

How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?

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Abstract – How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?

The purpose of this research study is to explore how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students? The study analyses one university (University A) undergraduate students' orientations, to understand their outward mobility experience. The study applies a mixed methods methodological research approach, including a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative focus groups with semi-structured questions, where the research is recorded, transcribed and coded.

Findings identify a variety of important independent and inter-related emerging themes which for students, include the development of cultural and aspirational capital; enhancement of employability; development of global mindedness, as benefits of participation in an international experience. For the institution, findings confirm a requirement for a wide variety of support for undergraduate students at University A, to support their participation in an international experience.

This research asserts that support from university staff for students at University A is vital to overcome a wide range of barriers, enabling student participation in an international experience. This research study develops an understanding of aspirational capital and extends the discussion to incorporate participation in an international experience for undergraduate students at University A. This analysis can be used to further support development of an international experience for undergraduate students, by understanding student values from such initiatives. This research can aid UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by enabling enhancements to outward student mobility programmes. These improved practices may contribute to the quality and sustainability of such international experience programmes.

1. Introduction

This Chapter commences firstly with the research study aims and objectives, as well as the purpose, background and context of the research study. It continues by investigating a range of concepts relevant to the research study. Following on there is an acknowledgement of the terminology connected with different forms of international experience. This chapter then presents a short description of internationalisation within the context of higher education. Finally, there is a review of the overarching concepts of , globalisation, glocalisation and the development of global citizens. The presentation of these is in some detail, since each places different demands on higher education institutions.

1.1 Research study aims and objectives

This research study aims to investigate *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, in the context of an English post 1992 university based within the North Midlands area (section 1.3). Data and subsequent analysis is used to support further development of international experiences. Aligned to the aim of the research study, the following research questions have been devised: -

1. What are the factors that influence a student's decision to study abroad and/or undertake a period of work experience abroad?
2. Are there any challenges, barriers or obstacles for students wanting to study abroad and/or undertake a period of work-experience abroad?
3. What, if any, support do undergraduate students require from their university to enable them to participate in study or work-experience abroad?

1.2 Background

For this research the term **international experience** refers to the plethora of related concepts including international placement; international work experience (including ERASMUS work placements and internships); study abroad (incorporating ERASMUS study

exchange); attendance at a short conference abroad; a university organised short visit to another higher educational provider abroad; periods of voluntary work abroad. When attributing to an **international experience** this research study referred to outside the United Kingdom (UK).

For this research study, a short-term international experience refers to 0 to 4 weeks, congruent with Caffrey *et al.* (2005) and UUKI (2021), a medium-term international experience is 3 months (approximately 1 semester) and a long-term international experience lasts more than 3 months (longer than one semester). The available existing literature cites benefits to short term mobility, as noted by UUKI (2021) and Fenech *et al.* (2013). For this reason, the definition of International Experience (section 1.1) central to this research study includes participation in a short-term mobility. However, authors continue to note benefits to the more traditional models of longer-term mobility (Farrogia, 2017; Giolando, 2016; Lough, 2009) (Chapter 2 Literature Review). When identifying benefits of an international experience for full-time undergraduate students, this research study identifies outcomes that have a positive effect or achieve a good result and are for the students' own benefit as Tyler *et. al.* (2018 p. 4) confirmed "it can be a benefit or a cost, but it must be something that would be more likely to happen to an individual on an international experience, rather than someone in the UK".

1.3 Context

As a framework for context, the researcher for this research study considers that study abroad involves the undertaking of credit bearing modules, not just attendance (i.e. where a student completes part of their programme of study abroad, with transfer of credits to their UK programme). University organised short visits and experiences are expected to be structured (established visits set up and led by academic staff). Periods of international work-placement are expected to have learning objectives agreed by the home (sending and sometimes called 'local') institution, student and employer.

This research study investigates *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students* and takes place in the political context of an English post 1992 university based within the North Midlands area, which is given the pseudonym University A within this thesis. The person conducting this research study is employed as a manager for practice learning by the institution and is directly involved in

taking groups of students abroad and organising study and work experience abroad. University A attracts 30% of its students from the local area, with 56% classed as 'commuter students' who travel daily to study from outside the immediate city conurbation. Over half the city's population (53%) live in areas that are among the 20% most deprived in the country, as the local Public Health Profile identified. The latest available Public Health England Local Area Health Profile data contained in a city council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2019), shows that in 2019, 63% of the city's population was of working age between 16 and 64 years. Just under three quarters (71.6%) of this population is 'economically active' (in work or available for work), compared to a national average for England of 75.2%. An estimated 6,000 people are unemployed, a rate of 5.8% of the economically active population (the national rate for England at the time of this data is 4.7%). Compared to the rest of England, the Public Health England Local Area Health Profile (2019) identifies that the city's adult population is poorly qualified. The number of people with no qualifications is about twice the national average and the number of people with the highest qualifications is more than half the national average. Average pay within the city is £100 lower per week than the rest of England, with 20.8% of people experiencing deprivation due to low incomes, compared to an average for England of 14.6%. 22% of children (aged 0 – 15 years) live in out-of-work benefit households, compared to an average for England of 14%. The city is classified as being within the top 15 of the most deprived local authority areas in England and is regarded as an "entrenched social mobility cold spot" by the UK Government Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission Social Mobility Index (2021 p. 3). This research takes place during the time of a Conservative UK Government.

The intake profile for University A, taken from University A enrolment statistical data, evidenced that:

- 45% of full-time students and 30% of part-time students are classified as 'widening participation', as per the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Widening participation: UK Performance Indicators (2020). A current emphasis by HEIs on 'widening participation' is noted by Levitas (2004)
- 19% of full-time and 12% of part-time students declare a disability or learning need
- 20% of full-time students and 15% of part-time students are from a British Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background
- 49% of the student population are female

- 23.5% of students are classified as being within the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) within the lowest two deciles
- 56% of full-time undergraduate students are 'commuters' (travelling from their main home to University A) with 33% having their main residence address local to the university's central campus

University A is one of 30 HEIs, who in 2019 signed up to a Civic University Agreement which pledges University A to play a leading role in enhancing the quality of life experienced by its local community. Civic University Agreements are a key recommendation in a report published by the Civic University Commission, set up by the University Partnerships Foundation. In 2022 University A developed a strategic plan with an aim of becoming a 'civic anchor university'. This strategic strategy recognises the importance for University A having an 'international mindset' and ensuring that graduates have the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in a global marketplace. The landscape in which University A is situated is recognised by the Social Mobility Index (2021 p. 5), acknowledging how the "city performs badly on both educational measures and adulthood outcomes", providing its young residents with fewer opportunities than the UK national average to improve outcomes for themselves. A Social Mobility Opportunity Area Report (2021, p. 44) notes how "progression into higher education for pupils from state funded schools in the city is also well below the national average" and continues to state how "in all cases, the city is amongst one of the lowest performing areas in the country".

Universities UK International (UUKI, 2017, p. 15) notes that participation of students who spent time working, studying or volunteering abroad in 2015-16 is dominated by those classified as being "from higher socio-economic backgrounds" (see table 1.3.1). It continues noting that "participation is highest amongst those from higher managerial and professional backgrounds", stating this category is "more than twice as likely to go abroad as those from a routine occupation background".

Socio-economic status	Number of mobile students	Participation rate
1 – Higher managerial and professional occupations	6,845	2.9
2 – Lower managerial and professional occupations	6,820	2.4
3 – Intermediate occupations	2,485	1.8
4 – Small employers and own account workers	1,420	1.9
5 – Lower supervisory and technical occupations	795	1.7
6 – Semi routine occupations	2,165	1.4
7 – Routine occupations	935	1.3
8 – Never worked and long term unemployed	10	-
9 – Unknown	4,545	-
Grand Total	26,025	1.7

Table 1.3.1 Mobile students and participation rates by socio-economic status, 2015 – 2016, source UUKI publication Widening Participation in UK Outward Mobility (2017, p. 15)

Hillman (2023 p. 1) cites the 1963 Robbins Report as “one of the most important official social policy documents of the post-war era”, which “foresaw a much larger higher education sector for Great Britain” Hillman (2023 p. 1) identifies the Robbins Report as stating that “courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them who wish to do so”. Hillman (2023 p. 9) concludes that the Robbins Report has an “enduring relevance” on government methodology for assessing higher education student demand and the principal of long-term university expansion “for ensuring better educated populace”. Barr *et al.* (2007 p. 19) cite a belief that “the Report was not right about everything”, particularly with financing the foreseen expansion of higher education places. However, Barr *et al.* (2007 p. 19) acknowledge that “initially, the additional numbers are relatively small”. Barr *et al.* (2007 p. 19) continue to note how plans to suggest increasing student participation in higher education should be funded through a system of student loans, were rejected. However, Barr *et al.* (2007 p. 22) acknowledge that by the late 1980s “with the participation rate in higher education at 14%”, a system of student loans was introduced by the government. Barr *et al.* (2007 p. 23) argue that it is not the implication of a loan that is the biggest barrier to participation in higher education, rather it is “lack of attainment in school” and “support for pupils who are struggling”.

O’Shea (2016) describes widening participation students as being those who are first in family university entrants, with Levitas (2004 p. 53) noting the importance of enhancing “prospects of those from different classes, genders and ethnicities”. A House of Commons

briefing paper (2018 p. 3) discusses the UK Government policy for a widening participation strategy in higher education in England, describing widening participation as aiming "to address discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different groups of under-represented students". The House of Commons briefing paper (2018 p. 4) provides examples of disadvantaged and under-represented students as "lower income households; care-leavers; mature students; disabled students; students from some ethnic groups". Acknowledging changes in the focus of widening participation over time the House of Commons briefing paper (2018 p. 4) notes how there is now a focus on "older students and young white males from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds, because they are identified as having especially low participation in higher education." The briefing paper states that current strategy for widening participation aims to address participation with these new identified groups.

Connor *et al.* (2001) identify from their research findings that a student's socio-economic background is a determiner of their ability to make choices that impact on their participation in higher education. David *et al.* (2010 p. 2) discuss improving access to higher education for those from "diverse socio-economic, ethical/racial and gender backgrounds" and notes how higher education opportunities have been significantly increased during the twenty first century. David *et al.* (2010 p. 4-5) argue that Government policies have not created "fair and equal access to equal types of higher education" and that although a diverse range of higher educational opportunities exist, these "may not lead to equal benefits in labour markets". Crozier *et al.* (2009 p. 62) opine that universities are reporting success with widening participation, however, there is "polarisation of types of university" with one group "attracting working class and minority ethnic students", as the Sutton Trust notes. Crozier *et al.* (2009 p. 66-67) state that in their research study "middle class students" all "have more preparation for university life" and "know what to expect" than "working class students". Most middle-class students receive advice from their parents with these having attended university themselves and able to provide "insights and relevant experiences". Crozier *et al.* (2009 p. 68) continue to discuss the importance of university students from working-class backgrounds receiving information about their course programme and "the invisible pedagogy" of university study and life, because as evidenced by the Crozier *et al.* (2009 p. 69) study, some choose to "opt out" and "avoid the university social milieu and in some cases choose to live at home" and commute to campus daily.

Crozier *et al.* (2009 p. 69) note that the same is not true for students from middle class backgrounds, finding that with this group of students the social aspects of university life is a key driver for participation. Drawing conclusions from their study Crozier *et al.* (2009 p. 73) identify a need for higher education institutions to adapt their integration strategies and “inherent practices”, rather than expecting the student to change. The view of Crozier *et al.* (2009) aligns to the view of Devas (2011 p. 827) who argues that widening participation students have “a greater need for guidance than they are able to access”. Devas (2011 p. 827) opines that the systems and processes used by universities reinforced “profound inequalities in higher education”, with students expected to act independently, regardless of their background and social class. Layard (2014 p. 16) opines that at the time of the Robbins Report (1963) “the number of people with two or more A-Levels, which was considered the minimum entry qualification” for university entrants at the time of this report, was rising. However Layard (2014 p.16) notes that the number of enrolments onto university courses is expanding much more slowly, creating political pressure from “young people and middle-class parents”. Therefore Layard (2014 p. 16) argues that Robbins and the government committees of the time were correct to focus on a “demand for places approach”, maintaining free tuition and offering maintenance payments for those choosing to study at university. Layard (2014 p. 19) cites that since this time “more children from professional social classes are going to university every year” and that the “percentage point increase in university entry” has remained consistent across all social classes. Watson (2014 p. 33-38) notes how the UK has now become a “mass higher education system” with the UK now having a “lifelong-friendly learning system”, particularly in admitting mature students and “first time undergraduates aged over 21”.

Forrester *et al.* (2012 p. 7) note that the purpose of education could be contested with varying opinion of what education “should be doing and how it should be done”. Forrester *et al.* (2012 p. 7 - 109) opine that it is necessary to explore both policy and ideology when exploring education and that “the policy of (Post-Compulsory) Education is influenced by a broad range of social, cultural and historical factors”. The ideological concept of English education has become about competition and not collaboration. For example, the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 which created the Office for Students (OfS), supporting students as consumers of higher education with a remit to protect their consumer interests. The OfS (2023) acknowledges the emergence of the “student consumer” and “marketisation” of higher education in the UK. The Office for Students (OfS) is a non-departmental public body of the Department for Education, acting as the regulator and

competition authority for the higher education sector in England. The OfS was contacted as part of this research study and confirms they do not offer advice or direction to higher education providers with the development or direction of international study. However, the OfS offers signposting to the UK Council for International Student Affairs (2023) who describe themselves on their web site as “the UK’s national advisory body supporting international students and those who work with them” and who “provided advice, guidance and information about all aspects of the international student experience, from immigration and fees to mental health, culture shock and orientation”. At the time of this research study, this was an independently funded, membership-based organisation for institutions, students' unions and organisations working with international students and is not a government department.

The European Union ERASMUS programme (section 2.3.3) promotes international co-operation for study exchange and work experience abroad for its member countries higher education institutions. This research study considers that participation in ERASMUS has been important for the UK, as currently 53% of UK university students who study abroad do so through the scheme (BBC News 2019). Data from ERASMUS can take time to be processed and published, but shows that during 2017, 16,561 UK students participated in ERASMUS, while 31,727 EU nationals came to the UK. At the time that this research study is complete the United Kingdom has left the European Union (EU) and exited the ERASMUS programme, replacing this with the UK’s own Turing Scheme programme, which is discussed later within section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4. Whilst there is a great deal of change with the financial support arrangements for UK students considering an international experience, this research study is still considered relevant as it focusses on the benefits for full-time undergraduate students, regardless of how their international experience is financed. In considering UK students’ outward mobility to mainland European countries, it must be remembered that traditionally Europe has been more accessible to UK students. Membership of the various ERASMUS programmes provided financial support for international experiences (study abroad and traineeship/work-experience) in the geographic area covered by the ERASMUS scheme, which expanded to include more countries over time. However, in recent decades air travel is significantly cheaper and air routes more widely available, particularly from a growing array of regional airports, outside London. For these reasons, this research study considers it is important that this research focusses on international experience globally, rather than just that which was available to UK students through the ERASMUS programme.

This research study acknowledges that there are alternative virtual placements available by using on-line video conferencing services, for students who do not wish to travel or have face to face contact. Recent authors analysing the development and benefits of video conferencing as alternatives to face-to-face international experiences include Sundh (2018, p. 123) who judges the use of video conferencing facilities as “useful to establish contacts between students in different places and to develop intercultural understanding of school-related matters” and Panos (2005) who states, technological advancement in this area has been rapid with decreasing costs of technology. Phpponen (2021 p. 7) identifies a positive impact on virtual exchange and states a view that virtual mobility and physical mobility “are not in opposition – rather, they are both important parts of what I call an ecosystem for internationalisation”. McCollum (2023) cites a positive benefit of the Covid-19 pandemic as the greater use of on-line technology and a reduction in the need for air travel. McCollum (2023) notes how research into the use of international virtual mobility suggests that this type of mobility is a compliment to international physical mobility, rather than a direct replacement for it. Whilst acknowledging the development of video conferencing and virtual placements, this research study only focusses on face-to-face international experience.

1.4 Internationalisation - definitions

1.4.1 Problems with defining international mobility

The UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2020, p. 1) defines international placements as:

Any period of study within a higher education course where that block of learning takes place at on-site workplaces, partner universities or learning environments (such as field work) outside the UK

QAA (2020) note that placements may either be self-sourced by students or arranged directly by a student’s provider. There is broad agreement of the QAA definition when reviewing the Universities UK campaign titled ‘Go International – Stand Out’ (2017, p. 1) where outward student mobility is defined as “study, work or volunteer periods abroad undertaken by UK domiciled students for two or more weeks as part of their UK higher education programme”. Study abroad is defined by UUKI (2017 p. 29) as mobility abroad

“where a student is studying for both credit and non-credit bearing modules”; work as “where a student is doing paid work such as an internship”; volunteering as “undertaking voluntary or other unpaid work”. Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 390) cite the work of Nuttman-Schwartz and Berger (2011) who identify four different types of international placement models in their work:

Independent/one-time model – student or faculty member arranges placement with minimal support; the neighbour country model - students are in a geographically close country; on-site group model - exchange of a group with faculty staff from the home university; exchange / reciprocal model - requiring more resources involving faculty field seminars, supervision and guest lecturers in the host country

Andresen (2014, p. 2295) notes confusion with the terminology connected with different forms of international experience, stating “a growing array of different forms of international work experiences such as assigned and self-initiated expatriation” continuing, “However, the criteria for demarcation of these different forms are often unclear”.

Sweeney (2012, p. 9) describes international outward mobility as “a period of study or work of at least one semester in another European Country as an integrated part of a UK study programme”. Sweeney (2012, p. 9) also notes the concept of “virtual mobility” which he says is achieved by “participation in networks facilitated through technology”. A third type of mobility is identified as “brief study visits, seminars and/or conferences delivered over a few days in a higher education institution abroad”, which Sweeney (2012, p. 9) notes is “an area of growing engagement”. Andresen (2014) and Sweeney (2012) agree that there are multiple definitions of outward student mobility which encompass many different international learning activities and exchanges and that this can be confusing when discussing the concept of students’ international experience. For this research study it is fundamentally important to be able to use a single terminology (as section 1.2 notes) to encompass all types of international experience for United Kingdom (UK) full-time undergraduate higher education students.

1.4.2 Internationalisation

Kreber (2009, p. 1) notes that the concept of internationalisation has increased rapidly since the 1990s and “has become a key theme and widespread phenomenon in higher

education” and that the concepts of internationalisation and globalisation are frequently discussed together. Kreber (2009, p. 2) suggests that internationalisation focusses on countries’ or higher education institutions’ “responses to macro socio-economic processes and effects of globalisation”, noting that these are external and not in direct control. Kreber (2009) suggests that internationalisation is the way in which institutions respond to the effects of globalisation. Svensson *et al.* (2010, p. 596) note there is concern with the internationalisation of higher education which they opine is “closely linked to economic-political-policy demands”. Svensson *et al.* (2010, p. 596) are of the opinion that universities are expected to work within a ‘knowledge-based economy’ and to become more self-supporting financially. Crucial to these aims is income generation and a university’s place within university league/ranking tables. Svensson *et al.* (2010) state that this has driven a desire to recruit international students. Zobotkina (2013 p. 59) views the internationalisation of higher education through a different lens, believing that this is a “key concept of modern education” that is focussed on supporting and developing student employability and that this should be “part of the whole process of education” continuing to state an opinion that “students should be able to apply their knowledge at international level”.

Wit (2020) and Uzhegova *et al.* (2020) note a clear and now universally used definition of internationalisation in higher education, provided by Knight (2013, p. 85) who states “The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education” Wit (2020, p. 1) notes that universities have always “had international dimensions in their research, teaching, and service to society”. Wit (2020, p. 1) expresses a view that during the 1990s because of globalisation and regionalisation, this has created a “context for a more strategic approach towards the internationalisation of higher education”. Wit (2020) contextualises internationalisation as the mobility of students, scholars, university reputation, branding and programmes of study. It is the view of Wit (2020, p. 1) that “internationalisation of education has become an industry, a source of revenue and a means for an enhanced reputation”. Uzhegova *et al.* (2020, p. 1) challenge the view that the internationalisation of higher education is a “global public good”, particularly for peripheral universities. Uzhegova *et al.* (2020, p. 1) note their view that internationalisation is now “central to the agendas of higher education institutions and governments across the world”. In section 5.26 (Chapter 5) of this work, the concept of internationalisation is analysed in respect of University A and the context of this research study.

1.4.3 Globalisation- definition

Several authors have commented on the lack of a definition for globalisation (Reich, 1998; Unterhalter *et al.* 2010; Svensson *et al.* 2010). Reich (1998, p. 3) describes 'globalisation' as "so elusive as to defy definition". However, the use of this term has become more widespread with its meaning evolving over time. Spring (2008, p. 331) identifies a comment concerning globalisation that has been included within a European Commission report in 1998, citing:

the European Commission's (1998) document Teaching and Learning: On Route to the Learning Society describes three basic impulses for globalization: These three impulses are the advent of the information society, of scientific and technical civilisation and the globalisation of the economy. All three contribute to the development of a learning society

Svensson *et al.* (2010, p. 596) describe the concept of globalisation as the "flow of people, money, products and ideas" and note that this is external to higher education institutions but that these factors "influence the organisation of higher education". O'Rourke *et al.* (2004, p. 109) comment on a perceived lack of definition defining the concept as "the integration of markets across space" and adding the notion of 'market integration'. Ciu (2016 p. 1) describes the concept of globalisation as unquestionable, stating that this is a "social movement" and calls for consciously "infusing global perspectives" into the education curriculum. Ciu (2016 p. 1) continues to add that the concept of global education uses a "world centric mind set", without limitations by "considering perspectives in isolated contexts or constraining teaching to ethno-specific points of view". The research findings of Ciu (2016 p. 8) notes that the length of study abroad may impact on levels of global mindedness. The development of the concept of globalisation as viewed by Dagen *et al.* (2019, p. 643) that after 1989 "technology facilitates unprecedented levels of global social interconnectedness", continuing to comment that "since the 1980s globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation have also strongly entered the academic research arena". It is evident that there is no clear definition for the concept of globalisation. Mayo *et al.* (2018 p. 113) note how the future success of industry depends on understanding and building cross-cultural relations. Mayo *et al.* (2018 p. 123) express a view that students need to be "prepared for and respond to this challenge" continuing to describe the importance for educators to allow "students to explore how culture impacts on business concepts and practices cross culturally". Ciu (2016) and Mayo (2018) acknowledge a need

for higher education students to develop cultural awareness for employment in a globalised world as Dagen *et al.* (2019) and Svensson *et al.* (2010) note.

For this research study globalisation is viewed within an educational context, with a focus on increasing the mobility of students and acknowledging the impact of national and international external factors. Unterhalter *et al.* (2010 p. 17) note how “the driving forces of globalisation” are most evidenced in education through technological change which has created a more “international student body” supporting new delivery and research collaborations. Through this change Unterhalter *et al.* (2010 p. 17) discuss pedagogic changes with “quality assurance and peer review” which can now be exported and contested globally. Unterhalter *et al.* (2010 p. 18) state how the process of globalisation involves a “change of scale” and a “change of nature with socio-economic relations” to deliver higher volumes of students through higher education. Discussion and evaluation of globalisation within the context of findings for this research study forms part of section 5.9 of Chapter 5.

