, I've lost my phone, it was here 1 second ago.' Then what did you do, did you talk to your mum about it?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Oh no. I grabbed my friend's phone. My mum, she knew straight away. I called her and she was like 'hello.' I was like 'mum, it's me', she was like 'Aahil?', I was like 'yeah.' 'Did you lose your phone?' I was like 'yeah…Mum I don't understand' and she was like 'don't panic, don't panic, its fine, don't worry, just see if you can find it, if you can't don't panic, just go home.' I was like 'alright mum.' She came home and she was telling me 'it's alright, it's alright.' We cancelled everything, everything like that, so..yeah. My mum was…mum knows obviously I didn't do it purposely, she can't really do anything about it, so yeah.

GK

OK. Alright, Aahil, if you get onto the next stage of issues which is perhaps feeling extremely stressed about your academic work, feeling a bit isolated or depressed or just fed up with everything. If you were in that sort of state..

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

What would I do?

GK

Yeah, what would you do then?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

I'd talk to someone.

GK

OK. Mum?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No. The last thing I want to do is have my mum worry about me. If I do something I always try and avoid telling her, I'll get her a bit worried, cos if she's worried she'll just go….she just…mums go mum-ish and….especially my dad as well.

GK

Dads go dad-ish?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

My dad is really like treating me like a kid still, so, he worries too much. I'll be like, if I go out at 11 o'clock to go get a meal at the canteen, he'd be like 'be careful, let me know when you get to your room.' I was like 'dad, I'm fine, leave it please.' I don't call him anyway, but um.. My friend – the first person I'd probably…

GK

School friend?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Both school and flatmates just to see what they think really.

GK

OK. Can you think back at a time Aahil in your life, at any time have you ever though 'gosh I need some help, I do need to talk to somebody.' Have

you ever had a time in your life when you thought 'this is horrible, I wish this wasn't happening to me.'

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

In terms of what, anything?

GK

Yeah, in terms of, I don't know, bullied at school, anything.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

The only thing that, I was racially abused badly I think in year 9 or mid-year 9, year 10, one of the two. I didn't handle it well enough cos I got in a fight with him, cos couldn't handle it, he said one thing, I thought I lost it, I attacked him, I hit him. Then we both got into trouble, but he got excluded. Teachers kind of understood, like the situation why I did it, they saw I…this had been happening a while, they said I should have told someone but I was like I thought it had stopped so…. I think the only punishment I got was being in the support unit for 2 days and they were really nice to me there to be fair, so…

GK   Aahil - is that you saying this is a horrible situation, I'm going to sort it out?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Yes. I just lost it at that point, I was like 'OK, Aahil you've done it now' and yeah, not that I did feel good doing it, but obviously I knew I shouldn't have done it cos…

GK

Did your mates know how much pressure you were under? It must be horrible.

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

They knew it was happening, but I told them just to leave it, I always told them to leave it. But I don't think they knew how badly, what he was actually saying, but actually the person that did it, I think we're OK now,

we spoke. If I see him I say 'hi' to him. He's grown out of it. But um, yeah like, the regret I did was not telling many people about it, so yeah. I would say right now I would tell my mates about everything I do, but at that point, obviously I was introverted as well at that point as well, so I was just…I didn't really think of it until I took action myself, badly to be fair.

GK

OK. Do you ever think you consult, I don't know, Student Services here if you felt you had a problem which was insurmountable or very difficult? You know, counselling, or..?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No, always friends, they would talk me through. I'll always have my friends to talk to me. Yeah, I'll never take it that it that way, I always knew if that's if it's to the point where my friends can't even help me and that's what they suggest. If there's no other option – I've never been in that situation because I don't know how it will feel like in that situation, but if I had to go to a therapist I don't know what it would be for though. How bad it would be. I can't really describe that.

GK

OK. Have you ever raised an ECF since you've been here – an Extenuating Circumstances to get…

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

No.

GK

OK. Alright. I'm going to turn this off now.

GK

Hi Aahil, sorry for the forgotten questions. So can I just ask you, if you were coming to University now, what advice would you give yourself?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

The advice I'd give is, um… don't…like put yourself out there for anything you see that interests you. That way you're going to make more friends. Just don't be shy, everyone's in the same boat, just kind of go for it and just like, talk to everyone, especially like in…I'd say in (name of sport) right now, I'd do have friends, but unlike other people in the first year that joined the same time as me, they've gone ridiculously close with everyone – I'm like, I don't really have…I didn't really do that, I wish I kind of did. So yeah, I just be like, kind of, just kind of, don't try to hide yourself as much at the beginning, kind of be open.

GK

And in terms of work, you talked about the play and the work balance. What advice would you give yourself, or your younger brother?

05 LM YR1 AAHIL

Just, just keep a balance of that, just don't…right now its freshers and you're gonna probably try and have fun a lot, but just make sure its…obviously in the beginning, yeah you will, but right now you need to, obviously as time goes past you need to catch up. Keep a consistency in terms of what you do at uni because you are paying 9 grand for it. But um, yeah, no, just, yeah, just carry on a good balance really.

GK

Alright, thank you Aahil.