1.4.4 Glocalisation - definition

Patel *et al.* (2013 p. 223) discuss glocalisation as an alternative to the internationalisation of higher education, stating that glocalisation “encourages the enhancement of learners’ glocal experience through a critical academic and cultural exchange of global and local socio-economic and political issues”. Patel *et al.* (2013 p. 223) express a view that glocalisation is a merger of global and local perspectives on the “socio-economic and political” environment, which impact on both local and global communities. Patel *et al.* (2013 p. 225) opine how “alternative viewpoints, on local and global socio-economic and political concerns are important, if respectfully exchanged” and how in terms of an education setting, this can enhance the education process. Dvir *et al.* (2019 p. 18) offer an opinion that “glocalisation’ in an educational context supports the preparation of “students for their adult lives in a globalizing economy and world”. Jons *et al.* (2019 p. 10) acknowledge a difference in the way that local economies adapt to global “processes and practices in transnational education and careers”, citing a “variety of regional scales between the local and the global” Reed (2007 p. 16) discusses how by focussing on local ways of living this can build competences that are crucial for global citizenship. Reed (2007 p. 16-17) refers to this process as glocalising education. Reed (2007) opines that

education must “validate local knowledge and make connections between the local and the global” believing that “education is one institution played in a globalisation process”.

Burbules *et al.* (2000 p. 13) discuss how “dualities occur” in education “between the global and the local” and that globalisation can now be “viewed as a trend towards homonoginisation in Western culture”. Ball (2012) expresses a view that policy mobility and glocalisation need to be understood in a similar context, with Ball (2012) noting how non-hierarchical structures are replacing bureaucratic relations, with the delivery of public services globally. Ball (2012) argues that the growth of global advocacy and for-profit organisations in the provision of education is creating global discourse across the education sector. Ball (2012 p. 15) argues that neo-liberalism “works on and in public sector institutions”, because the state is important to neo-liberalism, as “the regulator and market maker”. Ball (2012 p. 15) notes examples of “quasi-markets”, for example, “public-private partnerships” and what the author describes as the “enterprising up” of public organisations. Ball (2012) notes how central to a neo-liberal approach is “a less state – more markets” approach. Burbules *et al.* (2000 p. 60) argue that a neo-liberalism approach is part of a “more extensive attack on government employees” and through a focus on “consumer choice” supports exporting blame “from the decisions of dominant groups, onto the state and on to poor people”. Burbules *et al.* (2000 p. 60) argues that this has created closer links between education and the economy. Forrester *et al.* (2012 p. 133) opine a neo-liberal approach within the UK has created a situation where universities are encouraged to maximise their recruitment of students to gain income, with this in turn meaning that higher education institutions must consider “efficiency, marketability and open competition” in place of the previous notions of “egalitarianism and social justice”.

Several authors (Ball, 2012; Burbules *et al.* 2000; Forrester *et al.*, 2012; Jons *et al.*, 2019; Patel *et al.*, 2013; Reed, 2007) acknowledge how products and services, such as education are developing globally and view glocalisation as the process of changing delivery from the global perspective and adapting this on a local level, to make things more specific for individuals within the context of their local market and needs. Ball (2012) cites the importance of a neo-liberalism approach by governments in allowing the education market to open up and develop itself in a global way, with Dvir *et al.* (2019 p. 18) seeing this process as enhancing the employability of students, enabling them to succeed in global career markets. This research study uses the definition provided by Dvir *et al.* (2019), who note that glocalisation focusses on the role of universities in preparing students for their future employment and lives in a globalised economy.

1.4.5 Global citizenship - definition

The concept of the development of global citizenship is longstanding as is evidenced by the work of Davies *et al.* (2005, p. 67) who explore the meaning of "citizenship education" and "global education" from an English perspective and as early as 2004/5 argue for further debate to create a new form of education for "global citizenship". Davies *et al.* (2005) note that at the time of their work there were many writers discussing a wide variety of contexts connected to globalisation. Davies *et al.* (2005) express their view that globalisation impacts significantly upon the nature of education with parameters extending to the economy, technology and communication, population and the environment. In particular, stating that the scale and rapid increase in information flow at the time of this work is impacting significantly on aspects of society. Bosanquet (2010, p. 1) notes that higher education institutions frequently refer to a multitude of different terminology to indicate the perceived enhanced benefits of 'global citizenship'. Terms used by universities include "intercultural awareness, cross-cultural competency, inclusivity, diversity, globalisation, sustainability, leadership, multiculturalism, internationalisation and community engagement". Bosanquet (2010, p. 3) state global citizenship is "an ambiguous and contested notion". Bosanquet (2010, p. 7) concludes that a broader aspect of internationalisation and social inclusion is required for 'global citizenship' and 'social inclusion' in higher education. In describing what this means, Bosanquet (2010, p. 7) cites "complex interactions between the education of international students; offshore teaching; international research partnerships; increasing community and industry engagement; higher mobility of staff and students between institutions", amongst others. Bosanquet (2010, p. 1) perceives a wide range of international links across the higher education community and between institutions and that these are all equally important in delivering the concept of 'global citizenship' for students. Focussing on outcomes for students, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2024) describe "global competence" as a "multi-dimensional construct that requires a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied to global issues or intercultural situations". Acquisition of "global competence" is viewed positively by developing cultural awareness; employability skills, including "building trust in diverse teams" and supporting sustainability. Torres (2015, p. 262) discussing the concept of global citizenship note "Global citizenship education interacts with globalisation and neo-liberalism, key concepts which designate movements that have come to define our era of global interdependence". Torres (2015)

suggests that there is a link between free market capitalism, globalisation and a requirement to develop and equip people as global citizens, with the skills that they need and who are best able to take advantage of these trade (free market) conditions. Akkari *et al.* (2019, p. 178) discuss the concept of global citizenship noting that enhanced information and communication technology and increased cultural and ethical diversity present an increased interest for post-national and global citizenship models to support living in a “global world”. Akkari *et al.* (2019, p. 176) express views that the concept of “citizen of the world” is not a new idea and their view that “globalisation is mostly driven by economics, business and technology, which creates “continuous flows of products, capital, people and information across the world”. It is the opinion of Akkari *et al.* (2019, p. 176) that ‘global citizenship’ “refers to a shared sense of identity and human values”. A brief review of UK university global citizenship programmes shows that, whilst there is wide variation in course content, a sense of common identity and values is at least part of their programme aims. Akkari *et al.* (2019, p. 177) also note that an increased focus on global citizenship is impacted upon by “anti-globalization rhetoric, growing scepticism towards multiculturalism, a rise of nationalism and anti-refugee discourse”.

The work of Akkari (2019) and Rhodas (2011) suggest that, as Davies *et al.* (2005) argue, the concept of creating global citizens continues and is more widely embedded and accepted by HEIs globally. Perry (2013, p. 186) discusses how HEIs actively promote internationalisation as a key strategy, suggesting that they are developing “global citizens” as part of their educational mission. Perry (2013, p. 184) states that graduates of the modern era are “critically dependent on an interconnected world, and universities have a responsibility to promote global mindedness, to provide greater employment opportunities for their graduates”.

Reflecting on the over-arching concepts discussed in this chapter (internationalisation; globalisation; glocalisation; global citizenship), the rationale for this research study is drawn from the personal experience of the researcher, whose job role is to promote participation in an international experience for undergraduate students at University A. The researcher for this research study works within the International Partnerships department at University A and has first-hand knowledge of the way in which universities, as noted by Wit (2020), may use strands of internationalisation strategies for revenue generation and reputation building.

Global citizenship is taken forward in Chapter 5 with further discussion and analysis in relation to the findings from this research study, including employability (section 5.2.3) and encouragement for students to participate in an international experience (section 5.26).

Chapter 1 introduces this research study, its aim and objectives and the context for University A. The chapter provides an overview of definitions of over-arching concepts relating to the research question and considers the positionality of the researcher for this research study. Moving forward, the following Chapter (Chapter 2) discusses previous studies and literature in relation to this research study and analyses existing literature to identify gaps and themes throughout this thesis. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology for this research study. Chapter 4 presents findings from the primary research and is the core point where research data analysis occurs, involving statistical analysis and thematic coding to support interpreting the data and to derive meaningful insight. Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the quantitative and qualitative responses of the research participants, using existing literature to draw connections, highlight implications and discuss the significance of the research results. Finally, Chapter 6 draws conclusions and evidence-informed discussion about this research study's contribution to the provision of new knowledge (section 6.4).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and approach taken to literature review

The literature review discusses and reviews studies, perspectives, theories and bodies of work relevant to the research question, i.e. *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?* Literature is critically examined in relation to themes within the planned research and highlights any strengths, limitations and gaps. The literature review demonstrates the journey taken which influences the research approach, with literature later discussed with the findings in the Analysis and Discussion chapter (Chapter 5).

A review of available literature identifies several themes relevant to the research question. The review commences with an overview of internationalisation of higher education and the landscape within which international experience for students is part. The literature review continues with a review of authors who discuss international experience in the context of higher education, following on with an examination of authors' work directly identifying benefits for students of participation in an international experience. There is then a review of authors identifying barriers to participation. Finally, after discussing the concepts of cultural and aspirational capital, there is an introduction to conceptual and theoretical frameworks relevant to this research.

The approach to this literature review commences with a list of key words used for searching electronic academic library resources (print books, eBooks, journals and articles). Searches cover academic library resources and open access content and allow material to be identified down to individual article level. Key words in searches are: student mobility; international mobility; study exchange; work-experience abroad; traineeships; inter-institutional exchange; student international experience; globalisation higher education; global citizenship higher education; internationalisation higher education; glocalisation higher education; practice learning abroad. Considering positionality, the researcher for this research study chose key words for literature searches drawn from the researcher's experience working in an international development role at University A. A review is made of suitability by reading titles and abstract, removing any articles that are not relevant to the research question of *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students.* Where difficulty in the assessment of any article by

reading the title and abstract alone is evident, a full-text reading of the article occurs. A final reading of selected articles ensures relevance to the research question. This process leads to articles informing the literature review. Published work for this literature review is thematic, according to the main themes that exist within current literature (the landscape for student international experience; student international experience within the context of higher education; barriers to student participation in an international experience; cultural and aspirational capital). This process enables the identification of key authors and their work, along with an understanding of who is saying what and when. Literature is spread across a wide range of themed areas relevant to international experience. In cases where several authors discuss the same theme, they tend to remain in agreement about key findings and/or recommendations. Therefore, there is little disagreement between the main authors writing in this area of knowledge.

The literature review examines published work from 1990 onwards, acknowledging the relevance of early 1990s work as the beginnings of thinking about the benefits for students of participation in an international experience. For example, Carlson *et al.*, (1990), DeMartini, (1992) and Kauffmann *et al.* (1992) who start to examine the wider student experience of study abroad. The work available from this period, focusses on the benefits of short-term international placements (St Clair *et al.*, 1992) and from an employer perspective (Barron, 1997). The European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) and Universities UK (UUK) publishes several papers which significantly contribute to available data on the number of UK outward student mobilities, their subject groupings and destination countries. For example, the EU publication ERASMUS Facts, Figures and Trends (2015). This publication (section 2.3.4) defines the historic nature and practice of UK and European outward student mobility.

There is a review of many relevant empirical articles from around the world, discussing outward student mobility. This systematic literature review provides a timely update of existing research and debates focussing on the benefits of university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students. Section 2.8.1 discusses strengths and limitations of the literature. This literature review discusses the current UK political climate, along with factors which have influenced the development of student mobility (e.g. the Bologna Declaration of 1999) and wider support for international experience. This review encompasses available data from UUK and ERASMUS, along with key findings from their most recent research. Authors' work is split across a variety of areas and points of intersection. Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023) provide a scoping review

synthesising articles which focus on how institutional internationalisation practices impact student outcomes. Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023 p.6) discuss how the research team reviews 967 articles, assigning each to one of 21 thematic categories, with 9% of papers “not meeting the inclusion criteria”. Findings from the Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023 p.8) review of available literature indicate that “only 22.8% of papers reviewed evaluate the impact on student outcomes or experiences”. However, Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023 p.8) consider that authors work in other categories, still makes “a valuable contribution to knowledge” from a “relatively limited evidence base”. Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023 p.8) conclude that the “majority of institutional strategies about internationalisation focus on research and student recruitment, rather than issues of student experience” and that there is a “need to develop more complex research designs which collect evidence” pertaining to “student outcomes and experiences” in this area.

This literature review consolidates findings from the published literature into relevant themes to this research study including the landscape for student international experience; student international experience within the context of higher education; barriers to student participation in an international experience; cultural and aspirational capital. An acknowledgement of social, cultural, aspirational and navigational capital supports the overall context of the aims of this research study.

2.2 Further critical evaluation of definitions – policy context

This section continues discussion of the over-arching concepts discussed in the introduction chapter (Chapter 1)

Baty (2009) discusses how senior managers in HEIs are driving international strategies for global futures and how the concept of internationalisation is becoming part of universities’ strategic plans which are overseen by their governing bodies. Knight (2012) states a view that the concept of internationalisation is embedded into university strategic plans.

Supporting the internationalisation of the UK higher education sector, the UK Department for Education and Department for International Trade in their joint publication ‘International Education Strategy Global Potential, Global Growth’ (2019, p. 26) recognise the role of government in supporting higher education providers with international strategies. This publication notes that “The Department for International Trade International Team will lead much of the directed work with the sector”, noting the

significance of education as an export to the UK with an estimated income of 19.9 billion. This publication considers that policy acts as an influencer and driver of change for UK higher education institutions.

The importance of internationalisation as a part of higher education has continued and remains current, for example, Wit (2020) states a belief that internationalisation is important for the enhanced reputation of universities and Uzhegova (2020) considers that internationalisation is of prominent importance to both universities and governments. Baty (2009, p. 16) notes comments made by Sir Drummond Bone (former vice-chancellor of Liverpool University), citing "a dramatic increase in student mobility" and advises institutions to "move away from equating international strategy with student recruitment alone, to a much wider internationalisation agenda". Aamaas *et al.* (2019) agree with the earlier work of Baty (2009) and Aamaas *et al.* (2019, p. 539) note the importance of internationalisation and international placement opportunities to universities, stating "internationalisation has, in recent years, become an increased priority for higher education institutions, many of which offer students opportunities for studying and doing placements abroad." Aamaas *et al.* (2019, p. 539) argue that there is a need for more thorough understanding of learning outcomes as well as the wide variety and types of international experience, offered by global universities including "studying at a foreign university; participating in service-learning programmes abroad; going on excursions accompanied by a lecturer; undertaking a placement in schools in a foreign country."

Vinther *et al.* (2013, p. 797) argue that the movement of international students has inspired "educational renewal in universities" as this group of students "bring with them expectations and experiences that can benefit receiving institutions". Vinther *et al.* (2013, p. 798) note that the recruitment of international students has become "big business" for universities worldwide. Also, Parker *et al.* (2015, p. 6) comment about the issue of internationalisation within higher education, noting that this has "captured the imagination of many Higher Education Institutions in the bid towards the development of their profiles regionally, nationally and internationally". Vinther *et al.* (2013) is referring to the recruitment of international students by universities. The Migration Advisory Committee (2018 p. 66) reports that the impact of international students is generally viewed as positive by UK domestic students, particularly in the areas of providing a world view; developing a global network; awareness of cultural sensitivities. Discussing the impact of international recruitment on UK domestic students' experience, the Migration Advisory Committee (2018) offer an acknowledgement of strong world-wide competition for the

recruitment of international students. A positive economic benefit, is cited by the Migration Advisory Committee (2018), including cross subsidising the education of domestic students from international recruitment.

Gerhards *et al.* (2018, p. 682) provide the first direct empirical evidence that “the symbolic capital of a country and university determines the international mobility chances for students”. Gerhards *et al.* (2018) argue that there is a direct correlation between the country that a student resides in and their chance of being accepted for a place at an international university, alluding to an unconscious bias at work within the selection process. Gerhards *et al.* (2018, p. 670) conclude with a view that symbolic capital attributes to international university applicants and that this provides for “unequal opportunity to become internationally mobile”. In respect of placement and/or exchange students, Gerhards *et al.* (2018) argue that a student’s success in securing an exchange/placement will, in part, be dependent on the symbolic capital of the country from which they are applying, agreeing with Uzhegova (2020) about the importance of reputation (Wit: 2020) for both university and government. Morley *et al.* (2018, p. 538) identify the concept of mobility as being a key driver through which internationalisation occurs, however, they question whether the opportunity for mobility is impacted upon and therefore distributed unevenly amongst “different social groups and geopolitical spheres”. This view aligns with the work of Gerhards *et al.* (2018 p. 672) who describe “core”, countries with a high degree of symbolic capital, consisting of the USA and UK and a “periphery” which they opine includes “the educational institutions in most countries in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia”. Both Gerhards *et al.* (2018) and Morley *et al.* (2018) state that this uneven distribution impacts directly on a student’s chance of succeeding in securing an outward international mobility.

A study by Buckner (2019, p. 315) analyses survey data from administration staff, working across 137 countries, to understand their interpretations of the concept of internationalisation. Findings from this research study confirm that administrators from higher education institutions at “knowledge intensive economies” are more likely to view benefits as “enhancing international awareness”. However, those working at Anglophone (English speaking) countries are much more likely to interpret internationalisation in terms of revenue generation. This may be because, as earlier noted in this section by the Migration Advisory Committee (2018), international students are perceived as a valuable source of economic benefit by Universities in English speaking nations such as the UK and USA and their national governments. Hence, the competition to recruit international

students acknowledged by the Migration Advisory Committee (2018) and authors such as Knight (2012), who identify links with internationalisation to university strategic aims. Buckner (2019, p. 330) states that in these countries the recruitment of international students is seen as a method by which the economy could “make up for declining public funding” and that this is also a method by which they can “capitalise off global demand for English”. It is evident from the Buckner (2019) study the concept of internationalisation is viewed largely in terms of ability to generate increased revenue by Anglophone (English speaking) nations, however, Buckner (2019, p. 333) opines that the benefits of internationalisation can be and are often “localised” to meet the “broader needs and opportunities associated with particular national contexts”.

Several authors (Aamaas *et al.*, 2019; Baty, 2009; Gerhards *et al.*, 2018; Uzhegova, 2020; Vinther *et al.*, 2013; Wit, 2020) suggest that internationalisation within the context of higher education has increased in momentum over time, particularly since the turn of the last century and rapidly during the last decade and is now widely embedded across the higher education sector. However, Buckner (2019) identifies that the benefits derived from internationalisation can be localised and may not always relate to a drive to recruit international students for income, particularly outside English-speaking nations. Internationalisation is, at least in part, driven by a market-led desire to recruit worldwide students and that this is largely seen as positive by the higher education community, bringing both intercultural and financial benefits as noted by Vinther *et al.* (2013) and Wit (2020) in the case of English-speaking nations. Svensson *et al.* (2010, p. 598) note non-financial measures of success could be seen by universities to include the “increased mobility of students, teachers or researchers”. The acknowledgement of non-financial measures for mobility of students by Svensson *et al.* (2010) aligns with Buckner (2019) and the view that the benefits of internationalisation may be localised and do not always have to relate to student recruitment and income generation.

Authors (Kreber, 2009; Morley *et al.*, 2018; Uzhegova, 2020; Wit, 2020) agreeing with the view of Tikly (2001, p. 169) that “education cannot succeed alone and if educational reform is to be successful it must articulate with broader processes and struggles for change at the global, regional, national and local levels”. Kreber (2009) and Wit (2020) discuss how they perceive globalisation has impacted upon the organisation of higher education across the globe. Rose (2018, p. 111-112) discusses how Japan’s Ministry of Education aims to internationalise higher education in Japan and how an investment project titled ‘Top Global University Project’ has emerged to create “globally orientated universities”, with the aim of

increasing the role of foreign languages and such universities will appear in university global rankings. Particularly, Rose (2018, p. 114-115) notes how English language has been integrated into many courses by universities across Southeast Asia for the purpose of facilitating international student mobility. It is clear from a review of literature (Kreber, 2009; Morley *et al.*, 2018; Uzhegova, 2020; Wit, 2020) that globalisation is considered external to the higher education sector, but that it is having an increasing impact on how the sector operates. The impact is to create a structural adjustment of universities and education (Mock, 2005), leading to increased competition for students and enhancements to university profiles to increase their advancement in global league tables (Svensson *et al.*, 2010). Noting worldwide regional developments to enhance higher education provision Kondakci *et al.*' (2017) state that such developments are driven by governments to gain political dominance in regional areas of the world and to develop and promote reputation (Uzhegova, 2020; Wit, 2020). Singh *et al.* (2018) state that former exporters of students such as China are developing strategies to internationalise their own education systems and becoming 'regional hubs' (section 2.3.6). In the future Kondakci *et al.*' (2017) and Singh *et al.* (2018) suggest that this may change the dynamics of international student recruitment and mobility, as there may not be the demand to travel to English-speaking nations, as these former exporters of international students develop their own knowledge-based economies.

Mason *et al.* (2009) note a positive impact of international work experience for students. Mason *et al.* (2009) discuss how structured work experience and employer involvement with the development of degree level courses has the most positive outcome on the later ability of graduates to secure graduate level employment. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2019) describes the notion of transversal skills as "skills that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings". An article produced by The Skills and Education Group (2019 p. 1) states that most skills development courses "focus on hard, functional or specialist skills", continuing to state that "it is transversal skills that employers demand the most", as it is these skills that allow individuals to adapt to change and to "lead meaningful productive lives". The article acknowledges that whilst most individuals possess transversal skills, these skills are more developed in some individuals than in others. The Skills and Education Group (2019 p. 1) cite six categories of transversal skills as identified by UNESCO, "critical and innovative thinking; interpersonal skills (communication with others);

intrapersonal skills (communication with self); global citizenship; media and information literacy; others (e.g., problem solving, communication, teamwork and leadership)". Mason *et al.* (2009) along with other authors (Dagen *et al.*, 2019; Dvir *et al.*, 2019; Svensson *et al.*, 2010) agree that international work experience is beneficial for students. The UK HESA measures graduate outcomes and produces statistics, profiling the employment of graduates 15 months after finishing their higher education course. Therefore, UK universities have a direct interest in developing the employability skills of their graduates to support their entry into employment.

The World Economic Forum (2020) project a belief that 50% of employers will require re-skilling by the year 2025, caused by greater adoption of technology by employers, which has accelerated because of the coronavirus pandemic and a move towards greater use of technology and automation. Critical thinking and problem solving are identified by the World Economic Forum (2020) as the skills employers will demand the most between 2020 and 2025, along with strong emerging demand for skills in the areas of self-management, active learning resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility. Lopez *et al.* (2020 p. 16) identify a strong link between the acquisition of transversal skills and employability for young people, expressing a belief that globalisation is requiring society to "master socio-cultural tools for interacting with others. Lopez *et al.* (2020 p. 2) state a belief that "globalisation and technological changes are transforming the needs of employers" which is leading to employers seeking candidates "with demonstrated transversal competences" which may be in the form of skills relating to "adaptability, leadership, teamwork and clear communication in different languages". Standley (2015 p. 4) makes a point that some students will "have legitimate reasons for not wanting to go abroad". Standley (2015 p. 4) advises such students to note that "employers are primarily looking for the transversal skills developed through international experience (e.g. openness to and curiosity about new challenges) rather than the international experience per se". Lopez *et al.* (2020) and Standley (2015) recognise the advice provided by The Skills and Education Group (2019 p. 1) that employers are seeking graduates who are adaptable to change and good when working with others, skills which cut across different tasks and job roles, thus enabling employers to be flexible with the deployment of their staff. Lopez *et al.* (2020), Standley (2015) and The Skills and Education Group (2019) recognise that participation in an international experience is one method by which undergraduate students can develop these skills.

In summary, it is possible to see how through the over-arching concepts of internationalisation, globalisation, global citizenship and development of transversal skills,

UK Universities have an interest in promoting uptake of an international experience to their students, as one of several methods by which they can internationalise themselves, providing benefit to both the student and the university.

2.3 The landscape for student international experience

This section introduces authors discussing processes, the political landscape at the time that this research study is taking place and available data for student mobility, relevant to the research question.

2.3.1 The Bologna Declaration of 1999

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 creates the European Higher Education Area under the Lisbon Recognition Convention, through a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries. The process, as of 2023 includes 49 States, which form the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with a purpose of enhancing the quality and recognition of European higher education systems, to improve the conditions for exchange and collaboration. Amaral *et al.* (2004) discuss the driving forces of the Bologna process contrasting perceived advantages and negative effects. Amaral *et al.* (2004, p. 79) confirm their view that “the Bologna process can be interpreted as a strategy to increase higher education relevance to (the) economy”. It was Amaral *et al.*'s (2004, p. 82) view that higher education when “seen from both a cultural and economic point of view” has the potential to be enriched through the process of ‘globalisation’.

Amaral *et al.* (2004, p. 83) note that the Bologna process when signed on 19th June 1999 set the following objectives: -

- adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adopt a system based on two main cycles (undergraduate and post-graduate)
- establish a system of credits (important for encouraging and promoting study-based mobility)
- promote mobility (move towards overcoming obstacles preventing this)
- promote European co-operation in quality assurance

- promote European dimensions in higher education with curriculum development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research

Amaral *et al.* (2004, p. 83) consider the above points will support the aligning of academic processes and procedures into a common system which will more easily support the mobility of both staff and students across European countries. Amaral *et al.* (2004, p. 94) conclude that "Student mobility, graduate employability and study programme comparability, appear as cornerstones of the foundation of possible future policies, aimed at the convergence of the national higher education systems, at least at the European level."

Vogtle *et al.* (2016, p. 734) examine the impact of membership of the Bologna process on patterns and driving forces of cross-national student mobility exchange flows. Bologna membership is considered by Vogtle *et al.* (2016) to be "slightly more important for explaining patterns of student mobility, as the set of member countries increased both in size and heterogeneity regarding country characteristics". The results of this analysis reveal that "cross national student exchange networks are stable over time". Vogtle *et al.* (2016, p. 731) identify that several core countries are central to student flows, including "USA, Great Britain, France, and Germany", with this group of countries attracting the highest shares of students from countries within the study sample. The study undertaken by Vogtle *et al.* (2016) confirm that the objectives of the Bologna process, as noted by Amaral *et al.* (2004) have been met with Vogtle *et al.* (2016) confirming that the results of their study show that the Bologna process has a positive impact on student mobility. In concluding their work, Vogtle *et al.* (2016, p. 735) note that a further important factor positively influencing student exchange patterns, is the existence of a "common border" or "geographical propinquity" as well as the 'common use of languages' and 'the same language branch'.

2.3.2 Current political climate

This section introduces discussion of the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU following a UK referendum on 23rd June 2016 and the potential impact for the UK Higher Education Sector. This research study is taking place at a time of great political change as the United Kingdom has now left the EU.

The UK Government Turing Scheme (2021) (Appendix 4) has been created following the UK withdrawal from Europe and its ERASMUS programme. The UK Government Turing Scheme website (2021) promotes “[for] learners, life-changing experiences to study or work abroad”. The website notes that the scheme operates across “higher education, further education, vocational education and [the] training and schools’ sectors”. Waters (2023, p. 315) describes how the Turing scheme, has “replaced the ERASMUS programme, champions widening participation, whilst also supporting shorter term mobility opportunities”. The development of the UK Government Turing Scheme is therefore, as Waters (2023) confirms a direct result of Brexit.

The UK government has voiced its support for maintaining a strong relationship with the EU, but at the time of writing the future direction of that relationship is not clear, with changes made to passport validity requirements; passport stamping required on entry or exit the Schengen area; a requirement for study or work visas, all introduced in the years following Brexit. The EU is also introducing a requirement, from mid-2025, for UK nationals to hold an electronic travel authorisation (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) for entry into any EU member state. Woodfield (2018) notes how the UK higher education sector is actively working to minimise the negative impact of Brexit, with Universities UK lobbying the government. Woodfield (2018) continues to discuss how the UK lags other EU countries in terms of student mobility, therefore, Woodfield (2018) states that losing membership of ERASMUS will make it very difficult for the UK to widen access and increase rates of UK student mobility. However, Waters (2023, p. 315) notes that a key aim of the Turing Scheme is its focus on widening the participation of disadvantaged students by offering shorter term mobility, because “evidence suggests that more disadvantaged students are likely to be attracted to shorter duration ‘study abroad’ placements”. Waters (2018, p. 1466) examines political aspects associated with the internationalisation of higher education and in discussing the potential impact of Brexit notes there is potential for the UK to form other educational alliances outside the EU. It is Yu’s (2019) view that political change impacts on the internationalisation process of UK higher education. Yu (2019) continues to comment about how international student mobility, is shaped and influenced by national political geographies. Turing Scheme (2021) notes an intention to support “Global Britain”, with the 2023 to 2024 academic year funding 474 institutional projects across “more than 160 destinations across the world”.

Priestley *et al.* (2019) agree with other authors (Waters, 2018; Woodfield, 2018; Yu, 2019) about uncertainty caused by Brexit, stating their belief that Brexit must be seen within the

context of turbulent global trends. Chris Skidmore (2020, p. 1) the UK's former minister for universities, science, research and innovation, writing about his time in post, expresses views about the challenges and opportunities confronting HEIs, "as they are thrust to the forefront of the UK's post-Brexit industrial strategy". Brady (2019, p. 1) considers that UK Government strategy offers "nice words" about outbound mobility, citing "The government will continue to support the campaign to double outbound numbers by 2020", but notes that whilst this figure may appear impressive it will mean that only 13% of UK students spend a period abroad. Brady (2019, p. 2) identifies that continued participation in the ERASMUS programme is essential if the government is to achieve its target for outward student mobility. However, the UK Government Turing Scheme (2021) (Appendix 4), adopts a different stance to the concerns Priestley *et al.* (2019) raise. Woodfield (2018) and Yu (2019), promote a Global Britain and heralding the new Turing Scheme as transcending borders and enabling travel to distant English-speaking nations, rather than the member country specific nature of the predecessor ERASMUS programme.

Highman (2018) discussing repositioning UK relationships post-Brexit, notes that after the Brexit referendum of June 2016 the implications for higher education and research in the UK are not clear. Highman (2018, p. 20) states that while the UK was part of the EU the support mechanisms such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and recognition of time spent abroad for mobility made the EU a favourable destination for UK students. Highman (2018, p. 20) notes the historic importance of Horizon Europe research funding, stating "over 40 midsized UK universities have received income exceeding 20 percent of their research income from EU government bodies", with the UK post-Brexit now only able to participate in this programme as a third country, with no decision-making role or net transfer of EU funds to the UK. Discussing the success of the EU ERASMUS programme, Highman (2018, p20) warns that for UK students "while going global sounds appealing", it should not be assumed that the demand exists within the UK-based student body" and that the cost of travel to countries outside Europe will be higher and not offer the extent of opportunities for language learning. Dennis (2016, p. 3) agrees with the rhetoric of Highman (2018), noting how the "majority of EU students (82 percent) consider the U.K. less attractive for study after the Brexit vote" with some students viewing the UK as "unwelcoming". Dennis (2018) states that some students who may have enrolled in the UK will now seek out other English-speaking nations for their study abroad. Dennis (2018, p. 3) concludes that the implications of Brexit are not

immediately clear and that it will take time for the full picture to emerge, as “no one has a crystal ball”.

2.3.3 ERASMUS programme

An article by Universities UK (2020) notes the scale of the ERASMUS programme “The programme creates opportunities for thousands of students from schools, colleges, and universities to spend time in more than 60 countries around the world - not just in Europe. Almost half of these involve traineeships with companies outside the UK.” Traineeships is a term used by ERASMUS to indicate financially supported periods of work experience abroad.

Androula Vassiliou, a former European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport states in the EU publication ERASMUS Changing Lives Opening Minds for 25 Years (2012, p. 3) “ERASMUS has changed the lives of almost three million young people” and comments on young people spending time abroad noting that this “provides opportunities for gaining knowledge and skills” and for the young people taking part to become “confident and self-reliant”. Vassiliou (2012, p3) notes that the experience of spending time abroad provides students with a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive labour market and that the ERASMUS programme itself “is the biggest and most successful student exchange scheme in the world”. Commenting specifically about ERASMUS ‘traineeships’ (work-experience abroad) in companies, this publication notes that traineeships provide students with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of other economies as well as develop specific skills. Speaking at a UK – Viet Nam Education Collaboration Forum held in London during June 2022 Vivienne Stern, Director at UUKI notes the importance of international links for developing UK education, citing the work of the British Council, which has managed UK ERASMUS membership during the time that the UK has maintained membership of this European mobility scheme. Noting the importance of the international work-experience programme to the United Kingdom, UUKI (2020) quotes Vivienne Stern, who agrees with Androula Vassiliou (2012) about the benefits ERASMUS exchange offers students, opining how incoming mobility brings money into the economy of countries and supports the employability of students. Adams (2020 p. 1) agrees with Stern (2020) and Vassiliou (2012) stating that the loss of ERASMUS would be felt hardest by disadvantaged and disabled students who receive additional grants to study abroad, very often spending their first time overseas as part of an ERASMUS financially supported traineeship programme.

UK withdrawal from the EU is discussed earlier in section 2.3.2. A further strand from this discussion are authors discussing possible scenarios for what may happen if the United Kingdom is no longer able to remain part of the EU ERASMUS programme. Jones (2020) notes that former Prime Minister Gordon Brown calls for the UK to remain in the ERASMUS programme and notes how Brown cites the importance of the ERASMUS exchange programme to the UK and its role in supporting national academic research and providing global opportunities for UK students. Mersinoglu (2020, p. 1) cites that the UK government has announced "it is committed to remaining in ERASMUS". Mersinoglu (2020) notes that this may prove difficult as Members of Parliament voted against requiring officials to negotiate continuing full membership of the programme. Mersinoglu (2020, p. 1) states in a January 2020 article that "there was no mention of the programme in the 2019 Conservative manifesto ahead of the last general election". Mersinoglu (2020, p. 2) also cites warnings provided by UK universities, who are recorded as saying that "a UK led scheme, if this was to replace the UK's membership of ERASMUS, could never match the reputation and extensive partnership that ERASMUS has to offer".

Adams (2020) writing in *The Guardian* newspaper (the paper's readership is generally on the mainstream left of British political opinion) notes that the UK would be £243 million a year worse off with 17,000 British young people deprived of international work experience, if the UK is unable to continue with its membership of the ERASMUS programme. Choosing to focus on the financial impact, Adams (2020) states that these figures are calculated by UUKI after deducting ERASMUS membership costs from the £420 million income the UK receives and that is generated through EU students visiting the UK. Adams (2020) notes that traditionally universities tend to break even with fee income and expenditure for domestic students and make a profit on fee income from overseas students, which helps to offset losses with their research work. Several authors (Adams, 2020; Jones, 2020; Mersinoglu, 2020; Stone, 2020; Turner, 2021) cite multiple instances of potential impact to UK students, higher education and the wider UK economy if the UK does not retain its membership of the ERASMUS programme. Following the UK government announcement in January 2021 that the UK would be leaving the European ERASMUS programme, Stone (2020) writing in *The Independent* (newspaper readership leaning to the left wing of the political spectrum), notes how the EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier said "the British government decided not to participate in the ERASMUS exchange

programme” with the former UK Prime Minister at this time, Boris Johnson responding, “the UK exchequer lost out” and that ERASMUS is “an extremely expensive scheme.” Turner (2021) writing in *The Telegraph* (newspaper readership considered politically conservative) notes how the former Education Secretary Gavin Williamson describes ERASMUS as a “bloated and bureaucratic” scheme which has cost the UK two billion pounds a year to maintain its membership, with this cost being unjustifiable now that the UK has left the EU.

2.3.4 ERASMUS data

In contrast to much of the literature which promotes the benefits of membership of ERASMUS (Adams, 2020; Mersinoglu, 2020; Stone, 2020; Turner, 2021), not all authors are positive about the EU ERASMUS scheme. Brady (2008) notes that ERASMUS has proved less successful in generating student mobility than market-led schemes, for example, direct international recruitment by universities. Brady (2008) is particularly critical in what he perceives as a poor participation rate for ERASMUS mobilities by UK students, noting that only 7,000 participate with nearly half (40%) who are students studying languages, which necessitates spending time abroad. Table 2.1 illustrates the EU publication *ERASMUS Facts, Figures and Trends* (2015) which provides data from the 2013/14 ERASMUS cohort about student mobility.

	Types of Student Mobility		Total Student Mobility
	Studies	Work Placements (Traineeships)	
Total number of ERASMUS students	212,208	60,289	272,497
Average EU monthly grant (€)	255	367	274
Average duration (months)	6.2	4.4	5.8
Number of grants for special needs students	331	70	401
Top sending countries (absolute numbers)	ES, DE, FR, IT, TR	FR, ES, DE, UK, IT	ES, FR, DE, IT, UK
Top sending countries (% share of the student population)	LU, LI, ES, LT, CZ	LU, LT, MT, LI, SI	LU, LI, LV, LT, ES
Top receiving countries	ES, FR, DE, UK, IT	UK, ES, DE, FR, IT	ES, DE, FR, UK, IT
Level of students (% share)	Batchelor 70% Masters 28% Doctorate 1% Short-cycle 1%	Batchelor 56% Masters 31% Doctorate 3% Short-cycle 11%	Batchelor 67% Masters 29% Doctorate 1% Short-cycle 3%
Average age of students (years)	23.4	23.9	23.5
Number of higher education institutions sending students	2,407	2,829	3,456
Gender balance (% of women)	60.2	61.6	60.5

Table 2.3.4.1 Student mobility in figures 2013 – 2014 Source: ERASMUS Facts Figures and Trends the EU support for student and staff exchanges and university cooperation in 2013-2014, (2015 p. 17)

The data (Table 2.3.4.1) provides evidence that for 2013/14 of the 272,497 students who participated in an ERASMUS funded international experience 60,289 went on a 'traineeship' (work-experience) abroad. This figure represents an annual increase of 9% compared to the previous year. The report notes that since traineeships (periods of work experience lasting at least eight weeks to a maximum of 52 weeks) are included as part of the ERASMUS programme, participant numbers for this activity have grown rapidly and for this cohort are three times higher than in 2007/8. Traineeships in 2013/14 represent 22% of all ERASMUS student mobility activities, for students in this academic year.

The report EU publication ERASMUS Facts, Figures and Trends (2015) suggests that by spending time working in a company abroad, students are supported to adapt to the labour market and develop specific skills in an employment sector. This report notes that traineeships enhance the relationship between higher education and employers and

identifies for the 2013/14 cohort of the ERASMUS member countries, France sends the most students abroad for work placements followed by Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom. The average duration of each traineeship is 4.4 months with the average ERASMUS grant being €367. Students from the subject areas of Social Sciences and from Business and Law, undertake the highest number of traineeships (29%). The second largest share are from students in the Humanities and Arts subject areas (17%), followed by students undertaking Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction programmes (16%).

Although not exclusive to the ERASMUS programme, UUKI (2017) published data relating to the top twenty mobility destinations of UK domiciled students studying at UK universities during the 2014/15 to 2016/17 academic years (see Table 2.3.4.2): -

Destination	% of all mobilities
France	12.6
Spain	11.8
United States	11.5
Germany	7.3
Austria	5.4
Canada	3.9
Italy	3.6
Netherlands	3.4
China	2.6
Japan	1.4
New Zealand	1.4
Ireland	1.4
Sweden	1.3
South Africa	1.3
Malaysia	1.2
Portugal	1.2
Denmark	1.1
Belgium	1.1
Russia	1.1
India	1.1

Table 2.3.4.2 Top 20 destinations by instances of mobility of UK domiciled students published 2017 Source: UUKI report Gone International: Raising Aspirations Report on the 2016-17 Graduating Cohort (2019 p. 25)

The UUKI research Gone International: Raising Aspirations Report on the 2016-17 Graduating Cohort (2017 p. 24) identifies that 50.8% of outward mobility is to a EU country, followed by North America with 18.5% of instances. The most frequent non-EU

destinations for outward mobility from the UK are the United States, Australia (5.4%) and Canada (3.9%). Overall, 34.2% (5,805) of mobility instances from the UK are to other English-speaking countries.

In reporting published data from the ERASMUS programme, along with quotations, for example Vassiliou (2012), from EU ERASMUS publications, it is important to recognise that the ERASMUS scheme, by its very nature has an interest in promoting student and staff mobility between higher education institutions based within its member countries. Brady (2008) does criticise what he perceives as a poor participation rate for ERASMUS mobilities by UK students, noting that 40% of mobilities have been for students studying languages, which Brady (2008) argues necessitates spending time abroad. The International Higher education Commission (2023, p. 21) reports that the number of incoming and visiting exchange students to the UK has fallen significantly during the pandemic, where the impact is a “reduction of cultural and linguistic diversity on campus” and linked to this, fewer opportunities for formal and informal “cross-cultural exchange”. International Higher education Commission (2023, p. 24) notes a decline in the international diversity of UK HEI campuses which the International Higher Education Commission (2024) attributes in part “through the loss of incoming ERASMUS exchange students” and a decline in the study of foreign languages by UK students. The International Higher education Commission (2024, p. 22) describes a decline in the number of students with international experience, describing this as “very worrying” and advising that this will impact on the benefits that students are able to gain from international experience, citing “intellectual and social capital on return to the home campus”.

2.3.5 UK mobility numbers

The UUKI report *Gone International: Rising Aspirations Report on the 2016-17 Cohort*, (2019 p. 10) provides data on undergraduate mobility rates between subject groupings. The table (Table 2.3.5.1) evidence how there are variations in mobility rates between different subject groupings.

Subject Group	No. Mobile Students	All Students	% Mobile
Languages	4,530	13,355	33.9%
Combined	125	380	32.8%
Medicine and dentistry	2,085	6,775	30.8%
Veterinary science	110	635	17.2%
Physical sciences	1275	12,025	10.6%
Architecture, building and planning	350	3,745	9.3%
Law	715	8,805	8.1%
Business and administrative studies	2,070	26,560	7.8%
Historical and philosophical studies	820	10,965	7.5%
Social studies	1,590	23,530	6.8%
Engineering and technology	700	12,415	5.6%
Creative arts and design	1,225	25,405	4.8%
Mass communications and documentation	300	6,360	4.7%
Agriculture and related subjects	80	1,995	4.1%
Biological Sciences	1,105	27,470	4.0%
Mathematical sciences	180	5,070	3.6%
Subjects allied to medicine	780	29,305	2.7%
Education	255	11,480	2.2%
Computer science	205	9,720	2.1%

Table 2.3.5.1 UK Mobility rates by subject grouping 2016 – 2017 Source: UUKI report *Gone International: Rising Aspirations Report on the 2016-17 Cohort*, (2019 p. 10)

It is clear from the UUKI data that the largest percentages of mobility are for language, medicine and dentistry students who combined represent just over one third of all UK student mobility. There is a link with this data to the work of Crawford *et al.* (2016) (section 2.5.7) who state that only academically strong students tend to participate in outward mobility. The high percentage of mobility for language students Fazackerley (2020) explains is that the third year of a languages undergraduate programme is usually spent abroad. However, it is evident from this data (Table 2.3.1) that for most subject areas the percentage of mobility is in single figures and confirms that outward mobility is not a popular choice for UK undergraduates in other subject areas.

The UUKI report, '*Gone International: Rising Aspirations Report on the 2016-17 Cohort*' (2019 p. 3) finds that students who go abroad are "less likely to be unemployed" than their non-mobile peers" and are also more likely to be in a graduate job with a higher starting salary. Research outcomes from statistical evaluation of data include:-

- “Students that study abroad are 19% more likely to gain a first-class degree, 20% less likely to be unemployed, 10% more likely to be in ‘graduate’ jobs six months after graduation”.
- “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students who study abroad are 17% more likely to be in graduate jobs six months after graduation, mature students who participate in these programmes earn 10% more than their peers”.

It is evident that the UUKI (2019) data is encouraging international experience as a method by which students, particularly those from BAME backgrounds, can increase their prospects of success, both academically and in employment.

Teichler *et al.* (2001, p. 448) analyse the impact of the European ERASMUS programme during the period after participants graduate. The research evidences a strong link between study abroad and international professional mobility. Findings demonstrate that most participants (82%) are employed in the country where they have studied (‘home country’ in most cases) 9% are employed in the country where they have completed an ERASMUS experience and 9% in another country. During the period that the study took place the international professional mobility of European graduates was 2%. Teichler *et al.* (2001, p. 448) note that “substantially larger proportions of former ERASMUS students consider employment abroad”. Research findings indicate that 38% of former ERASMUS students apply for a job abroad with 32% indicating that they have been offered a job overseas. Teichler *et al.* (2001, p. 452) conclude that “ERASMUS contributes to enlarging the pool of persons in Europe, who are mobile in the course of their study and are thus prepared and willing to be internationally mobile after graduation”.

Further evidence of the positive impact of the ERASMUS programme is provided by the Combined Evaluation of ERASMUS and Predecessor Programmes (2017) data. Participants who engage in this consultation are working in the education, training, youth or sports sector. The survey identifies: -

- 73% of participants consider that developing the skills and competences of individual students remain an ‘extremely relevant’ objective for the programme.
- 68% of participants indicate that improving the quality, innovation and internationalisation in education, training and youth organisations, is an ‘extremely relevant’ ERASMUS objective.

According to this research study the most successful objective of this programme is the development of skills and competences for individual students with 86% of participants believing that this is met to either a 'very large' or 'large' extent. Whilst the ERASMUS programme has a central feature developing students, it could also be viewed as a way of delivering the internationalisation of higher education.

The findings of Teichler *et al.* (2001) align with the recent ERASMUS Higher Education Impact Study (2019, p. 1), which assesses the impact of ERASMUS activities and is based on 77,000 responses from students and academics. The study finds that those who complete an ERASMUS mobility "boost their employability skills, with a large majority (72%) saying it is beneficial or highly beneficial in finding their first job". The publication continues to note that participants consider that the impact of their mobility increases their "technical, inter-personal and inter-cultural skills and competences, as well as their self-confidence, ability to achieve goals and social and cultural openness". A further significant finding from this research study is that 40% of participants who undertake a traineeship (work-experience abroad) are offered employment by the organisations that host their placement. The ERASMUS Higher Education Impact Study (2019) confirms that ERASMUS students frequently change their study plans after their time abroad, as they develop a clearer idea of their career goals. 23% of ERASMUS students find employment abroad in comparison with 15% of non-ERASMUS students. An article by UUKI (2020) notes the positive value that students undertaking ERASMUS traineeships place on their international work experience. This article is of the same opinion as the work of Cranston *et al.* (2020, p. 139) who argue the importance and advantage of international experience and note that "outward mobility links to employability in a global labour market".

The work of Cranston *et al.* (2020), Teichler *et al.* (2001) and UUKI (2020), cite a wide range of benefits from participation in an international experience, ERASMUS data (section 2.3.4) demonstrates that this is likely to be primarily available to students from the most popular subject groupings (table 2.3.5.1) who participate. A gap in the literature identifies studies focussing on the benefits of participation for students who are in subject groupings where fewer outward mobilities take place (table 2.3.5.1).

2.3.6 Destinations

Several authors discuss the choice of destination for international experiences, focussing on related topics of interest to them. Kondakci *et al.* (2017, p. 517) consider that international

student mobility is not only an issue for the “economically developed” Western World, but also involves “countries with different economic, political and academic characteristics”. Kondakci *et al.*'s (2017, p. 517) study argue that these factors have “led to the emergence of non-traditional destinations for international students”. The Kondakci *et al.* (2017, p. 521) study label these countries as “emergent regional hubs”. Findings from this research study identify and acknowledge the strong position of traditional destinations, but also the emergence of several regional hubs which Kondakci *et al.* (2017, p. 517) argue are “undergoing internationalisation processes in different forms and with different rationales”. For example, Kondakci *et al.* (2017, p. 535) note the flow of students from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran to Turkey and inflows of students from the ex-Soviet republics to Russia and from Sub-Saharan Africa to South Africa. Kondakci *et al.* (2017, p. 535) describe this type of international student mobility flow as “unlike that to traditional destinations” because it is “motivated and driven by government policy (e.g. developing a broad scholarship policy) to gain political dominance”. Kondakci *et al.* (2017, p. 521) conclude that destinations such as Bahrain, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey, may all be considered “emergent hubs” (in the case of Turkey this country is also a regional hub for that part of the world). Political stability is an important factor which does impact on the ability of an emergent regional hub to attract students. Singh *et al.* (2018, p. 608) express a belief that former “exporters” of students, citing the countries of China, Singapore and Hong Kong, are now developing strategies to internationalise their own higher education systems and are becoming regional hubs of higher education. Both authors suggest that the development of emerging regional hubs is changing the dynamics and possibilities for international experiences for students globally.

Kondakci *et al.* (2017) identify the concept of an emerging regional hub. Busfield (2020) writes about how the Republic of Cyprus has three universities in the top 1,000 of the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings for 2021, beating many of the 25,000 entrants. Busfield (2020) notes how in the past academic year the island has seen a 5.6% increase in student numbers, with approximately half of all students coming from overseas and is an emerging hub in its own right. It is clear from the limited available research in this area that regional hubs are fast developing and that over time this impacts on the dynamics and flows of student and staff mobility. Taking a very different perspective to Busfield (2020) and Kondakci *et al.* (2017), Dostal *et al.* (2018) (2018, p. 93) review the impact that the threat of terrorism on society is a barrier to student mobility. Research is according to the opinions of representatives of four universities.

Findings from this research study reveal that terrorist attacks impact on international student mobility in two universities that Dostal *et al.* (2018) describe as being “recently hit by terrorist attacks”. Dostal *et al.* (2018) opine that international terrorism is increasingly an issue for higher education institutions and that this may impact upon the strategic goal for universities to achieve internationalisation of higher education. Dostal *et al.* (2018) suggest that by understanding the impact of terrorism, universities could better prepare policies for the promotion of internationalism. In conclusion Dostal *et al.* (2018, p. 99) comment that “it is possible that a new era is beginning, in which international terrorism will have a strong effect on higher education because of the interconnection of HEIs in different parts of the world”.

2.3.7 Length of international experience

A limited number of researchers comment on another aspect of international experience, which is the duration of the actual international experience. Authors’ work is split between those considering periods of international experience more broadly across the HEI sector (UUKI, 2021; UUKI, 2017) and other authors who focus on key themes, for example, employability (Farrogia, 2017; Giolando, 2016; Lough, 2009;) and student preferences for placement length (Kent-Wilson *et al.*, 2015).

UUKI (2021 p. 1) describe short-term mobility as experiences abroad which typically last “between one week and two months”, noting that these “can be more intense experiences” and include “study visits, with a disciplinary focus; group-led visits to industry with entrepreneurship themes; international summer schools”. Authors (Caffrey *et al.*, 2005; Edmonds, 2010; St. Clair *et al.*, 1999; Waters, 2023) focus on short-term placements and define ‘short-term’ overseas experiences as in the region of two to three weeks duration. Waters (2023 p. 318) acknowledges a weakness in the current literature as “critically assessing the issue of duration” with international experience. Waters (2023) argues that short-term mobility is beneficial to students, however, a longer period of mobility, the greater the learning experience. Waters (2023 p. 315) suggests that “disadvantaged students are more likely to be attracted to shorter duration” placements abroad and that it is therefore important to understand the value of shorter periods of mobility. Waters (2023 p. 316) notes how widening participation is an important goal for UK higher education institutions and states that “short term mobility initiatives” may benefit this aim. A research study by Fenech *et al.* (2013, p. 473) investigate the outcomes of short-term overseas placements by Australian students, concluding that “more well-travelled” students

are able to “immerse themselves quickly” and often provide support for other members of the same travelling group. Less well travelled participants are frequently found to be “initially anxious as to what to expect” however, as time progresses, they generally react positively, become more knowledgeable and responsible. Offering a contrasting view The International Higher Education Commission (2024, p. 22) suggests there is a current shift from longer to short-term mobility and that this “will have a substantial impact on the benefits [students] accrue personally and intellectually”. The International Higher Education Commission (2024) opines that short-term mobility is under-reported by the UK HEI sector and that a long-term decline in the number of UK foreign language students may be a factor relating to the decline in the number of long-term outgoing UK student mobilities.

Lough (2009, p. 474) discusses the length of Social Work international experiences, suggesting the importance of the length of a placement in allowing students to develop their practice and concludes that “one academic semester, or about 3 months, is adequate for growth, less time however, will likely be inadequate; one month is often insufficient to produce cross- cultural adaption” Overall, Lough (2009, p. 474) argues that the “length of the placement may actually be more important than the number of hours students engage in the service task”, because there can be significant learning with shorter experiences when combining with a reflective period. Providing that there is a requirement for reflective activity connected with the placement, Lough (2009) states learning will occur. The work of Lough (2009) considers students who undertake professional practice placements abroad, as do the studies and findings of Caffrey *et al.* (2005), Edmonds (2010) and St. Clair *et al.* (1999), with Lough (2009) the only author commenting about the length of placement time to facilitate learning. Kent-Wilson *et al.* (2015, p. 944) offer an alternative finding to Lough (2009), commenting about the length of time students need to develop learning when undertaking an international experience. Kent-Wilson *et al.* (2015, p. 944) note how the preferential length of placement time for participants is “6 weeks (48% of participants); 12 weeks (28% of participants); 4 weeks (15% of participants) and other variations including a full semester to a year (9% of participants)” Kent-Wilson *et al.* (2015, p. 944) argue that “students seem to be balancing the financial cost of a longer placement with the desire to spend sufficient time to immerse in the culture”.

Farrugia (2017) views the length of placement from an employability perspective, discussing the Institute of International Education report of the same year, noting a clear

finding from the survey, that longer periods of study abroad have a high impact on subsequent job offers and the development of skills, with skills gained through study abroad having a long-term impact on career progression and promotion. Giolando (2016, P. 4) reports on the importance of the length of an international experience, from the same employability perspective as Farrugia (2017). Giolando (2016, p. 4) cites research by The Frontiers Journal: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad identifying “that the longer a student spends abroad the more relevant the experience is to their career”. Giolando (2016, p. 4) recommends that students carefully consider their chosen destination as Giolando (2016, p. 4) notes “the relevancy of the actual location reflects the seriousness and competence in the sector of choice” Choosing finance as an example Giolando (2016, p. 4) recommends “hubs like London, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, and Tokyo” as working in such financial hubs has more credibility with employers working in that sector. UUKI (2017) data demonstrates a gradual rise over time with the volume of short term outward mobilities (as shown in Table 2.3.7.1). Analysis of available data undertaken by UUKI (2017) recognises the increasing importance of short-term mobility “with 10.2% of all reported mobility in 2015-16 for periods of one week and 19.1%” falling in the range of 1-4 weeks.

Year	1 – 4 weeks	5 – 13 weeks	14 weeks+
2013-14	10.1%	13.0%	76.8%
2014-15	16.0%	14.7%	69.3%
2015-16	19.1%	14.2%	66.7%

Table 2.3.7.1 Instances of mobility by duration, source UUKI (2017 p. 25)

The UUKI report focussing on short-term mobility (2021 p. 5) notes from the research with UK students “focus group students feel that university-run short-term mobility is very attractive, making the visit more impactful and immersive”. This research also notes that “students enjoy the shared experience of going abroad as a group” and in particular, that travelling as a group provides them with a sense of security”. The UUKI (2021 p. 5) research also demonstrates that 80% of survey participants “went abroad to experience something new” and 55% “wanted to improve their confidence”. UUKI (2021) states that students report enjoying the busy schedules of by short visits and that bursaries to subsidise the cost of short-term visits, remain an important incentive to ensure student

participation. Celia Partridge, Assistant Director of Partnerships and Mobility at UUKI, speaking at the British Council Going Global 2021 conference on 16th June 2021 states that short term placements of four weeks or less abroad now account for over a fifth (21%) of all student mobility in the UK.

2.3.8 Pedagogic culture

Mortimore (2009 p. 2) states that pedagogy is a difficult term to define, suggesting that a brief definition could be “the science of teaching” and “any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another” this attributes to a teacher’s style. The notion of an education system having capacity and able to update itself, Carvalho *et al.* (2020) note as particularly important when considering the current political climate and Brexit (section 2.3.2). Priestley *et al.* (2019) agree with Carvalho *et al.* (2020) also stating a need for thought about the future design of curriculum. Discussing the characteristics of pedagogic change, Shamir-Inbal *et al.* (2021 p. 825) note how in preparing students to function well “one of the education system’s goals is to develop students’ ability to interact, collaborate and work”. Shamir-Inbal *et al.* (2021) and Carvalho *et al.* (2020) both recognise a need for flexibility within the education system to develop students for future employment. Carvalho *et al.* (2020 p. 206) conclude that in their study of the development of pedagogical innovation in higher education, teachers and students are receptive to pedagogical innovative change, “which translates into the implementation of active learning methodologies”.

Giroux *et al.* (2004 p. 90) discuss the concept of cultural studies, noting that “pedagogy plays a central role” to any discussion of politics and education. Giroux *et al.* (2004 p. 90) note that cultural study is a fundamental aspect of higher education, bridging transformation between “politics, in which matters of pedagogy and agency play a central role”. Reay (2004 p. 75) discusses how more “subjective aspects” of cultural capital, such as “confidence and ambivalence” are “key dimensions of cultural capital across social fields”. (Carvalho *et al.*, 2020; Giroux *et al.*, 2004) demonstrate a connection between education and development of cultural awareness, with Reay (2004) adding a further link to the development of cultural capital (section 5.5), which he considers important for development of people across social strata.

2.3.9 COVID-19

It is relevant that at the time of producing this literature review the COVID-19 pandemic is occurring globally. Beltaji (2020); Fazackerley (2020); Isherwood (2020); Kennedy (2020); Pelly (2020) discuss how the higher education sector is addressing issues caused from the pandemic and provide a range of examples drawn from world-wide HEIs, such as curtailing placements and study exchange abroad and making use of technology to provide virtual placements and/or experience. QAA (2020, p. 1) note within their COVID-19 Supporting Resources publication - Contingency Planning for International Placements ('mobilities') - that it is extremely challenging for providers to continue offering placements (both domestic and international) during the pandemic and that this impacts with "substantial changes to the student experience". The pandemic is impacting on international travel and the provision of international student experience, with students concern about the impact on their degree and their personal safety. Echoing the practical reality of what QAA (2020) acknowledge, Beltaji (2020) notes that many UK students need to cut short their year studying abroad during the academic year 2019/20. Beltaji (2020) describes students, as feeling 'frustrated', particularly in cases where they choose a particular course specifically because it includes a year studying abroad. Beltaji (2020) raises a concern that in the future, travel restrictions because of coronavirus and the potential impact of Brexit, will make it increasingly difficult for financially less well-off students to travel abroad as part of their studies. The EAIE (2020) notes that international placement students are enduring much stress and anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic. The EAIE (2020) further comments that a move to remote learning, withdrawal of study abroad opportunities and a switch to meetings and conferences on-line, are some of the challenges universities are managing during the pandemic.

Pipe (2020) acknowledges the impact of COVID-19 on internationalisation at one UK university, writing for the University of Bristol who notes that at the time of writing, 51 universities are cancelling their study abroad arrangements with Bristol University. Pipe (2020) notes that the university is no longer able to guarantee exchange students "an intercultural experience on campus or abroad". Fazackerley (2020) agrees with Beltaji (2020) and Pipe (2020) that many universities are cancelling overseas arrangements because of fears about coronavirus. However, this group of writers note that many universities are arranging a "virtual year abroad", however, these are not always acceptable as a positive beneficial replacement for travel abroad by students. Fazackerley

(2020, p1) notes that, for language students the third year of undergraduate study is frequently abroad and therefore “the time when language students become fluent”. It is evident there is universal agreement between the authors (Beltaj, 2020; Fazackerley, 2020; Pipe, 2020), of the damaging impact COVID-19 is having on the ability of universities globally, to offer an international experience and to identify suitable alternatives. Pelly (2020) identifies a positive long-term outcome, from changes the University of the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane, Australia has put in place to support the continuation of Nutrition students’ placements during the coronavirus pandemic. Pelly (2020) describes initial challenges for staff with introducing flexibility across areas of practice, which continue and support the development of students’ skills and allows them to be assessed against existing, competency standards. Pelly (2020, p. 481 - 483) notes the speed at which change occurs and identifies the use of a tele-health service which students can use for placement purposes as a method by which the university could remove the need for travel and additional cost barriers.

Isherwood (2020) notes that following the coronavirus pandemic, graduate internships and placements, that frequently lead to formal job offers are reported to be 40% down in number. Isherwood (2020) notes that many have been cancelled or delayed, but some may have been transferred to virtual placements. Isherwood (2020) states that some employers are now re-designing their placements and internships into shorter experiences which combine on-line projects. Isherwood (2020) considers that the future looks tough for graduate job hunters. Kennedy (2020) notes how civil engineering students are benefitting from virtual work experience, following the cancellation of many face-to-face placements caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Commenting on the cancellation of placements Kennedy (2020) notes how these are frequently used to compliment work covered during time on college and university courses. Kennedy (2020, p. 1) notes the positive development of students’ digital skills including video chatting and on-line presentations which enhances “as industry shifts further towards digital delivery”. It is Kennedy’s (2020) view that remote working provides students with an additional opportunity to “take the initiative” and accept “individual responsibility for workloads”.

The literature discussing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was on-going at the time this research was conducted, evidences an abrupt downturn in international student travel and mobility around the start of the pandemic with Beltaj (2020), Fazackerley (2020), and Isherwood (2020) and Pipe (2020), recording the impact of this.

2.4 Student international experience within the context of higher education

Several authors discuss factors relating to international experience within a higher education context. Discussion by authors pertains to a range of areas including practice learning; impact of experience; requirement for supervision.

2.4.1 Practice learning abroad

The development of professional practice arising through a work-based practice learning international placement is discussed by several authors (Barker *et al.*, 2010; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Geraghty *et al.*, 2020; Ozek, 2009). Where placement learning is international Mayer (2002) notes the importance of evaluating field placements to consolidate learning and progress overtime. Brooks *et al.* (2016) state that after being on placement, students report increased levels of confidence, particularly in relation to applying for jobs upon completing their studies and feeling confident in their ability to gain employment.

Wake *et al.* (2017, p. 3) note how Australian universities respond to the internationalisation of education with corporate goals that include being “global in attitude, action and presence” and offering a “global passport to learning and work”. Wake *et al.* (2017, p. 3) discuss findings from their student-centred research-led project, noting how governments and universities are increasingly encouraging students to “participate in global mobility activities” and how, in the opinion of Wake *et al.* (2017, p. 1), “few receive appropriate preparation”, with students “reporting that they have inadequate knowledge of the country and the industries to which they are heading”. The researchers comment how students report being frequently left to undertake their own research about “societal and organisational cultures in their destination country and workplace” and how frequently, universities have no knowledge of the working or living conditions that will be faced by their own students. Wake *et al.* (2017, p. 3) express their opinion that students who are preparing to work or study abroad “must have a capacity for personal development and the flexibility and insight to immerse themselves in another culture”. Wake *et al.* (2017, p. 3) recommend the creation of “resource websites” to allow students to explore cultural differences and to prepare themselves for work or study abroad. Wake *et al.* (2017, p. 13) suggest that the creation of such resources may encourage and support more students to engage with global internships and “thereby ultimately enhance the employability of a greater number of students”.

2.4.2 Impact of an international experience

This section introduces authors discussing the impact of placements and skills acquisition whilst abroad.

Attrill *et al.* (2019, p. 243) discuss international students undertaking professional placements abroad concluding that through the fostering of positive placement experiences there are further benefits to gain for both academics and international students to “share intercultural skills and knowledge that are transferable to practice”. Attrill *et al.* (2019, p. 251) opine that by fostering a culture of the learning activities of placement, positive educational relationships can be developed. In turn, this offers mutual opportunities for international students and academics to “share intercultural knowledge and skills”. Tarchi *et al.* (2019, p. 873) analyse study abroad students’ orientations to cultural difference, with participants using video logs to record incidents of cultural experience that “puzzled them”. Tarchi *et al.* (2019, p. 884) conclude that ERASMUS students experience their own culture in the context of other cultures, noting that ERASMUS students, studying in Italy reveal “a more advanced intercultural sensitivity than US students” who were also undertaking a study exchange at the same Italian university. Cantwell *et al.* (2008) also note in their study that students from North America encounter greater social difficulties than those from Europe and/or Latin America and that there are significant differences in “disposition, expectations and experiences” between students from these regions. However, Cantwell *et al.* (2008) are not able to conclude what accounted for these factors. Bagnasco *et al.* (2020, p. 6) drew similar conclusions to Attrill *et al.* (2019), noting that their participants report developing previously unknown abilities and confidence and that this in turn translates into personal and professional enrichment with possibilities “for more far-reaching cultural immersion”.

Martel (2020) writing online for The European Association for International Education (EAIE), which is a member-led organisation and which has a stated aim supporting higher education institutions to demonstrate the impact of internationalisation. The EAIE actively promotes mobility for both staff and students of higher education institutions. In discussing the benefits of international experience (both academic and non-academic) Martel (2020) acknowledges the EAIE belief that such experiences support student employability by introducing them to new situations. The EAIE is keen to promote a range of soft skills which can be developed through mobility. In support of its stated aims EAIE (2020) cites an Institute of International Education (IIE) impact study in 2019 that

identifies 85% of students “listed their study abroad experience on their Curriculum Vitae”, with 73% discussing this experience at interview, and believing that their international experience has directly supported their offer of employment. Lesjak *et al.* (2015 p. 845) note how student mobility develops competences for students, which support both academic and career development.

Attrill *et al.* (2019) and Bagnasco *et al.* (2020) discuss the impact of placements abroad. However, neither of these studies focusses on UK students. Lesjak *et al.* (2015) and Martel (2020) focus their discussion on positive skills acquisition, with Bagnasco *et al.* (2020) and Attrill *et al.* (2019) agreeing, both citing the findings of their studies. Whilst some authors (Petzold *et al.*, 2018) discuss the importance or organisation of an international experience (section 5.17), the length of an international experience (section 2.3.7) and/or requirements for pre-departure briefings (section 2.6.3), authors discussing the impact of an experience are positive.

2.4.3 Requirement for supervision

Jones *et al.* (2018) acknowledge the need for supervision with international experiences. There is a link from Jones *et al.*'s (2018) research study to the work of authors including Crossman *et al.* (2010), who also recognise the importance of good supervision practice. Chipchase *et al.* (2012 p. 467) discuss how students responding to their study prefer more frequent supervision “at the beginning of their placement until they are familiar with a new culture and the expectations of them”. Diack *et al.* (2014 p. 5) state there is a requirement for “structured learning outcomes and appropriate scheduling, to ensure that continued support is maintained” when students are undertaking an international placement experience.

2.4.4 Wider support for international experience

Several authors acknowledge support for student participation in an international experience from a variety of different themes including HEIs (Mahon, 2007), employers (Teichler *et al.*, 2001; Crossman *et al.*, 2010), public bodies (EU, 2014; Universities UK, 2017; Universities UK International, 2020) and students (Cleak *et al.*, 2016).

Mahon (2007, p. 146) discusses the benefit of universities creating programmes which include international study, describing such programmes as “the catalyst which enables us as educators to engage in the conversations which can bring internationalisation from the

margins to the centre". Mahon (2007, p. 146) concludes that the development of internationalisation "can perhaps be our 'field of dreams' – build it and the rest will come". Teichler *et al.* (2001) also note the issue of poor interconnections between the employers and education. However, Crossman *et al.* (2010) in a later paper International Experience and Graduate Employability: Stakeholder Perceptions on the Connection published in Higher Education note, that there is little about the connection between international experience amongst students and graduate employability. The EU publication Preparing for Life How the European Commission Supported Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (2014, p. 4) identifies the benefits for young people of studying or training in another country as introducing individuals to new cultures and languages and "ways of thinking". Cleak *et al.* (2016), discussing trends with international experience for Social Work students, note increased interest with student mobility and overseas placements and that international exchange programmes are now a common aspect of many university programmes. Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 390) opine that the perceived benefit is that "students can enhance their placement experience by combining their awareness of local issues with a global awareness of diversity and inequalities."

A Universities' UK campaign titled 'Go International – Stand Out' launched in 2017 sought to promote the benefits of an international experience to both students and universities with a remit to increase outward student mobility from 6.6% to a target of 13% by 2020. However, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted plans with only 0.5% of UK students participating in a mobility during 2020-21. The campaign itself claims to have impacted a 32% increase in mobility (during the years before the pandemic). The importance of skills development connected with outward student mobility is a strong feature of the Universities' UK 'Go International – Stand Out' campaign. The campaign notes that international placements can support the development of key skills, which are important for personal and professional success, in the areas of intercultural awareness; language development; knowledge of other countries; confidence; tolerance; self-awareness; sociability; problem-solving; decisiveness; adaptability and curiosity. A later Universities' UK International (UUKI) article titled 'Gone International: Rising Aspirations' (2020 p. 2) cites Chris Skidmore formerly Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation writing in support of university mobility programmes and their benefits for students, states that "mobility programmes play an important part in ensuring that students leave university with a well-rounded set of skills" and that "cultural competences and global connections are increasingly important to employers in the UK." The UUKI

campaign report (UUKI, 2020, p. 3) reviews Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data evidencing that 7.8% of undergraduate students responding to the 2016-17 DLHE survey, experience at least one period abroad during their programme of study. The report identifies almost half of opportunities for students to go abroad during their second year (2015-2016) were facilitated through the ERASMUS programme.

Although authors such as Crossman *et al.* (2010) and Teichler *et al.* (2001) describe a lack of connection between higher education and employment, during the same era, other authors such as Cleak *et al.* (2016) and Mahon (2007) express a clear view of their belief that the development of international experience for higher education students has the potential to establish and promote good interconnections between employers and educationalists. In particular, the focus of such international experiences is to develop opportunities for experiential learning and to enrich programmes of study. At this point in the literature review it is evident that there are some core authors who have cited support and student benefit for international experience (Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Crossman *et al.*, 2010; Teichler *et al.*, 2001). UUKI have a range of publications detailing data and impact evidence of international experience for UK students. However, it could be considered that as a connector of higher education leaders and policy influencers, this organisation has a vested interest in promoting international experience for UK students.

2.4.5 Edu-tourism

A different perspective of international mobility is provided by, Eluwole *et al.* (2020, p. 1) who introduce the notion of "Edu-tourism" or "Educational Tourism", which Eluwole *et al.* (2020, p. 1) describe as "a type of tourism where the participants travel to the location outside their domicile origin with the aim of participating in learning experience". Eluwole *et al.* (2020, p. 1) note that education tourism has become increasingly popular, with Eluwole *et al.* (2020, p. 1) expressing a belief that this contributes socio-economically to both the host and sending countries. Specifically discussing the concept of edu-tourism McGladdery *et al.* (2017 p. 293) state that "reflective practices that occur on site or during the tourism experience are important for learning" continuing to suggest that "the process of educational tourism extends beyond the actual touristic experience and encompasses pre- (and post-) travel considerations". Discussing how learning occurs during periods of edu-tourism, McGladdery *et al.* (2017 p. 293) state "in order for learning to occur during educational tourism, some degree of cultural difference from the tourist's normal life experiences needs to be encountered". McGladdery *et al.* (2017 p. 293) continue to

discuss the need for “a novelty seeking personality” to be present with students who choose to study abroad and a “willingness to leave one's comfort zone and to engage with people beyond one's immediate community, as a prerequisite for effective global learning”. The view of McGladdery *et al.* (2017) is shared by the ERASMUS Higher Education Impact Survey (2019), who note how an international exchange experience exposes students to new teaching methods and experiences and how travel to other countries introduces a degree of challenge, to develop inter-cultural awareness.

An analysis of authors discussing edu-tourism and a potential requirement for undergraduate student travel, along with contrasting views and the findings of this research study follow later in section 5.28 of Chapter 5.

2.5 Benefits for students of international experience

This section provides a summary of findings from authors discussing the wider student experience, who have conducted studies from differing perspectives, with a range of themed findings, which include, academic achievement (Brooks, 2016; Carlson *et al.*, 1990; Crawford *et al.*, 2016); development of transversal skills (Barker *et al.*, 2010; Yashima, 2010); self-development/maturity (Kauffmann *et al.*, 1992; Trilokekar *et al.*, 2011); cultural immersion (Drynan, 2013; Streitwieser, 2017; Sweeney, 2012; Waters and Brooks, 2011); employability (Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Crossman *et al.*, 2010; Parey *et al.*, 2011; Teichler *et al.*, 2001); development of professional practice (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Geraghty *et al.*, 2020; Gower *et al.*, 2017; Izunwa, 2021; Ozek, 2009); requirement for supervision (Chipchase *et al.*, 2012; Crossman *et al.*, 2010; Diack *et al.*, 2014; Jones *et al.*, 2018). The available authors identify a range of benefits devolved from student participation in an international experience.

2.5.1 Academic achievement

Carlson *et al.* (1990) conclude that students who study abroad score more significantly in their study, for factors such as cultural interest, current affairs and on self-esteem aspects of a study abroad, experiencing opportunities to interact with people from their host country and travel. Crawford *et al.* (2016) review the impact of international placements on the academic performance of UK and international students and concludes that both groups statistically and significantly can increase their final year marks. Specifically, the performance of UK students is above that of other groups participating in the Crawford *et*

a.l. (2016) study. Crawford *et al.* (2016) opine that this is because only academically stronger UK students decide to participate in international placements. Brooks (2016) also finds that completing a sandwich work placement (a course with a work placement year) associates a student with improved academic performance in their final year of study. Findings from Brooks (2016) suggests that placement year students are more likely to secure graduate level work and higher starting salaries upon completion of their degree than in comparison to non-placement students.

2.5.2 Development of transversal skills

A study by Yashima (2010, p. 276) investigates the effects of international volunteer work experiences on young people's intercultural competence using a quasi-experimental procedure. The study concludes that those who participate in the project "gain significantly more than those who did not, in intercultural approach; interest in international affairs; interpersonal communication skills". The study also opines those students participating in an international volunteering experience gain interest in international affairs and are more interested in learning about events taking place abroad. Barker *et al.* (2010) conclude from their study of occupational therapy students, that by students thriving in situations that are outside a personal comfort zone, this can contribute to both their personal and professional development, which in turn adds value to students' ability to handle challenging situations in their later life and employment because the skills gained are transversal in their nature to a range of different employment situations.

The development of transversal skills as an outcome of participation in an international experience is further discussed and analysed (Chapter 5) in section 5.12, in the context of employability and section 5.11, when the research participants for this research study reflect on their international experience.

2.5.3 Self-development and maturity

Kauffmann *et al.* (1992) discuss how case study analysis demonstrates that individual students' maturity and the extent to which they are immersed into a host country's culture are the two main variables that determine to what extent an international experience impacts upon a student. Findings from Kauffmann *et al.* (1992) demonstrate that as students' study abroad their perceptions of their host country's culture change, as do their perceptions of their own culture and of their global understanding. Conclusions drawn

from the research of Kauffmann *et al.* (1992) indicate that international placements can be a powerful educational technique. However, Kauffmann *et al.* (1992) identify programme design and participant selection as having a significant impact upon outcome. A study by Trilokekar *et al.* (2011, p. 1141) examine the study abroad experience of pre-service teacher candidates at the Faculty of Education, York University. The research argues that "disorientating experiences are a crucial first step for perspective transformation". Such "disorientating experiences" may involve racial dynamics, "outsider" status, risk taking behaviour and power relations. International experiences act as a "catalyst for an increase in self-confidence and improved self-awareness" because the "outsider" experience allows students "room to look, act and behave differently and to take risks in relation to their personae at home".

2.5.4 Cultural immersion

Waters and Brooks (2011, p. 567) examine the experience of UK students overseas and the extent to which UK students "actively seek out and encounter cultural difference through their education choices". This research identifies that whilst UK students frequently claim to be "seeking something different" they also desire a "knowable" destination. Waters and Brooks (2011, p. 571 - 573) identify film and television as significant factors in making international destinations, appear familiar and thereby influencing student choices. The research also confirms that students' cultural diversity overseas is frequently limited to 'international communities' of students and that UK students do not always encounter local cultures of the destination country. However, the research describes several instances where UK students form "significant and meaningful relationships with foreign nationals" as a direct result of studying overseas. Sweeney (2012, p. 21) refers to a 2011 British Council and YouGov undergraduate opinion survey, on globalisation and international experience and student attitudes, noting that 78% of participants consider that "having international perspectives is more important and that this is necessary to be an open minded and well-rounded individual with an understanding of other cultures". Sweeney (2012, p. 21) notes reference in this research study to a Council for Industry and Higher Education Study which concludes that although students do not always see an international perspective as significant to their careers, employers do value enhanced cultural awareness that an international experience can provide. Sweeney (2012) cites that 81% of survey participants consider that they are not at all or not very

likely to be involved in any international experience whilst at university. Sweeney (2012, p. 21) considers this finding “alarming”.

However, Table 2.3.5.1 (section 2.3.5) portrays that most outward UK mobility concentrates on the subject disciplines of languages, medicine and dentistry. Drynan (2013, p. 15) notes that survey participants identify “cultural competency” and “challenging assumptions” as a key benefit of participation, in an international placement in a middle income or low-income country. An American study by Streitwieser (2017, p. 471) focusses on students’ deeper conceptions and understandings of international experience and how these may change and develop during a student’s time participating on an international experience. This American study identifies four distinct categories of “conceptions of an international experience” which are observing (being exposed to the other culture and cultural differences); interacting (with another culture but maintaining and using own cultural practices and norms); participating (in the other culture) and embracing (comfortably accepting other practices and norms). Streitwieser (2017, p. 472) notes that within the United States of America “study abroad participation has dramatically increased over the last several decades, as have the breadth of locations” with higher education institutions continuing to promote the perceived benefits associated with “global understanding and perspectives”. The work of Streitwieser (2017) contrasts with Cantwell *et al.* (2008) who note how North American students encounter greater social difficulties when arriving abroad, than those from European and/or Latin American countries. Tarchi *et al.* (2019) cite how in their opinion students from the USA have a high identification of their own culture, which the authors note results in lower levels of intercultural sensitivity.

Further analysis of the literature from this section, together with the findings of this research study are in Chapter 5 sections 5.3 and 5.4.

2.5.5 Employability

Teichler *et al.* (2001, p. 455) review mobility rates during study and after graduation. Whilst noting difficulty in comparing sets of available data, a conclusion drawn was that “study abroad is a successful way of preparing for international mobility and for job assignments with international components, both in the home country and abroad” and that “formerly mobile students are more frequently employed abroad after graduation, use their international competences more frequently and reach a somewhat higher status on average than graduates who were not mobile during their course of study”. Crossman *et*

a.l. (2010, p. 602) introduce the notion of “employability” and note that current research has changed, with responsibility for the development of employability skills, now resting with the individual. Crossman *et al.* (2010 p. 609) identify that “international experience supports the development of cultural sensitivity and adaptability, as well as enhancing graduate attractiveness in a globalised and internationalised labour market”. Crossman *et al.* (2010) consider that organisations such as universities have an important role in the development of these skills, but that primary responsibility does not rest with them alone but also with other stakeholder groups including governments, employers and graduates themselves needing to support the development of graduate employability.

Parey *et al.* (2011) note that international labour market migration has increased significantly over recent years. Parey *et al.* (2011) investigate the effect of studying abroad on international labour market mobility in later life for university graduates. Using ERASMUS data, Parey *et al.* (2011, p. 195) identify that an individual’s probability of later working in a foreign country increases by 15% when they participate in an ERASMUS experience. The result of this research suggests that studying abroad has a “strong causal effect on labour market mobility later in life”. Parey *et al.* (2011, p. 195) note that “qualitative evidence suggests that besides career concerns, soft factors such as interest in foreign cultures or living with a foreign partner, are important determinants for the decision to work abroad and “we suggest that the effect of studying abroad may work through these channels”. Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 401) focus on Social Work students, confirming that a significant number of them consider that an international experience enhances their employability and career prospects. Particularly Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 401) note “Participants felt that the placement improves their employability by highlighting their ability to be flexible, adaptable and embrace challenges and many also think that the placement helps them to bring in different and diverse perspectives and wider skills and knowledge base”.

There are comparisons with this section of the literature review and the findings from this research study pertaining to employability later in Chapter 5 section 5.12.

2.5.6 Development of professional practice

Ozek (2009) notes the benefit of international experience on professional practice. The Ozek (2009) study examines the extent to which teaching experience in Turkish schools affects the educational philosophies and expectations of foreign and Turkish student

teachers. Ozek (2009) concludes that international teaching experience not only enhances student teachers' awareness of other cultures but also their professional and personal development. Campbell and Walta (2015, p. 14) identify that "concrete experiences, which occur through immersion in another culture can enhance their empathy and appreciation of 'otherness' and cultural difference. Opportunities for guided reflection and interaction with locals, across the time of the practicum, also aid in the development of intercultural sensitivity." The Campbell and Walta (2015) study, which focusses on pre-service teachers, has similarities with other studies that have focus on an international experience as a method of developing professional practice including Ozek (2009) – focusses on teaching, Dunlap *et al.* (2017) – focus on social work and Gower *et al.* (2017) – focus on nursing, all considering the development of personal and professional practice by students participating in an international experience placement. Davies *et al.* (2017, p. 124) in their study of mandatory work placements forming a part of occupational therapy courses, note that major emerging themes from their research are 'becoming resourceful', 'resilient and confident' and 'becoming respectful of difference'. The Dunlap *et al.* (2017) study of Social Work students notes the development of cross-cultural sensitivity and the development of innovative practice, resulting from international placements. Gower *et al.* (2017) focus on the longer-term influences of international placements on students' understanding of nursing, concluding that participation in an international placement promotes the development of increased awareness and provides realistic strategies for nursing skills globally and that pre-placement training in cultural awareness with good supervisory support is essential.

Geraghty *et al.* (2020) report from their study of clinical placements for midwifery students, an increase in students' confidence, awareness of a requirement to consolidate knowledge and skills and a reinforcement of their own career aspirations, from participation in an international placement. Geraghty *et al.* (2020, p. 204) conclude that there are many benefits "beyond simply developing cultural sensitivity". Cranston *et al.* (2020, p. 139), whose study more broadly focusses on graduates from an English University, rather than an occupational specific international placement, as was the case with Geraghty *et al.* (2020), who conclude that students who undertake an international placement are perceived to have enhanced "intercultural skills and personality traits" and that this can convey "confidence, adventure and self-reliance" to others. Izunwa (2021), agreeing with Cranston *et al.* (2020) and Geraghty *et al.* (2020), writing in a British Council on-line blog, notes how resilience, perseverance and confidence are frequently" cited as skills gained

during a student's international experience" and how the author argues these skills will "play an important role in preparing students for today's workforce and contribute to the UK's international competitiveness". Quoting examples from a webinar series delivered to the British Council Generation UK: China Network, Izunwa (2021) states how one student describes their experience of spending time in China as growing their confidence by "time spent in an unfamiliar environment" and how it is possible to now "throw themselves into situations that they have not experienced before and know they can land on their feet".

2.5.7 Summary of literature for benefits for students of international experience

A key area which much of the available literature notes over several decades, is the benefit of cultural interest and inter-cultural skills, evidencing in the writing of (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Carlson *et al.*, 1990; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; DeMartini, 1992; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Ozek, 2009; Pence *et al.*, 2008; Sweeney, 2012). Since the beginning of this century a significant number of authors (Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Geraghty *et al.*, 2020; Gower *et al.*, 2017; Ozek, 2009; Trilokekar *et al.*, 2011) comment on how another benefit of an international experience is that it impacts positively on professional practice. More recent authors (Brooks *et al.*, 2016; Crossman *et al.*, 2010; Teichler *et al.*, 2001), note the positive impact of the development of employability skills, with a small number of authors (Brooks, 2016; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Parey *et al.*, 2011) recording findings that connect to increased academic performance.

There are clear links from the early writings of Carlson *et al.* (1990) and DeMartini (1992) who identify benefits of increasing academic performance and cultural experience and to the later work of authors (Barker, 2010; Ozek, 2009; Sweeney, 2012) who also cite the development of cultural awareness as a key benefit of participation in an international experience. Whilst most research takes place outside the UK an examination of available published work focussing on the UK by Waters and Brooks (2011) identifies that UK students tend to limit themselves to international communities, avoiding local culture. Whilst the authors acknowledge this is not always the case, this finding is significant because the Waters and Brooks (2011) study focusses on UK students. Authors (Sweeney, 2012; Trilokekar *et al.*, 2011) focussing on UK students, agree with the wider published work about benefits of increasing self-confidence, with Sweeney (2012) acknowledging, a value placed by employers on the development of cultural awareness.

Cranston *et al.* (2020) and Jones *et al.* (2018) note the importance of good supervision practice and the perceived significance of this to consolidate learning from international experience. From the early authors (Carlson *et al.*, 1990; DeMartini, 1992; Kauffmann *et al.*, 1992) to the more recent available work of authors such as Sweeney (2012) and Trilokekar *et al.* (2011) an understanding of positive factors relating to an international experience are recorded. However, reviewing the literature it is possible to identify a shift in focus of work, from the writings of authors such as Crossman *et al.* (2010) and Parey *et al.* (2011), who start to discuss findings from international experience and relate these to aspects of employability. This trend continues through to the more recent work of authors such as Geraghty *et al.* (2020) and Sweeney (2012).

Although Carlson *et al.* (1990), Kauffmann *et al.* (1992) and De Martini (1992) are all writing some time ago in the 1990s, their work is still pertinent to this research study because they are amongst the first published works investigating the benefits to students of participation in an international experience. Development trends with the available literature over time, include authors drawing out a wider range of benefits available from participation in an international experience, as shown in table 2.8.2.1 at the end of this chapter.

2.5.8 Employer perspective

This section seeks to understand how employers view periods of student international experience. Authors making links between international experience and employability include Cranston *et al.* (2020); Crossman *et al.* (2010); Lopez *et al.* (2020); Teichler *et al.* (2001); Wake *et al.* (2020). This section will add to discussion from an employer perspective.

From an employer perspective Trooboff *et al.* (2007, p. 17) note how their study provides evidence that “employers value study abroad when comparing to a variety of other educational experiences”. Trooboff *et al.* (2007) conclude that the more international activity a firm has, the more likely its employers value all types of study abroad. Trooboff *et al.* (2007, p. 17) comment how managers responsible for “entry level” recruitment are found to value more highly study abroad than other more senior managers. Managers at all levels valuing study abroad do so because of the enhancement of personal qualities by students who undertake an international experience. Crossman *et al.* (2010, p. 607) note how employers, academics and students perceive connections between international

experience and graduate employability. Crossman *et al.* (2010, p. 605) argue that increasing globalisation and internationalism heightens the need for graduates to operate in culturally diverse contexts. The research findings of Crossman *et al.* (2010) suggest that all stakeholders identify clear connections between international experience and employability, which include outcomes associated with forging network opportunities for experiential learning, language acquisition and the development of soft skills relating to cultural understandings and ways of thinking. The article notes key benefits of international student experience for employers, as acknowledging “internationalising forces” and “implications for intercultural communication”, which may include experience of overseas travel; interaction with visiting overseas customers; international recruitment and maintaining relationships with overseas contacts. Sweeney (2012, p. 26) in his report for the British Council notes that leading employers “look favourably on applicants who have had an international experience” and concludes that more research is necessary to identify the relationship between international experience and employability. Sweeney (2012) acknowledges a need for further research between international experience and employment.

Conboye (2013) notes support for international experience by multi-national employers and cites research by Price Waterhouse Coopers (2013) predicting a significant rise by 50% in the number of workers expecting to take on global assignments in the next decade.

Conboye (2013) notes the importance employers may place on the geographic location of an international experience, noting the popularity of countries depending on an employment sector. The later work of Giolando (2016) further discusses the importance of destination for an international experience. Aamaas *et al.* (2019, p. 541 - 542) introduce a very different focus, with the notion of “scaffolding” (what someone cannot yet do on their own but can achieve with support and guidance). Aamaas *et al.* (2019) focus on Norwegian pre-school students on an international placement in India. Aamaas *et al.* (2019) note that for students undertaking placements abroad, to optimise their learning potential, a substantial level of scaffolding is crucial. Aamaas *et al.*'s (2019) view that some competent peers provide scaffolding for others. However, Aamaas *et al.* (2019, p. 540) conclude that supplemental professional guidance will always be a requirement to ensure that students do not develop “stereotypical impressions of the host culture” or are “overwhelmed by the new cultural context”.

The focus of the available literature changes over time with more recent writing making links with student employability and includes an article by UUKI (2020), advocating the

positive value that employers place on international work experience. This article comments on the value of students who have complete an ERASMUS international work-experience. Giolando (2016) discusses the perspective of how employers may evaluate a student's overseas placement. Giolando (2016, p. 1) offers reassurance to students noting that "international experience is almost universally looked at as a positive, from employers". Giolando (2016, p. 1) states that employers value international work placements and understand that students overcome challenges of "living and working abroad" and "will have built trust and problem-solving, in new environments". Giolando (2016, p. 1) considers that these practices build students' "resourcefulness". Giolando (2016, p. 2) cites the QS Global Employer Survey Report, which reveals "6 out of 10 employers around the world give extra credit for an international student experience and more than 80% said they actively sought graduates who had studied abroad". The report also provides an insight into the industries where international experience is most highly valued. The survey identifies that industries most likely to seek students who have undertaken an international experience, are energy, travel, leisure and hospitality, electronics, and technology.

Ross *et al.* (2020, p. 665) assess institutional responsibilities, concluding that placement providers can feel under pressure from institutions to accept international placement students and that they can feel unsupported in their role. Ross *et al.*'s (2020) research study identifies that there is a need for increased contact and co-ordination between education institutions and placement providers and a need for educators to clarify supervision expectations. Conclusions drawn from Ross *et al.* (2020, p. 665) also include a need for closer collaboration and support for placement providers to "substantially maintain quality placements". Baron *et al.* (2020) examine the workplace experience of international students in Australia, concluding that many workplace staff have only limited capacity in cultural awareness which makes it more difficult for them to develop approaches to support international students. The Baron *et al.* (2020) research study identifies that Australian workplace staff are frequently hesitant to host international students because employers sometimes perceive that placement students will cause them more work. However, in cases where workplace staff can effectively support international students, the study identifies that there are advantages for both employers and students when placements work well.

However, it is evident that employers generally value graduates who have this experience (Conboye, 2013; Crossman *et al.*, 2010; Sweeney, 2012; Universities UK, 2020). There are

links here with authors who report on the wider student experience and wider support for international experience, where the benefits (discussed in section 2.4.4) overlap with those that employers also note, including Trilokekar *et al.* (2011) who identify development of increased confidence and self-awareness; Barker (2010) who discusses benefits as including professional development; Cleak (2016) noting increased employability and career prospects; Martel (2020) noting flexibility and adaptability in handling new people and situations; Kauffman *et al.* (1992) who discuss increasing cultural capital and global understanding as a benefit of participation in an international experience.

2.6 Barriers to student participation in an international experience

Whilst there is literature recording positive aspects of participation in an international experience, several studies focus on difficulties that students experience when participating in international experiences.

2.6.1 Factors influencing study abroad

Naffziger *et al.* (2017, p. 40) find that it is their belief that studying abroad is “a path to increased cultural awareness and sensitivity and a better understanding of our multi-cultural world”. Although Naffziger *et al.* (2017, p. 51) note potential barriers to engagement (finance; personal matters; curriculum issues) this research study is unique as Naffziger *et al.* (2017, p. 40) opine such barriers are overcome through improved planning and “individualised” work with students. It is clear from the work of Naffziger *et al.* (2017) that academic involvement through tutorial processes could positively influence a student’s decision to undertake an international experience. Naffziger *et al.* (2017 p. 40), conducting their study in the United States, hold a view that there are links between acquiring “world knowledge” and career success. A further study by Mazzarol *et al.* (2002) note reasons for study abroad and conclude that students often perceive this in terms of its ability to raise the economic and social status of the graduate, where the qualification gained will have global recognition and from a country where education where the perception of quality is high. This research study highlights how lack of access to higher education in some countries, can be a significant factor driving study abroad. Mazzarol *et al.* (2002, p. 90) consider that “personal recommendations” and the “quality of reputation” remain important factors when students make choices about where to study. A more recent study by Petzold

et al. (2018) investigate insights into the causes of students' intention to study abroad. Petzold *et al.* (2018, p. 35) state that the intention to study abroad "is shaped by the students' evaluation of the expected benefits from studying abroad". Petzold *et al.* (2018, p. 35) conclude that students prioritise conditions when considering study abroad and that they do "not ponder about beneficial outcomes of studying abroad, such as their own personality development and being in a desired host country, as long as the realisation of the stay is not substantially guaranteed by related foreign language skills, sufficient financing and a supportive host university". This research study by Petzold *et al.* (2018) takes place in Germany, with a nuanced approach aiming to explore the deeper feelings of students and their intentions to study abroad. In contrast, the work of Mazzarol *et al.* (2002), focussing on several East Asian countries, draws from the work of other studies with a broader focus that includes economic and social forces within a home country.

Petzold *et al.* (2018) also consider that social pressures and internalised norms are influential in their study findings. Petzold *et al.* (2018, p. 38) conclude that clear priorities that students consider are "resources and restrictions for the feasibility of studying abroad; subjective benefit and opportunities for one's own well-being abroad and general organisation and support, along with the expectations of others". Petzold *et al.* (2018, p. 51) state their belief that students may view study abroad as something where there is little that needs to be done to promote further interest. Broader financial support and early language promotion may increase students' interest to study abroad. In considering what could be done by higher education institutions, to further promote international experience, they suggest that "partnerships with well-equipped and supportive host universities abroad" could encourage more students to consider participating in an international experience. Fox *et al.* (2018 p. 14) note how having a formalised international relationship between universities can "provide structural support for students whilst they are navigating a different system". Citing examples of support, Fox *et al.* (2018 p. 13) suggest immigration, housing, medical and financial assistance and that the challenge for universities is to ensure "there is cohesion between the organisational process, assessment requirements and ultimately, the underlying pedagogical framework". Fox *et al.* (2018), Naffziger *et al.* (2017) and Petzold *et al.* (2018), acknowledge a need for support, to allow higher education students to overcome barriers and access the benefits of an international experience.

This research study takes place at the start of a time of great change for UK higher education. The UK has formally left the EU (Brexit) and a COVID-19 pandemic is occurring

worldwide. QAA (2020, p. 1) notes that the exchange and mobility of students is a key feature of UK higher education and that it is their view that international experiences provide students with unique opportunities to “understand, engage and share ideas with people from different cultures”. The HEA (2014, p. 3) notes in its Professional Placements publication, that many university courses include “a professional (or practical) placement, a period of work-based learning or an internship” and that this is often typical for work in the professions (e.g. education, social work and nursing). The work of Fox *et al.* (2018), Naffziger *et al.* (2017) and Petzold *et al.* (2018) state a need for support to enable students to take advantage of international experience, which Knight (2004) and The UK Department for Education and Department for International Trade (2019, p. 26) advocate should be part of a university’s strategic strategy. Whilst there are few authors that directly identify and write about the need to provide students with adequate support for participation in an international experience, there are additional authors who directly identify and discuss barriers to participation and preparation for travel (section 2.6.5).

The researcher for this research study will analyse factors impacting on a students’ decision whether or not, to study abroad, such as those Naffziger *et al.* (2017) identify, which are finance (section 5.15); organisation/curriculum (section 5.17) and personal matters (sections 5.19 and 5.20) and contrast these with the research findings from this research study later in Chapter 5.

2.6.2 Preparing students for international experience

Several authors acknowledge the importance of preparing students for periods of international experience. Authors such as Razack (2002) acknowledges a requirement for feedback on placement set up and the formalising of arrangements, with further authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009) who discuss the notion of more formalised pre-departure briefings for students travelling internationally.

Considering specifically how to prepare students for international experience Razack (2002, p. 258) reviews the use of international placements with Social Work students, commenting that “students report disorientation and anxiety”, with some indicating that they are “frustrated with the lack of feedback during the planning process” and “slow progress with making formal arrangements”. Razack (2002) concludes that some students do not take into consideration, particularly for travel to very remote locations, their placement host’s

access to technology which could impact on time taken to set up a placement. Auburn (2007, p. 127) examines the transition from a placement organisation to the final year of a degree programme using discourse analytic methodology. Findings conclude that students were able to “deploy advantageously” learning from their placement year to the final year of their course. The significance of Auburn’s (2007, p. 131) study, is a finding that “students felt limited to voice the learning they had undergone on placement”. Auburn (2007, p. 131) concludes that the students’ ability to voice their learning was “limited to the terms imposed by academic staff” and that students are nervous with demonstrating knowledge gained through their international experience that is at or above the level of their academic staff.

Lough (2009, p. 473) supports the view that students must prepare adequately for their international experience. Writing about the principles of effective practice in the international social work field placements he states, “Proper support for international placement requires a ‘comprehensive design,’ which includes pre- departure preparation and regular support while in the field.” Lough (2009, p. 473) discussing preparation, comments that this “is necessary to correctly frame students’ expectations. If expectations are not met, students will not be satisfied with their experience and may perceive the practicum experience as negative.” Lough (2009, p. 474) also considers that student reflection is important to develop international experience and maximise positive learning outcomes, stating “guided reflection can occur in discussion with a professor or supervisor online or through phone calls or video conferencing. Through dialogue, supervisors can connect practicum experiences directly to student responsibilities.” Spooner-Lane *et al.* (2009, p. 91) agree with the need for providing pre-departure support and cite the need for the development of a “cultural competence model”, which they argue could provide students with a ‘theoretical base’ and allow the development of interpersonal and communication skills. Campbell and Walta (2015, p. 2) note that “there is a need for pre departure orientation programmes which help students define themselves culturally and consider the impact of cultural difference on their comfort and learning.” Campbell and Walta (2015, p. 9) note that “there was no evidence of placing observations in a cultural context or trying to understand it differently from their own experience of working in the Australian context”. Interview records evidence that where pre-departure briefings are held, they focus on the ‘logistics of the visit’ and not on engaging students with reflection on culture. Campbell and Walta (2015, p. 11) conclude that “Student data tends to support the contention that the most effective orientation sessions, involve cultural

immersion rather than talking about future events.” In recommending changes, Campbell and Walta (2015) note “it is ‘structured preparation’ that aids students’ intercultural sensitivity. It is now apparent from the Campbell and Walta (2015) study that structured pre-departure preparation needs to include opportunities to reflect on one’s own culture and identify possible challenges associated with cultural adjustment before embracing notions of other cultures and the impact of experiencing cultural difference.

Dunlap *et al.* (2017, p. 900) focus on assessing the impact of a pre-departure class on the measure of cross-cultural adaptability and conclude that pre-departure courses help to improve cross-cultural adaptability. The pre-departure programme forming part of the Dunlap *et al.* (2017) study aims at supporting students to understand their own culture and assist with recognition “that there are a variety of ways in which people ‘do’ life”. Dunlap *et al.’s* (2017) research study is significant because although other authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Lough, 2009) discuss the importance of pre-departure preparation, they do not directly assess the impact of pre-departure preparation. The Dunlap *et al.* (2017) study supports the need for effectiveness of structured pre-departure programmes, for students undertaking international experiences. As Carter *et al.* (2019 p. 191) recommend “programmes should promote independent learning, ahead of the elective (placement abroad) and opportunities to use the placement learning as part of the university programme, should be explored.” A further study by Conroy *et al.* (2019) agrees with the earlier research of Dunlap *et al.* (2017) identifying a lack of guidance and support for students during preparation for placement; whilst on their work placements and after returning from placement. The study recommends that support needs to be developed across all three key interrelated stages in the international placement process, pre-departure; post-arrival; repatriation. The work of authors such as, Auburn (2007), Lough (2009) and Razack (2002) is, therefore, relevant. Reviewing this early literature allows the researcher for this research study, to understand the development of this field of knowledge and why it is the way it is. It is notable that more recent authors such as Campbell and Walta (2015), and Dunlap *et al.* (2017) are calling for a more structured approach to preparation, including the use of formalised pre-departure sessions.

2.6.3 Student experience – problems

Beard *et al.* (2001) provide an understanding of the challenges students face whilst undertaking international placements. Beard *et al.* (2001, p. 10) conclude that ‘negotiation and mutual agreement’ on placement objectives early in the placement, is the most

important factor for success, particularly from the students' perspective. Over a decade later, a report by the HEA (2014, p. 3) notes that international placements "can provide challenges and anxieties for students" which are exacerbated by language and cultural differences. The agency identifies gaps between the expectations of students, universities, lecturers and placement hosts. Major issues that the HEA report identifies include placement hosts not being inclusive, supportive of students or understanding their learning needs and particularly in the case of (UK) placements – staff who are not welcoming, particularly when placement trainees are vulnerable and/or do not have a good command of English language. Recommendations from the HEA report suggests the need for universities to adequately prepare trainees for placements, including workshops and work with students to develop their communication skills.

Parker *et al.* (2015) argue international placement students in their study, comment about feeling uncomfortable when they observe unprofessional practice (in the context of their home country), but that this practice is acceptable within their placement country. Fox's (2017) work on the experience of distance and isolation, focus on international Social Work Placements. Findings from this research study reveal some students who may travel remotely for long periods of time, lack of support can become an issue. Fox (2017, p. 508) acknowledges that students experience "distance in a unique way". In Fox's (2017) study distance refers to "isolation in a learning community". Fox (2017, p. 512) identifies that geographical difference may in some cases have implications for students, for example, feelings of homesickness, problems progressing in a placement and/or concerns about their physical and emotional safety. The study concludes that there could be a reduction in negative experience by educators "facilitating local networks and culturally specific networks"; by providing a "tour guide of the new city"; by helping students to communicate with their friends and family on-line. Ranz *et al.* (2016) support this work in their study analysing Facebook social media posts of Israeli students participating in an international Social Work placement in India. Ranz *et al.* (2016, p. 139) identify students "grappling with their personal and professional identities". Ranz *et al.* (2016, p. 142) identify themes of (a) awareness of national identity (b) exploration of other identities (c) an attempt to contain multidimensional identity. Ranz *et al.* (2016, p. 142) consider weekends as particularly important spaces where students formulate new identities or expand their own identity, whilst also being able to practice their national customs.

Discussing the need for academic staff to support students Maginnis *et al.* (2017, p. 348) opine "it is essential that students are prepared for the change in cultural norms and are

supported by academic staff to work through the processes required to adapt to culture shock". Maginnis *et al.* (2017, p. 348) note the need for academic staff to support students before departure with good planning and preparation and with an emphasis on "the inclusion of cultural norms and beliefs" of their destination country. Hay *et al.* (2018) question whether for smaller, less experienced institutions the challenges associated with organising international placement experiences outweigh the advantages. Hay *et al.* (2018) recognise that it can be difficult for inexperienced university staff to build new relationships with international placement hosts and that they must place considerable trust in their sponsoring organisations. Hay *et al.* (2018, p. 1) recommend that one way to overcome such difficulty is to connect with other tertiary institutions from other "countries with more established international placement programmes".

A review of the literature examining student participation of international experience, highlights two factors for consideration. Firstly, that much of the available research centring on professional practice placements is Australian, for example Fox (2017) and Maginnis *et al.* (2017). It is evident from the work of Fox (2017) and Maginnis *et al.* (2017) that the practice of international experience is already very well embedded into higher education programmes across Australia, including professional programmes such as nursing, teaching and social work. Secondly, a theme raised by authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009) identifies a need to adequately prepare students for international experience and to consider their support needs whilst attending their placement. However, the work of Parker *et al.* (2015) is significant because this research is UK based, sponsored by the British Council and notes how UK students can feel uncomfortable when standards and practices are not the same as in the UK. This finding links to the work completed by the HEA (2014) who discuss challenges and anxieties felt by students because of gaps in expectations between students, universities and placement hosts.

2.6.4 Culture shock

Schein (2016) notes how the concept of culture exists at many levels and include "behavioural regularities when people interact", feelings that groups show and celebrations of events that are important to those who belong to a given group. Together, these form what Schein (2016) describes as a "set of basic assumptions" that belong and were "invented" by the group. Schein (2016) summarises a definition of culture as "accumulated learning or system of beliefs, values, and behavioural norms that come to be taken for

granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness". Hofstede (2023) agrees with Schein (2016) stating that people learn culture from their environment and use this to distinguish themselves from other groups of people. Hofstede (2023) notes how rituals, heroes and symbols are all important aspects of culture for groups of people.

Presbitero (2016, p. 28) describes how the notion of "culture shock" has been seen as a process of "initially adjusting to a new cultural environment" and how culture shock can either shorten or extend how long it takes someone to adapt to a new environment, depending on psychological and physical stresses experienced by an individual. Penderson (1995) offers a similar definition of culture shock stating that this is a period for someone to adjust to a new unfamiliar environment. Presbitero (2016, p. 29) notes that in the context of higher education, culture shock is closely associated with students travelling internationally with psychological stresses closely focussing on "a sense of identity, mental health and overall life satisfaction" and sociocultural stresses comprising of managing the educational environment, work and one's general life. Hambroyan (1995, p. 1714) notes how for students travelling internationally they may feel disorientated and have "nostalgic depressive reactions" and that they may sometimes feel embarrassed about their home culture and traditions in another country. Zhou *et al.* (2008, p. 63) discuss how students attending international universities have "novel social and educational organisations, behaviours and expectations" to overcome, which the authors describe as "difficult enough" when students are "aware of the obstacles" and even more problematic when they encounter challenges that they did not expect. Zhou *et al.* (2008, p. 63) state that such "unfamiliar experiences" for those travelling internationally are known as "culture shock", with pedagogical differences in one another's culture and a mis-match of expectations, resulting in students encountering a higher degree of "unfamiliar experiences", with increased potential for "culture shock".

Bai *et al.* (2022, p. 3) describe culture shock as an "anxious state of mind" because international students find themselves in situations where they have yet to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to manage something. Pramesti *et al.* (2022) identify from their study that all international students experience culture shock, however, the extent of their culture shock experience differs. Pramesti *et al.* (2022 p. 179) opine that culture shock relates to the "feelings and emotions" such as "anxiety, homesickness, uncomfortable, confused and frustration". Pramesti *et al.* (2022) state that culture shock is a "first response to a new culture" lived in and "the result of encountering an unfamiliar environment". An outcome of the Pramesti *et al.* (2022) study is that food; seasons and

weather; payment systems; people behaviour has a significant impact on culture shock. Pramesti *et al.* (2022 p. 184) note the importance of pre-departure preparation and students preparing themselves "by learning about the culture (of the country they are visiting) from the internet "as a strategy for the management of culture shock". Respect for cultural differences, maintaining good relationships with others and cultivating a spirit of tolerance are additional advisory outcomes from the Pramesti *et al.* (2022) study. Yahya (2020 p. 42) agrees with Pramesti *et al.* (2022) that "culture shock is a normal reaction experienced by a foreigner when moving to another country". Yahya (2020 p. 42) opines that culture shock impacts upon issues of "social life, language and food" and can additionally impact on academic performance. Pramesti *et al.* (2022) acknowledges that the notion of culture shock is a continuing area of interest and that there is potential for further research to support cross-cultural understanding in this area. Machin *et al.* (2020 p. 296) suggest that there is a need to anticipate and "be open to difference and the unexpected" and that those who don't "will be those most likely to experience the more negative aspects of culture shock". Machin *et al.* (2020 p. 303) continue to note how it can be difficult for some people to adapt to another culture, particularly in circumstances where they may not have prepared themselves for "the realities of living in a different cultural space".

2.6.5 Barriers to participation

It is evident that many researchers and authors (Attrill *et al.*, 2019; Campbell and Walta, 2015; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; UUKI, 2020) acknowledge a wide range of benefits for students who participate in international experiences, however several writers have focussed on 'barriers to participation' experienced by students with some authors further suggesting ways in which such barriers may be overcome. Writing in this area is not extensive, therefore, it is necessary to review the work of authors during the last two decades onwards.

The work of Teichler *et al.* (2001, p. 455) note that "mobile graduates differ somewhat from non-mobile graduates in vertical terms, i.e. slightly higher status and income and substantially in horizontal terms, i.e. higher frequency of international work tasks and use of corresponding competence". Teichler *et al.* (2001, p. 455) state that ERASMUS is not more successful "in preparing students for international mobility and international work

assignments than study abroad with other means and in other contexts". However, Teichler *et al.* (2001) do credit the success of the ERASMUS programme as a positive factor, which has made it easier to expand the number of mobile European students who are able to participate in mobility exchange. Sweeney (2012, p. 30) states that barriers for UK students' participation in outgoing mobility can be split into two factors: "institutional" and "personal circumstance". The type of university where a student is studying may cause institutional barriers with accessing an international experience. Sweeney (2012) notes that a National Union of Students' (NUS) study identifies gaps between different university groupings, with 23% of Russell Group university students considering a placement abroad. This compares with 18% at pre 1992 universities and 11% at post 1992 universities. Sweeney (2012) acknowledges that other factors such as degree structure; term and semester times; examination and assessment schedules; the need to undertake core modules, are also key institutional barriers to participation. Reay (2012) suggests that another important factor is discussion of class inequalities, noting that students from working class backgrounds have less opportunity for summer internships and volunteering because of the need to generate monetary income. Sweeney (2012) also considers that personal barriers to participation in outward student mobility may include student diffidence (e.g., levels of confidence); lack of confidence in language skills; friendships, relationships and language concerns; financial considerations; housing considerations; the need for information to be provided early enough for students to consider and act upon.

Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) investigate barriers to international student mobility, focussing on the European ERASMUS programme and as such this research study has similarities with the work of Sweeney (2012). Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) note limited research making comparisons between participants and non-participants. The Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) research study examines differences between ERASMUS and non-ERASMUS students with data drawn from seven countries. Research findings reveal that those who consider participating in the programme cite financial barriers more frequently than those who do not participate. Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) opine that as those who consider participating start to gather relevant information, financial barriers to participation become more apparent. Furthermore, the research of Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013, p. 73) find differences with informational barriers, as they identify that non-ERASMUS students are more likely to be certain as to the benefits of an international experience for themselves, more so than those who participate. Findings also reveal that students who have low confidence with

foreign language and those who perceive personal relationships, as a barrier to participation are less likely to take up an ERASMUS international experience. Conclusions from the Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) study indicate that students first consider personal aspects with non-participants withdrawing their interest at this point. Those who overcome this consideration continue to consider areas such as finances and study system comparability. Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013, p. 75) conclude that "individual characteristics and perceptions, rather than the conditions of the ERASMUS programme, deter students from participation in the first place". The results of the research by Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) demonstrate the impact of social and personal variables as a differentiating factor between those students who participate in ERASMUS and those who decline. Research conducted by Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) has many findings that are similar to those of Sweeney (2012), particularly in noting the influence of separation from relationships, as a key influence in whether an individual decides to participate in an outward student mobility.

Focussing on ERASMUS students, but in a different type of study to those of Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) and Sweeney (2012), Böttcher *et al.* (2016, p. 2) conduct statistical analysis of ERASMUS big data sets, analysing mobility patterns in the 2011/12 ERASMUS mobility data across participating countries and subject areas. Their findings identify gender gaps across participation areas. In almost all participating countries, female students were over-represented compared to the entire population of tertiary students. About 61% of students were female which was 1.13 times higher than the fraction of female students attending tertiary education across ERASMUS participating countries. Female students are consistently over-represented, even when considering their majority in tertiary education. The Böttcher *et al.* (2016) study notes that "this result is in sharp contrast to the labour market, where empirical studies suggest that the mobility of female workers is lower than the one of their male counterparts". A study by Chinnappan *et al.* (2013), differs from the work of Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) and Sweeney (2012), because it focusses on professional practice placements, rather than on general ERASMUS mobility, confirms the importance of pre-departure support for students undertaking international experiences. Chinnappan *et al.* (2013, p. 48) state "in order to optimise their overseas experience and develop, pre-service teachers (PSTs) require understanding of what works in Australia and how this can be adapted in an overseas classroom" Chinnappan *et al.* (2013, p. 48) state "more guidance needs to be provided for PSTs prior to them commencing their overseas professional experiences". For example, participants in the study comment that following

their international experience there is a need to “provide culturally relevant but cognitively demanding teaching aids to engage students in learning” Chinnappan *et al.* (2013, p. 48) also acknowledge the need for on-going support during the course of the international experience, in the form of supervision, noting “without the benefit of a supervised overseas experience, there is an inverse relationship between resource availability and quality of teaching”. Participants in this research study are positive in the acquisition of additional skills and their transferability into new teaching contexts.

Research conducted by Cleak *et al.* (2016), which as in the case of Chinnappan *et al.* (2013) focusses on professional practice placements, asks students studying Social Work qualifications about their international experience. The Cleak *et al.* (2016) research study is unique because it allows students who have graduated, to compare their international experience with other placement experiences. Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 394) opine that “the retrospective nature of the study allows participants to comment on the benefits and drawbacks for them, in terms of their careers in social work, employment opportunities and current professional practice.” Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 393) agree with Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) and Sweeney (2012), that finance can be an issue for students seeking international experiences, stating that “Financial obstacles are the most commonly cited barriers to student participation and frequently students are required to self-fund international placements”. However, Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 393) also note differences with the management of health and safety across different countries, noting “Students’ safety issues are a particular challenge in developing countries”. Cleak *et al.* (2016) continue to state the importance of screening and pre-departure briefings as a method for controlling the risk involved. Other barriers to participation according to Cleak *et al.* (2016) include identifying qualified supervisors; styles of teaching in different regions of the world; inconsistencies in the standard of living experience. When discussing their time on placement, students who were part of the Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 401) study note encountering the following barriers “inadequate supervision and professional support; pre-placement arrangements and liaison; cultural barriers, such as language; different culture and values.” In addition, participants identify facing practical difficulties, including lack of money, health, safety, accommodation and travel.

Research by Fowlie *et al.* (2018, p. 8) review groups of undergraduate Business Management students at Brighton and Goethe Universitie, Frankfurt, to gather attitudes towards work placements abroad. The Fowlie *et al.* (2018) research study focusses on two groups of undergraduate students in different European countries (as the UK was part of

the EU and a member of the EU ERASMUS programme at the time the Fowlie *et al.* (2018) study was completed). Findings reveal that both sets of students identify similar barriers to participation, but that they are motivated by different drivers. Significantly, the Fowlie *et al.* (2018) research identifies that a lack of staff interest or awareness of placements abroad, can have an adverse impact on student decisions about whether to participate in an international experience. Fowlie *et al.*'s (2018) research identifies main drivers for students, include gaining language skills; employability and career prospects and developing intercultural competence. However, there are some notable differences in responses to questions about drivers from the two groups of students. For example, Goethe students rated 'developing international business knowledge' as the top reason for undertaking a work placement abroad, whereas for Brighton students 'gaining/improving language skills' was the primary driver. It is suggested (Fowlie *et al.*, 2018, p8) that "Goethe students are focused on ways to develop themselves in the workplace and Brighton students are seemingly more focused on a cultural experience".

A key objective of the Turing Scheme (2021) (Appendix 4) is to contribute to the UK Government's commitment to a Global Britain, by helping organisations enhance their existing international ties and forge new relationships around the world. The Turing Scheme aims to provide funding for those individuals undertaking education and training in the UK to undertake study or work placements across the world. In line with the UK Government's vision of a Global Britain, Turing Scheme projects are intended to "encourage the forging of new relationships across the world". The Turing Scheme is intended to support the UK Government's commitment to "levelling up", as the Social Mobility Commission (2021 p. 8) note, with the Turing Scheme supporting social mobility and widening participation across the UK. A key feature of the Turing Scheme is the provision of additional funding for students identified as being from disadvantaged backgrounds (for example a household income of less than £25,000, from a care background, an asylum seeker or refugee). A second key feature is that the scheme is global in its nature, without the limiting country membership boundaries of the previous ERASMUS scheme. Waters (2023 p. 323) notes how the Turing Scheme targets "those from less advantaged backgrounds" and how the minimum length of time students need to spend abroad is less than that required by the former ERASMUS programme. Waters (2023 p. 323) states a belief that universities "need to take a more active role in supporting students [to] undertake shorter placements" abroad. Waters (2023 p. 316) notes that a "main driver" of the Turing Scheme is to "widen participation in study abroad" and that

mobility durations of a shorter period are one method by which this aim can be achieved. At the time this research is taking place the Turing Scheme has only been operational for a limited number of years and there is limited published data on the impact of the scheme and length of mobilities.

From the literature it is possible to draw out key areas relating to barriers to student participation in an international experience, where there is overlap with authors who identify barriers to participation. Concerns in the available published work include, language skills (sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.5) Cleak *et al.* (2016); Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013); Sweeney (2012); finance Cleak *et al.* (2016); Naffziger *et al.* (2017); Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013); Sweeney (2012); organisation of the experience (section 2.6.5) Petzold *et al.* (2018); supervision of a placement by the university (section 2.4.3) Cleak *et al.* (2016); Chinnappan *et al.* (2013); Cranston *et al.* (2020); Crossman *et al.* (2010); Jones *et al.* (2018).

2.7 Cultural and aspirational capital

2.7.1 Social and cultural mobility as influencers

In viewing this research study from a wider educational and sociological perspective this research study takes the view that it is important to acknowledge the influence of social and cultural mobility within the context of the study. Social mobility is the movement of individuals (or categories of people) within or between social status in a society. It is often viewed as an opportunity for those from underprivileged backgrounds or lower social statuses to move to a different social class (Noble *et al.*, 2009). As Noble *et al.* (2009 p. 599) recognise, “considerable resources” target support to increase the number of students from “under-represented groups” into higher education. This research study *How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, understands that social and cultural mobility are factors that impact on an individual’s choice of whether to attend university and if attending university, whether to participate in an international experience.

Cultural mobility is seen to polarise class relations and practices in contemporary society. As Emmisson (2003, p. 211) notes:

“The concept of cultural mobility refers to the differential capacity to engage with or consume cultural goods and services across the entire spectrum of cultural life, an ability which is itself premised upon an unequal, class related distribution in cultural competence.”

Emmisson (2003, p. 212) describes “class moorings” which influence the “activities” and “taste cultures” and thereby the behaviour and thinking of individuals. Emmisson (2003) opines that a person’s background influences their position in society.

Considering the influence of culture from a workplace perspective (section 2.6.3), Hofstede (1991, p. 5) conducts a comprehensive study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture, defining culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing one group or category of people from others.” Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture (1991) can be used to help manage differences. Hofstede (1991) considers cultures in terms of acceptance of power in society; individualistic or collectivist culture; masculine cultures that focus on achievement and assertiveness; feminine cultures that focus on co-operation and care; uncertainty avoidance where there are rigid codes of belief in place; long term versus short-term orientation and the value of indulgence in society. This significant research demonstrates a belief that people are conditioned by the social groups and how they behave is influenced by their environment, making it likely that different groups of people will act and behave in particular ways. This research study empathises with Hofstede’s (1991) view, particularly when considering the behaviours of different groups of students at University A and those undergraduate students who are recruited from within the immediate city area (section 1.3).

Bennett *et al.* (2004 p. 7) discuss how “the concept of cultural capital has been identified as a crucial axis of social inequality”. Li *et al.* (2008, p. 392) discuss British society and their view that there are “deep and growing social class inequalities.” These include social resources and social capital with Li *et al.* (2008, p. 392) stating that this “pits an apparently engaged and involved professional and managerial/service class against an apparently increasingly disengaged working class”. Bennett *et al.* (2004 p. 7) analyse civic engagement and informal social connections, finding that “access to social ties is strongly controlled by mobility trajectory” and that minority ethnic groups and women are more greatly disadvantaged in terms of ability to “bridge social ties”, because as Bennett *et al.* (2004 p. 8) argue cultural capital is assumed by people’s educational qualifications, without regard to “people’s aesthetic tastes, the extent of their social and cultural participation and

their cultural tastes". Bennett *et al.* (2004) argue that the acceptance of these additional factors is important when debating social inclusion and exclusion.

Chan *et al.* (2013) note that most studies relating to social mobility review two generations. Their study takes account of three generations. Chan *et al.* (2013, p. 662) opine that "social origins are strong predictors of social destinations". Chan *et al.*'s (2013) research study also reveals that "civic engagement in formal associations is especially high among second-generation members of the service class". Daenekindt *et al.* (2014, p. 86) note that "it is not clear as to what happens with the cultural resources originating from childhood experiences. For example, individuals originating from lower social strata exhibiting lowbrow preferences and practices in childhood, may pick up highbrow preferences and practices during their educational career." Daenekindt *et al.* (2014, p. 86) continue to state their view that "cultural profiles of upwardly mobile individuals are predominantly guided by the social position of destination. That is, upwardly mobile individuals tend to exhibit more dissonant cultural profiles compared to individuals from the same social position of origin who did not climb the social ladder."

In discussing social and cultural mobility it is important to recognise the work of Bourdieu (1973) who discusses the concept of cultural capital (a person's knowledge and intellectual skills). Bourdieu (1973, p. 71) states a belief that the education system perfectly reflects the "structure of distribution of cultural capital among the classes". Bourdieu (1973) describes how social capital works within an economy to confer someone's social status. Education is seen as a method which can provide an advantage to an individual in achieving a higher social status in society. Introducing the value of educational qualifications, Bourdieu (1973, p. 87) notes how in a pre-capitalist economy "the value of the diploma, outside the specifically academic market, depends on the economic and social values of the person who possesses it." An example is provided for the child of an industrialist, where their diploma is considered "only an added qualification to them legitimately succeeding their father or to them occupying the director's post guaranteed by their network of family relations." For a white-collar worker's child who is "less favoured in economic and social capital" a qualification is considered "more indispensable" as their only way of achieving the same qualification is "by means of academic success" and that, even with the qualification they cannot be sure of achieving the same post at the same firm as the child of an industrialist. Bourdieu (1973) cites the notion of habitus which he describes as a social structure known to a person with a known set of actions that are common to persons of a particular group. Bourdieu (1973) introduces the concept of fields, which are

described as a social space in which interactions, transactions and events take place in someone's life. Within fields Bourdieu (1973) describes forces and relationships of inequality where some people dominate others with a person's power defining their position in the field.

Bourdieu's (1973) studies are not without criticism, for example, King (2000 p. 427) offers criticism of Bourdieu (1973) noting how critics argue that the concept of habitus does not allow people to construct new strategies for changing situations. King (2000 p. 427) acknowledges that this degree of inflexibility is very much at odds with the intention of Bourdieu (1973), thus demonstrating a limitation in the concept. Webb *et al.* (2017) argue there is a need to move beyond Bourdieu's (1977) original work by incorporating the study of organisations and their routine practices to reveal complexities. Webb *et al.* (2017 p. 1) argue that by allowing theoretical extensions to Bourdieu's (1977) work it will be possible to discover "more nuanced understandings of the complex and intersecting social inequalities in higher education". This research study is not intended as a study of Bourdieu, however, the influence of Bourdieu's work is recognised by more recent literature. The work of Bourdieu (1977) influences the lens through which this research is viewed and in particular, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital which is later acknowledged in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 3) and is pivotal to the Analysis and Discussion Chapter (Chapter 5). Analysis of cultural capital within the context of the research findings of this research study is in section 5.5. The concept of cultural capital develops further in section 5.2.1.

2.7.2 Aspirational and navigational capital

This section intends to provide an overview of aspirational and navigational capital relevant to this research study.

Yosso (2005 p. 79) cites how social capital is concerning "networks of people and community resources", who provide "emotional support" to each other to "navigate through society's institutions". Vryonides (2007 p. 868) discusses how theoretical concepts can be applied when researching educational issues and describes the concept of cultural capital, developed by Bourdieu (1973) as "legitimised knowledge present in a home environment, which allows parents and children to secure advantages from the educational process". Vryonides (2007 p. 869) expresses an opinion that social capital is a resource that is interconnected with cultural capital and works in a way that extends "the horizons

for choice making”, which consists of “knowledge of how the educational system operates”. Abel (2008 p. 1) describes cultural capital as the values, behavioural norms and knowledge that people possess which are “acquired mostly through social learning” with this learning “varying across the social classes, status groups or milieus”. Gripsrud *et al.* (2011 p. 514) note how there is a social gap between students “from lower and higher social classes, regarding access to elite studies” with the gap “even more marked with regards to differences in terms of parents’ capital composition”.

Xu *et al.* (2012 p. 105 - 118) identify “participation in cultural activities and possession of cultural goods as our primary measures” of cultural capital and note how “educational inequalities that are reproduced through parental background and its interaction with cultural capital”. Prieur *et al.* (2013 p. 3) describe the concept of cultural capital as being “a tool for explaining how the success of children in school depend on the level of education of their parents”. Cincinnato *et al.* (2016 p. 143) suggest that the practices of individuals are impacted upon by their social background and “more precisely by the cultural resources handed down in the family context”. Authors (Cincinnato *et al.*, 2016; Gripsrud *et al.*, 2011; Vryonides, 2007; Xu *et al.*, 2012) suggest that parents’ knowledge and experience of the educational system influences what they can pass down to their own children, which in turn may impact on their children’s experience of education. Ohashi *et al.* (2017 p. 386) agree with Cincinnato *et al.* (2016), Gripsrud *et al.* (2011) and Vryonides (2007), acknowledging the importance of the educational system, stating that cultural capital is accumulated and reproduced “through the education system” and how the development of cultural capital “reduces health and social inequality with academic achievement” and “ultimately enhances the well-being of individuals and the community overall”. Sullivan (2001) agrees with the view of Ohashi *et al.* (2017) taking a traditional view of cultural capital, stating that it is passed down from parents to their children and expressing a view that a lack of cultural capital can make it more difficult for those from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed in the education system. Gomez (2021 p.2534) introduces the concept of digital capital and a connection to economic capital, which the author argues is “the basic form of digital inequality” as those less financially able are not able to purchase digital resources which are essential for the development of cultural capital, by providing “access to knowledge” in modern society.

Reay (2004 p. 75) argues for a broad understanding of cultural capital within an educational context, that can acknowledge “qualitative dimensions” inequalities, stating “it can be argued that levels of confidence and entitlement are key dimensions of cultural

capital across social fields". Brown (1995 p. 30) discusses a belief that there "will be an increasing polarisation in the fortunes of students from middle-class backgrounds", because of "important differences in 'work' and 'market' situations". Brown (1995) identifies that the main differences will be in the areas of career opportunities, job security and household income. Brown (1995 p. 30) expresses a view that higher education expands to support the demand for employment within scientific and technical knowledge fields. At the same time, there has been a decline in the proportion of semi and unskilled jobs and this has impacted on a "polarisation" of the middle classes. Brown (1995 p. 33) continues to state that cultural capital has "long been recognised as vital to the reproduction of the middle classes", because of the perceived need for this group of people to enter "professional occupations".

Yosso (2005) identifies the importance of aspirational capital, which Yosso (2005, p. 77) states overlaps with other forms of capital and "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers". Yosso (2005 p. 78) describes how the concept of aspirational capital allows people to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain these goals". Basit (2012) introduces a concept of aspirational capital which Basit (2012) associates with educational and career aspirations, particularly for disadvantaged groups of people, Basit (2012 p. 130) argues that cultural capital plays a significant role in enabling people to succeed in education and careers and transfers where it exists in families regardless of social class. Basit (2012 p. 134 - 139) views the notion of aspirational capital as a critical extension of, or substitute for cultural and social capital, depending on the family background of an individual and states that this is a "strong motivating force, striving to improve life chances", noting how an important concept of aspirational capital is a "desire for upward social mobility". Straubhaar (2013 p. 99) agrees with Basit (2012), describing aspirational capital as "hopes and dreams for a better future". Straubhaar (2013 p. 99) notes how participants "believed strongly in their education as a means to improve their earning ability and quality of life".

Yosso (2005 p. 70) acknowledges and builds on the work of Bourdieu (1973) stating a belief that where people are not born into a family "whose knowledge is already deemed valuable" such individuals are then able to access "the knowledges of the middle and upper classes and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling". Yosso (2005 p. 70) makes a valuable point that where education providers identify a potential lack of "social and cultural capital required for social mobility" they must "work from this assumption" and

"structure ways to help disadvantaged students". Yosso (2005 p. 75) states a belief that culture impacts on the organisation of society, particularly how educational curriculum and pedagogy are developed and implemented. At this point it is relevant to introduce Yosso's (2005) concept of "navigational capital", which refers to a person's ability to manoeuvre through systems and institutions that historically were not designed for them. Yosso (2005 p. 80) notes how navigational capital is "a set of inner resources, social competences and cultural strategies" that enable people to "survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events" and to later draw from these experiences "to enhance subsequent functioning". Yosso (2005) notes that this capital empowers individuals to move within environments that can feel both unsupportive or hostile. Yosso (2005 p. 77) identifies how aspirational, navigational and cultural capital "are dynamic processes that build on one another" and do not, therefore, stand in isolation from each other.

Basit (2012 p. 135) adds further to the discussion of aspirational capital and its potential to build an individual's cultural capital, noting how development of a career is seen by young people as a "natural progression from education". In Basit's (2012 p. 135) study none of the participants wished to "attain education for education's sake", with most participants in their final stages of education having a "clearly envisioned "view of their future career paths. Basit (2012 p. 136) identifies as an outcome of their study the notion that aspirational capital "prevents people from becoming downhearted and enabling them to continue to hope and dream of a life which includes education and a career". Basit (2012 p. 139-140) concludes by acknowledging the significance of cultural capital and describing aspirational capital as a "fluid concept" that when worked with, allows support for the achievement of aspirations by other parties. For Basit (2012 p. 140) aspirational capital consists of "positive thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs and actions". Basit (2012) is suggesting that the development of aspirational capital may be used to enable growth of cultural capital, where this is at first lacking in an individual.

Straubhaar (2013 p. 94) acknowledges the work of Bourdieu (1973) with the development of cultural capital and the notion of habitus and notes how knowledge acquired by individuals is "influenced by family background and sociocultural experiences". Straubhaar (2013 p. 95) acknowledges the work of Yosso (2005) and supports the opinion of Yosso (2005) that where education providers know about a likely deficit of cultural capital they must "work from this assumption and identify ways to support disadvantaged groups". Straubhaar (2013) introduces evidence of aspirational capital from a study of 14 students who are Mexican immigrants in the 10th grade at high school in the USA. Straubhaar (2013

p. 99) identifies aspirational capital, stemming from the repeated positive messages provided by the study participants' parents. For the participants, these messages provide them with a belief in the "power of education" to improve their lives in creating improving opportunities for their futures.

Literature discussing aspirational capital focusses research on minority communities and their engagement with education. However, this body of literature does focus on the education system and enhancement of achievement in education and careers for disadvantaged groups of people. Through the work of Basit (2012), Straubhaar (2013) and Yosso (2005), it is possible to view the concept of aspirational capital in a context where this links and supports the building of cultural capital for disadvantaged groups. Basit (2012), Straubhaar (2013) and Yosso (2005), cite the importance of the education system as central to the development of both cultural and aspirational capital. Authors appreciate that cultural capital has the potential of enhancement through the raising of aspirational capital, for example, Yosso (2005) supported by Straubhaar (2013), makes a point that educators must recognise deficits of cultural capital with disadvantaged groups and use this as their starting point for future development. Analysis and further discussion of aspirational capital within the context of the research findings for this research study is in later sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 of Chapter 5.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature identifies through examination of overarching themes (the landscape for student international experience; student international experience within the context of higher education; barriers to student participation in an international experience; cultural and aspirational capital), within which international experience for students is part, that the internationalisation of higher education is central to the advancement of knowledge. Kreber (2009) and Morley *et al.* (2018, p. 538) note the significant advancements that higher education providers have taken to prioritise internationalisation since the 1990s. Wit (2020, p. 1) connects internationalisation within a higher education context to the mobility of students and staff. Linked to this is the development of global citizens and global citizenship which Bosanquet (2010, p. 1) cites is frequently referred to by universities. Knight (2012, p. 20) when discussing how international student mobility transforms the higher education landscape, notes how internationalisation now embeds into university strategic plans and government policy statements. Knight (2012, p. 21) argues that international student mobility brings benefits to students, institutions,

communities and countries. Dagen, *et al.* (2019, p. 643) express their opinion that globalisation and internationalisation have very much “entered the academic research arena”. Rose (2018, p. 111) notes the impact of globalisation on the higher education sector and the development of “globally orientated universities.” The importance of the Bologna Declaration of 1999 in creating the European Higher Education Area and adopting a more standardised approach to the structure of higher education qualifications within that area, is recognised by several authors including Amaral *et al.* (2004) and Vogtle *et al.* (2016).

The literature review continues to examine factors that support international experience. Eluwole *et al.* (2020) and McGladdery *et al.* (2017) introduce the concept of Edu-tourism where participants travel to another domicile and learning occurs through a process of reflective practice. The current political climate, including Brexit, which has taken place during the time of this research is discussed by a range of authors (Waters, 2018; Woodfield, 2018; Yu, 2019), with Highman (2018) identifying that the implications for the Higher Education sector are not immediately clear. Waters (2023) notes the launch of the UK Government Turing Scheme, which Waters (2023) describes as being a replacement for the ERASMUS programme, following Brexit and offering shorter term mobilities than its ERASMUS predecessor. Several authors (Carvalho *et al.*, 2020; Priestley *et al.*, 2019; Shamir-Inbal *et al.*, 2021) identify the importance of pedagogic culture, citing a requirement for flexibility with curriculum design to allow for the facilitation of international exchange and Giroux *et al.* (2004) noting the important role of pedagogy in making transformation between politics and education possible.

This literature review examines available data from UUKI and the EU ERASMUS programme. The EU ERASMUS programme, which is cited in several EU publications, publishes data demonstrating success in improving the volume of student and staff mobilities across the member countries of the ERASMUS programme. Teichler *et al.* (2001) analysing data from the ERASMUS programme, evidence a strong link between participation and international professional mobility in later life.

Discussing the wider impact and external factors relevant to international experience Crossman *et al.* (2010, p. 604 and 609) conclude that “international experience is connected with graduate employability”. Crossman *et al.* (2010, p. 604) consider that, international experience “puts people into spaces where they would be exposed to global thinking”, which in turn distinguishes from other graduates in recruitment processes and

impacts positively with graduate employability. This view is shared by a wide range of authors (Brooks *et al.*, 2016; Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Ozek, 2009; Teichler *et al.*, 2001). Other authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; Pence *et al.*, 2008; Yashima, 2010) all identify social and cultural development as a key benefit for students participating in an international experience. Dunlap *et al.* (2017), Geraghty *et al.* (2020), Gower *et al.* (2017) and Trilokekar *et al.* (2011) recognise the development of professional practice as a key attribute of an international experience.

Fox (2017) identifies distance and isolation as issues for some students. The need for careful planning and preparation to minimise the potential for issues, particularly with disorientation and anxiety as Razack (2002) identifies. Other authors, (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009), identify a clear need for higher education institutions to adequately prepare their students for international experience. In other circumstances students may experience barriers preventing them from participating in an international experience, as Sweeney (2012) notes that 23% of Russell Group university students undertake an international experience compared to only 18% at post 1992 institutions. Both Cleak *et al.* (2016) and Sweeney *et al.* (2012) identify a range of personal barriers which may prevent some students from participating. Presbitero (2016) and Zhou *et al.* (2008) recognise a need for students travelling abroad to have a period of adjustment in their new environment and that during this time they may experience culture shock.

Several authors (Barron, 1997; Conboye, 2013) discuss the value that employers place on the notion of international experience with Crossman *et al.* (2010, p. 599) concluding that globalisation has increased the need for graduates to work within "culturally diverse contexts" and Sweeney (2012) concluding that employers favour graduates who have international experience. Ross *et al.* (2020) identifies and acknowledges pressure that placement providers can feel from higher education institutions, to accept international placement students, judging that there is a need for institutional tutors to be clear about supervision requirements, to maintain the quality of international placements.

Discussing cultural mobility, the influence of Bourdieu (1973) and his belief that capital works within an economy to confer social status, is important because of links to more recent authors. For example, Bennett *et al.* (2004) who discuss social capital as an axis of inequality and Emmisson (2003) who states a belief that there is a link between someone's background and their position in society. Bourdieu (1973) introduces the concept of fields,

which are described as a social space in which interactions, transactions and events take place in someone's life. Linked to fields are forces and relationships of inequality, where some people dominate others with power defining a position within a field. Basit (2012), Vryonides (2007) and Yosso (2005), introduce a concept of aspirational capital, which they describe as support for moving through hostile environments, providing someone with hopes and dreams for the future. Basit (2012) places aspirational capital as working within educational and career contexts.

2.8.1 Strengths and limitations of the literature

The existing literature dissipates across a range of authors (Bagnasco *et al.*, 2020; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2020; UUKI (2020), who discuss areas of interest and advocate engagement by students in international experience as a part of their time studying in higher education. In addition to the aforementioned authors, Carlson (1990) cites a benefit of participation as improved academic performance and cultural interest; Cleak *et al.* (2016) who identify enhancement of awareness of local issues, awareness of global inequalities and improving employability and career prospects; Kauffman *et al.* (1992) who discuss improvement in cultural capital and development of global understanding as a benefit of participation; Teichler *et al.* (2001) who make links to improving employability and job status, agreeing with the work of Cleak *et al.* (2016) and Geraghty *et al.* (2020); who identify awareness of cross cultural issues; Ozek (2009) who agrees with Kauffman *et al.* (1992) citing enhancement of cultural awareness; Cleak *et al.* (2016), Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) and Sweeney (2012), who discuss a range of barriers to participation in an international experience.

When considering the focus of this research (section 1.3) which is set in the context of an English post 1992 university within the North Midlands area, a limitation of the literature identifies less existing literature focussing on UK student experience. The work of Trilokekar *et al.* (2011) and Waters and Brooks (2011) is particularly important because they focus on UK students, however, this work is now over a decade old. The research by Crawford *et al.* (2016) is also important as it is UK based, recent and identifies students engaging in an international experience, tend to improve academic performance. However, this finding contrasts with UUKI (2017) data, demonstrating just over one third of UK student outward mobilities are for Medicine, Dentistry and Languages which tend to attract the most academically able students.

Connections are made in the literature with cultural capital and social capital, where there is much published work, building on the writing of Bourdieu (1973:1977). Literature discussing aspirational capital tends to focus on race and education (Basit, 2012 and Yosso, 2005) and immigration (Straubhaar, 2013). A limitation with the literature is opening discussion of aspirational capital to other areas of education research.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this research study is being completed at a time when the UK has ended its membership of the EU ERASMUS programme (May 2022) and is replacing this scheme with the UK Government Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4). Therefore, it is unsurprising that little literature and data exists about the Turing Scheme at this point in time. A benefit of this research study is that it will contribute to the literature discussing the Turing Scheme and the potential impact of the scheme's global nature compared to the predecessor ERASMUS programme.

2.8.2 How the literature informs this research study

The available literature provides a global context to UK outward student mobility. Data, through publications by the European ERASMUS programme and UUKI defines the historic nature and practice of UK and European outward student mobility. Together with the contextual setting of University A (section 1.3), this is relevant for this research study because of the low number of outward mobilities at University A (section 5.27). In particular, the work of authors discussing barriers to student participation (section 2.6.5) and student experience problems (section 2.6.3) is used to formulate the quantitative questionnaire questions, including tables relating to factors that are important when deciding whether to participate in an international experience.

The concepts of support, as Campbell and Walta (2015), Conroy *et al.* (2019), Dunlap *et al.* (2017) and Lough (2009), advocate are important influencers to the research design and inform both the quantitative and qualitative research for this research study.

The connection between cultural development and cultural capital, influences the lens through which this research will be seen and the journey to the research study approach (section 3.7). Drawn from the writings of cultural capital is the concept of aspirational capital as authors such as Basit (2012), Straubhaar (2013) and Yosso (2005), note and as having a connection within educational settings.

The literature has been mapped across the recognition by some authors of the benefits of student participation in an international experience, as shown in Table 2.8.2.1

Development of inter-cultural skills and knowledge		Advancement of employability skills and professional practice		Evolution of transversal skills
Attrill <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Martel (2020)	EAIE (2020)	Geraghty (2020)	Mason <i>et al.</i> (2009)
Bagnasco <i>et al.</i> (2020)	UUKI (2020)	Crossman <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Gower <i>et al.</i> (2017)	UNESCO (2019)
Carlson <i>et al.</i> (1990)	Pence <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Trilokekar <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Dunlap <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Skills and Education Group (2019)
Kauffmann <i>et al.</i> (1992)	Yashima (2010)	Cleak <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Brooks <i>et al.</i> (2016)	World Economic Forum (2020)
Cranston <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Sweeney (2012)	Teichler <i>et al.</i> (2001)	Parey <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Lopez <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Campbell and Walta (2015)	Drynan (2013)	Ozek (2009)		
Dunlap <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Jones <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Barker <i>et al.</i> (2010)		
DeMartini (1992)				
Ozek (2009)				
Becoming more flexible, adaptable, resourceful or improving confidence		Enhancement of global awareness		Emergence of improved self-control and self-confidence
Martel (2020)		Cleak <i>et al.</i> (2016)		Trilokekar <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Davies <i>et al.</i> (2017)				
Cranston <i>et al.</i> (2020)				
Izunwa (2011)				
Improved academic performance		Recognition of importance for institutions		
Crawford <i>et al.</i> (2016)		Aamaas <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Wake <i>et al.</i> (2017)	
Brooks (2016)		Baty (2009)	Perry (2013)	
Parey <i>et al.</i> (2011)		Vinther <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Cleak <i>et al.</i> (2016)	
Jones <i>et al.</i> (2018)		Parker <i>et al.</i> (2015)		

Table 2.8.2.1 Table demonstrating the recognition of identified benefits from participation in an international experience, as identified by authors

2.9 Conceptual framework

Basit (2010) notes the importance of understanding the context of a research study and what previous researchers discover when investigating a similar subject area. A conceptual framework describes what an author expects to find through research.

Kivunja (2018, p. 47) outlines the format for a conceptual framework as:

“Thoughts on identification of research topic; problem to be investigated; questions to be asked; literature to be reviewed; theories to be applied; methodology to be used; methods, procedures and instruments; data analysis and interpretation of findings; recommendations and conclusions”

In other words, once the research topic is chosen, a review of relevant literature to the research question follows before the research approach begins. Methodological choices and type of research methods are the next step before research takes place, followed by the development and testing of knowledge through the application of an appropriate theoretical framework and analysis and discussion of findings, with comparison drawn to the writing of authors. Finally, reporting and publishing of the research findings can occur. Crawford (2019) describes a conceptual framework as a reason for the research and notes how some authors view the framework as explanatory with the framework intended to be a logical representation of everything that forms part of the underlying thinking, along with the structure, practice and implementation of a research project.

The conceptual framework for this research study with its aim to investigate *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, identifies international experience (section 1.2) and participation by undergraduate students as the outline topic for this research study. An independent variable of the study is the student participation in an international experience. The independent variable is the impact of the experience on the student. A literature review (Chapter 2) occurs, that is relevant to the outline topic focussing on overarching concepts relevant to the research question; literature relevant to student mobility for study, work-experience and volunteering; social and cultural mobility within the context of the study. The literature review contributes to a conceptual framework underpinning this area of knowledge. Relevant literature is discussed later in relation to the research findings as part of the Analysis and Discussion chapter (Chapter 5).

Student experience with the phenomenon under investigation is essential to this research, with their experience emerging from both the qualitative (section 3.7.2) and quantitative (section 3.7.3) research data. Following analysis of this research data, the view will be through a lens of cultural capital, with the concept of aspirational capital, drawn from the writings of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1973) (section 2.8.2).

2.10 Theoretical framework

Newby (2013, p. 14) notes that "a theoretical perspective means that we read what others have written about how the elements we are investigating should relate to each other, or about how they do relate to each other and about what should happen in order for situations to improve". Coe *et al.* (2017) describe theoretical research as focussing on ideas, rather than phenomena. Both writers are of an opinion that this type of research presents a philosophical argument, a critique or methodological advancement. Chu *et al.* (2017, p. 290), discussing a theoretical approach, note that "this, as a research method, is a technique for gathering data through conceptual analysis, theoretical examination, or similar activities". Kivunja (2018, p. 46) views a theoretical framework as a "coat hanger for your data analysis and interpretation of results". Kivunja (2018) describes how the concepts and theories of previous work provide a theoretical background to as the basis for data analysis and interpretation. Kivunja (2018, p. 46) continues to note how the concepts of theoretical framework and conceptual framework are often mis-understood "even among experienced researchers".

This current research study, with its aim to investigate *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, seeks to firstly identify what others have written about the area relevant to the research question. However, as the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 3) describes, it is as Coe *et al.* (2017) note, a study of phenomena, aiming to advance available research in the area of benefits of participation in an international experience for undergraduate students.

From reviewing literature, it is evident that no single theoretical framework exists which can be solely linked to this research study and as Kivunja (2018) states, could be a basis for analysing data from the research study findings. The literature review (Chapter 2) provides a foundational review, for making connections and for contextualising arguments for this research study. The design of participant research questions for both quantitative and

qualitative research sit within the context of available authors' work (discussed further in section 3.7.1) and provide a broad framework for the structure of questions. However, participant questions and data gathering extend beyond this framework.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing authors' work discussing previous studies and literature in relation to this research, drawing out themes of the landscape for student international experience; student international experience within the context of higher education; barriers to student participation in an international experience; cultural and aspirational capital. Finally, the chapter introduces conceptual and theoretical frameworks relating to the research question.

3 Methodology

This chapter commences by setting out the research positionality chosen by the researcher for this research study and then continues to consider a range of research philosophies. Discussion of ethical considerations follows, with proposals made for methodological choices and research strategies along with a requirement for a pilot study and the necessity to consider the validity of research findings. Following the introduction of the target research population, proposals are made for data collection methods. Finally, this chapter finishes with a reflexive account.

3.1 Introduction

Having considered the personal positionality of the researcher for this research study, it is acknowledged that he is an employee of University A and that over time his employment role has changed to become more focussed working with undergraduate students who are travelling internationally. The researcher had previously travelled overseas with student groups, which provided the initial rationale for this research study. The researcher's background is education-based working at University A for several years and previously in Further Education.

Punch *et al.* (2014) noted how over time researchers associated groups of their assumptions with known research traditions. The traditions and associated clusters were referred to as paradigms, which declared a commitment to a particular way of perceiving and exploring social reality. Coe *et al.* (2017, p. 5) discussed how paradigms can be problematic, describing this as "a way of looking at a research phenomenon, a world view, a view of what is accepted and counts as scientific knowledge" and "should probably be treated somewhat more critically than it often is." To better understand the research process and its paradigm Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 128) provided a "research onion" (figure 3.1). The outermost layer considered research philosophy. The second layer considered the research approach, either deductive or inductive. The third layer considered methodological choice. The fourth layer considered strategies and the fifth layer, time given for research involving cross sectional and longitudinal studies. The final layer involved data collection methods.

Saunders *et al.* Research Onion (2012)

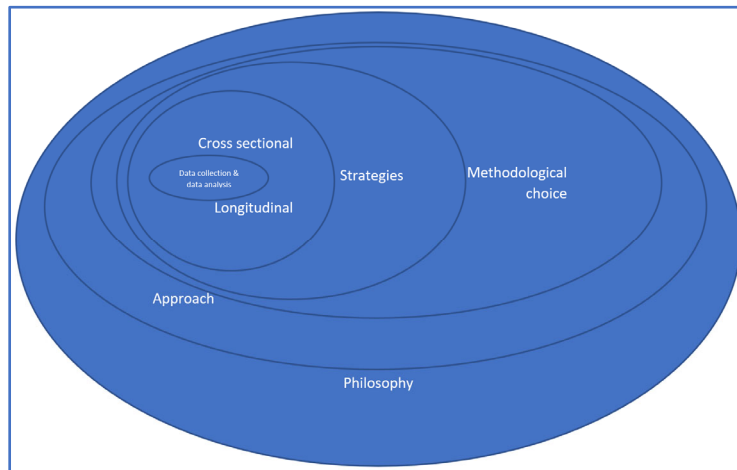


Figure 3.1.1 Saunders’ Research Onion (2012)

Source: Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 128)

Strategies	Methodological Choice	Approach	Philosophy	Cross-sectional / longitudinal	Data collection and data analysis
Experiment	Mono-method quantitative Mixed methods complex	Deduction	Positivism	Observation of same over a period	
Survey	Mono-method qualitative	Abduction	Realism		
Archival research	Multi-method quantitative	Induction	Interpretivism		
Case study	Multi-method qualitative		Pragmatism		
Mixed methods research	Mixed methods simple			Data collected from individuals at the same point in time	
Ethnography	Mixed methods complex				
Action research					
Grounded theory					
Narrative enquiry					

Table 3.1.1 Saunders’ Research Onion – Approach and Philosophy (2012) Source: Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 128)

Table 3.1.1 relates to Saunders' Research Onion (2012) and demonstrates the choices that are made at the onset of research. Saunders (2012) discusses how assumptions made about human knowledge impacted on how research questions are understood and the methods that are employed to interpret findings. A research philosophy chosen implies assumptions about the way in which a researcher views the world. The methodology for this research study is in the figure below and is discussed in detail within this chapter.



Figure 3.1.2 Study methodology for this research study

The figure above (figure 3.1.2) demonstrates the application of Saunders' Research Onion (2012) in relation to this research study. Each part of the research, research philosophy; research approach; methodological choices; research strategies; data collection methods are discussed in this chapter (Chapter 3). Analysis and discussion is discussed later in Chapter 5.

Burrell and Morgan (1979:2016) writing about paradigms, offered a useful way to understand and locate different types of research theory and to locate one's own frame of personal reference. Burrell and Morgan (1979:2016) made an epistemological critique of organisations and argued social theory can be analysed in terms of four paradigms: functionalist, interpretivist, radical humanist and radical structuralist. The functionalist paradigm had taken the belief that social structures had purposes reflected through human action and the interpretivist paradigm had taken the belief that it is human behaviour that

created social structures. Both interpretivist and functionalist paradigms were used to explain social construction and to maintain the status quo whereas radical humanist and radical structuralist approaches challenged social construction. Radical structuralists viewed society as being shaped by the socio-economic situation and radical humanists viewed humans as being dominated and constrained by the powerful in society and sought human liberation through this awareness. Burrell and Morgan (1979:2016) were writing in the 1970's at a time when the structure of organisations was unchallenged, as noted by Morgan when interviewed by Mills (1990). Saunders *et al.* (2019) described the view of Burrell and Morgan (1979:2016) as contentious, although highly influential in terms of how organisational scholarship was seen. The researcher for this research study has completed the Bristow and Saunders *et al.* (2018) Heightening your Awareness of your Research Philosophy reflexive tool, which has provided an indication that the researcher's own views tended to be aligned with the interpretivist research philosophy. As Saunders *et al.* Research Onion (2018) identified and Burrell and Morgan (1979:2016) discussed, philosophy is an important element of research.

3.2 Philosophical positioning statement

A detailed discussion of research philosophy (interpretivism; pragmatism; ontology; epistemology; axiology) is provided in the next section (section 3.3). Researchers investigated phenomena using research paradigms which were philosophical underpinnings. The philosophical approach was taken by this research study, as guided by the nature of the research and summarised in this section. Holmes (2020) noted how a researcher's positionality was unique to them and had influenced research, including research outcomes and results. Holmes (2020, p. 3) opined that positionality acknowledged "researchers are part of the social world they are researching and that this world had already been interpreted by existing social factors". The researcher for this research study is an employee of University A at the time this research is conducted, working in a placement management role which diversified over time to be more directly involved with students participating in an international experience. The background of the researcher for this research study is education based, having worked in both Further and Higher education. The position of ontology taken by this research study was that of social constructivism, in that there was a belief that reality was socially constructed. In contrast, a positivist

philosophy assumed reality existed independently of humans and that researchers gained knowledge through the study of cause-and-effect relationships between phenomena. It was the position of this research study that positivism was more appropriate if natural objects were studied, but in the case of this research study, social phenomena was studied where relationships were complex. The choice of ontological perspective determined the choice of research design (research methods, research approach, methods of data collection and data analysis).

Epistemology referred to the process by which knowledge was acquired and what constitutes acceptable knowledge (Bryman *et al.*, 2011). This research study was approached from a belief in socially constructed reality and that the study of human interaction is important. The research study had taken an interpretivist stance believing in socially constructed multiple realities and that people draw meanings from events, interpret them in different ways, unique to their individual circumstances and act independently according to their own view of reality. This research study acknowledged, therefore, an interpretivist epistemology was subjective in its nature because individuals had their own reality or truth as they knew it and used this as a basis for decision making. It was then the role of an interpretivist researcher to understand the subjective reality (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Through the methodological approaches taken, this research study explored the meaning and reasoning for participants' responses to the research question. The aim of the focus group research (section 3.8.1) was to explore the meaning of participants' responses and understand the way in which the research participants saw the opportunity to participate in an international experience.

Considering axiology and the values, beliefs and judgements attached to this research study, it must be acknowledged that the researcher for this research study is an employee of University A whose role is to develop international links and international experiences for undergraduate students. The study acknowledged that this may have influenced the view of social reality as seen by the researcher for this research study and was a potential source of bias and privilege, discussed later (section 3.10).

The methodology chosen in defining how the research should be undertaken, the methods used and data collection methods, was influenced by the research philosophy and the purpose of the research study, *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?* For this research study, mixed methods were employed, involving use of a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions,

used to gain understanding of social phenomena. Interpretivist data collection methods largely involved qualitative data, although with some quantitative data and taken an inductive approach, as it was mostly written/verbal rather than numerical responses. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire, with the numerical data analysed and triangulated with data collected from the focus group interviews.

3.3 Research philosophy

A range of research philosophies was evaluated in relation to this research study, with decisions provided about the methodological choices made for this research study.

3.3.1 Ontology

Law (2004, p. 23) offered a description of ontology as “the branch of philosophy concerned with what there is, with what reality out there is composed of.” Basit (2010) suggested that if a researcher viewed the world as a hard reality which can be looked at in a simplistic way, then they would choose to use highly structured methods for their data collection to produce what they understood are objective findings that were applied in a very general manner to all elements of society. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 130) described Ontology as being concerned with the nature of reality and suggested that “this raises questions of the assumptions researchers had about the way the world operated and the commitment to particular views.” Killam (2013, p. 7) discussed the paradigm of ontology and noted how this concept examined the relationship between knowledge and the research during the period of discovery. Coe *et al.* (2017) described Ontology as concerned with the nature of the social world and continued to discuss how the ontological position as a line which spanned from realism to constructivism. Coe *et al.* (2017) noted how realism perspective accepted a singular objective reality that is independent of a person’s own perceptions. Conversely, constructivism accepted that individuals held multiple realities. This research study had taken the view that social phenomena were created from the perceptions and actions of individuals (social actors), who were the participants in this research study and that as individuals, were influenced by their personal beliefs and understandings, acting independently and individually. Social phenomena and meanings in the context of this research study were continually being undertaken by social actors, which identified with a constructivist branch of ontology.

Subjectivism

Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 131) described subjectivism as asserting “that social phenomena were created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” and noted (Saunders *et al.*, 2012, p. 132) how those who chose to adopt this theory, understood that individuals added their own meaning to situations and the way that they considered roles should be performed. The view of Saunders *et al.* (2012) was shared by the researcher for this research study, that individuals (social actors) experienced circumstances (social phenomena) in unique ways and there was a need for researchers to understand the reasons why. The researcher for this research study was aware of subjectivity and reflected on the researcher’s role in the study and any personal experiences that could have impacted on interpretations of the phenomena being investigated (section 6.1). Considering the work of Oakley *et al.* (2020), Le Bourdon (2020) and Mercer (2007) who cited the importance of personal privilege, the researcher for this study recognised potential for their own subjectivity as part of this research (section 3.5.1).

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology, as earlier discussed (section 3.2) is a further way in which a research philosophy was viewed. Basit (2010) discussed epistemology identifying this as how we know something. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 150) described the concept as “what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study.” Cohen *et al.* (2018 p. 6) agreed with Basit (2010) describing epistemology as “concerned with the very basis of knowledge – its nature and forms, how knowledge could be acquired and how this was communicated to other human beings.”

This research study’s epistemological position was that reality needs to be interpreted and understood. It is of primary importance to discover and understand the underlying meaning of the research participants’ decision making, to gain a full understanding of the individual reasons why the research participants chose to participate or not to participate in an international experience offered by University A. For these reasons the study should not be conducted purely on a quantitative research basis. An interpretivist epistemological position was used for this research, which as Bryman *et al.* (2011) noted, shared a view that social

sciences (people and their institutions) were fundamentally different from natural sciences and that therefore, a different logic of research procedure was required.

3.3.3 Interpretivism

Saunders *et al.* (2003, p. 84) described social constructionism as aiming to “understand a reality behind a situation”, following from an “interpretivist position that it was necessary to explore the subjective meanings motivating people’s actions in order for them to be understood.” Newby (2013 p. 15) acknowledged the complexity of human interactions and making sense of situations as they emerged, noted the importance of understanding the research issue. It was the belief of the researcher conducting this research study that the interpretations people placed on the situations in which they found themselves, impacted upon their actions and that people drew meanings from events, interpreted them in different ways, unique to their individual circumstances and acted independently, according to their own view of reality.

Coe *et al.* (2017) described interpretivism as being about observations of situations that allowed indirect indications of phenomena and the development of new knowledge through a process of interpretation. Cohen *et al.* (2018) agreed with Coe *et al.* (2017) and stated that this paradigm set out to understand an individual’s view of the world and allowed the development of theory from situations. Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 37) discussed how theory allowed insight and understanding of people’s behaviour. An interpretivist approach was used for this research study and agreed with Cohen *et al.* (2018) that this research study was focussed on people and their feelings and behaviours. This research study agreed with Newby (2013) that people had a multitude of different relationships within their social world and reacted independently and individually to these relationships. It was the role of the researcher for this research study to have unpicked and made sense of these reactions. An important part of this research study was to accurately reflect human interest, understanding feelings and behaviours of research participants and appreciated the differences between people and their reasons for participation, or their choice of non-participation in an international experience.

Mixed methods and interpretivism

Dzurec *et al.* (1993, p. 73) noted how traditionally paradigms and their respective research methods were mutually exclusive. However, Dzurec *et al.* (1993, p. 73-74) stated that this was evolving "towards a more neutral distinction". Dzurec *et al.* (1993, p. 74) stated that the work of either qualitative or quantitative researchers was not "mutually exclusive". Sechrest *et al.* (1995, p. 78) agreed with Dzurec *et al.* (1993) and discussed the use of combining quantitative and qualitative research in a mixed methods approach. Discussing the use of both research methods, Sechrest *et al.* (1995, p. 78) stated "ultimately, tasks and aims are the same". In the opinion of Sechrest *et al.* (1995, p. 78) differences "had to do with the details, with exactly what is observed, by whom".

Johnson *et al.* (2004, p. 14) argued that mixed methods research was a "natural complement to traditional qualitative and quantitative research" and that this style of research would be successful as "more investigators study and help advance its concepts". Wiggins (2011 p. 45) described how the increasing popularity of qualitative methods with social science research had resulted in much discussion and debate, which Wiggins (2011, p. 45) described as "the paradigm wars". Discussing a mixed methods approach Wiggins (2011, p. 47) acknowledged the concern that researchers may have had about "constraining the discipline to only one set of methods" and how this was "unnecessarily restrictive and that all research evidence could have had at least some practical value". McChesney *et al.* (2019 p. 1) acknowledged the continuing debate with mixed methods research and examined the relationship between research methods and research paradigms, acknowledging calls by scholars for "greater flexibility towards the integration of paradigms and methods in mixed methods studies". Further discussion about mixed methods is provided in section 3.7.1

Interpretivism in the context of this research study

The quantitative element of research for this research study was designed using normative statements, asking the research participants to make value judgements. Discussing the sometimes problematic issue of methodological stance, Drakopoulos (2023) made a point that interpersonal comparisons were not always considered scientific by researchers when value judgements are made. Hampson and McKinley (2023) discussed how mixed methodology was of growing importance with educational research and how this was often associated with a pragmatic approach. However, Hampson and McKinley (2023) offered

criticism of this approach because the authors' view was that pragmatism did not link well with ontology and epistemology. In the case of this research study, as previously mentioned value judgements were made by the research participants. The researcher for this research study was of the opinion that as the questionnaire statements were normative, with value judgements made by participants, it was more appropriate to employ an interpretivist approach, rather than an approach which would incorporate elements of positivism.

McChesney (2020 p100) discussed the importance of researchers considering research paradigms and noted how the incorporation of positivism into a mixed methods approach "can be problematic for mixed methods researchers", opining that there was a strong case to "situate any research method within any paradigm". McChesney (2020 p101) argued that by using one world view for a mixed method study the issue of incompatibility of the research methods was overcome. The researcher for this research study, considering the advice of McChesney (2020), opined that taking an interpretivist approach to normative statements was most appropriate for this research study, as it was the researcher's opinion that values are socially shaped and meaning was socially constructed. Supporting this view, Hall (2013 p.2) noted how a single paradigm can be used with a mixed methods approach. Continuing discussion of paradigms, Dharamsi and Scott (2009 p.2) noted how all researchers, regardless of the methods they employed were attempting to "build knowledge, which, in the end, is applied to our understanding of the world".

The researcher for this research study has employed an interpretivist paradigm for the analysis of both elements of the research design. This paradigm was chosen to integrate the elements of research. The researcher for this research accepts the view of McChesney (2020), that by using a single interpretivist paradigm this has deepened the understanding of the quantitative data, allowing for triangulation and extended reflection of the underlying meaning for responses to each of the questionnaire questions. Both data sets for this research study have been triangulated, as Olsen et al. (2004 p.1) noted how triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data "deepens understanding" and supports "interdisciplinary research" in addition to validating the research findings. Specifically discussing the integration of mixed methods data sets, Olsen et al. (2004 p.2) opined that mixing "survey data with interviews, is a more profound form of triangulation".

This research study employed an interpretivist stance as advocated by McChesney and Aldridge (2018) because it focussed on the study of people and their meanings, with the

research participants of both elements of the research design having experienced the phenomenon investigated. The quantitative and qualitative data have been triangulated to explore and provide depth of understanding and meaning (Olsen et al. 2004), which is not possible with analysis of the raw data alone. Supporting use of triangulation when using an interpretivist paradigm, Babones (2015 p.453) noted how “key tenets” of interpretivist quantitative research were a triangulation and a “need to think reflexively about the manner in which data had come into existence”. Babones (2015 p.453) opined that “interpretive quantitative research had the potential to yield results that were more meaningful, more understandable and more applicable”. Following triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data findings, the researcher for this research study has taken an extended period of time thinking reflexively about the quantitative data findings and the reasons for the responses received, which the researcher considered would provide a more holistic and meaningful view of this data set.

3.3.4 Axiology

Basit (2010) identified axiology as an important area of consideration for a researcher. Basit (2010) noted that axiology was about values and how value judgements were made and was closely connected to a researcher’s principles and beliefs. The publication *Research-Methodology* (2012) noted how an individual’s own values impacted on how they conducted their research and the value of their research findings. This publication noted that axiology was concerned with the study of judgements about value and engaged with the assessment of the role of researchers’ own values on all stages of the research process. Killam (2013, p. 6) stated that axiology was connected to the nature of ethical behaviour and referred to what a researcher viewed as valuable and ethical. Killam (2013, p. 6) continued to note that “the purpose of a research enquiry needed to be balanced with what a researcher valued as well as other ethical considerations in the conduct of research”. There was, therefore, a consistent requirement to challenge one’s own assumptions within a research process.

This research study acknowledged the view of Basit (2010) that a researcher’s position and their own ethical values influenced their view of the world and how they viewed research findings. This research study accepted that potential existed for bias in many different research methods (section 3.10). As recommended by Killam (2013), actions were taken to

minimise potential bias and to ensure that this research study had full ethical approval from University A (Appendix 8) and was compliant with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2018 guidance.

3.3.5 Pragmatism

A further research philosophy was pragmatism, Saunders *et al.* (2019, p. 130) described pragmatism as recognising that there were a multitude of different ways of interpreting the world and conducting educational research and confirmed that, for a researcher "it was perfectly possible to work with different philosophical positions". Saunders *et al.* (2019) acknowledged that pragmatist researchers were happy to modify their philosophical assumptions to achieve what they understood were the best research findings to further understanding. Saunders *et al.* (2019, p. 130) stated that pragmatists accepted that multiple methods were often possible and "sometimes highly appropriate within one study." Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 130) continued to note that when adopting a pragmatist approach "the importance of the meaning of an idea (or research finding) were its practical consequences" and stated that although pragmatists do not always use multiple methods it was more important for them to use methods that were credible, well founded and reliable, thereby ensuring that relevant data was collected to further knowledge.

It could be considered that elements of a pragmatic approach were reflected in this research study, particularly with the choice of a mixed methods research. The researcher for this research study was of the opinion that this choice of method provided the most reliable data to further understanding (section 3.7.1). However, the philosophy chosen for this research study remained within the interpretivist field.

3.4 Research approach

3.4.1 Grounded theory

Discussing the potential use of grounded theory as a research technique, Savenye *et al.* (2005, p. 72) commented that "this methodology allows for the development of 'theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed'. Theory evolved during actual research, and it did this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection."

Obiakor *et al.* (2010, p. 22) acknowledged the qualitative concept of grounded theory, describing this as “an approach that allowed the researcher to develop or discover a theory based on the study of a phenomenon.” However, Saunders *et al.* (2012) stated that a researcher using this approach would still need to familiarise themselves with theory relevant to their area of investigation. Newby (2013, p. 487) acknowledged “Whether what the process produced, is really theory. Newby (2013, p. 487) concluded, “there is, however, no doubt that what it sought to produce was a statement or conclusion that would be applicable or could be tested in similar circumstances.”

This research study acknowledged that elements of a grounded theory approach were employed, for example, as Savenye *et al.* (2005) noted, data collection using interviews and surveys were used and as Obiakor *et al.* (2010) stated, participants who had experienced the phenomenon, were the only participants used for this research study. This aligned with a constructivist perception that reality is determined through one’s own experiences, and that through this, people developed their own knowledge and had multiple realities and that their knowledge was a personal experience to them (section 3.3.1) as noted by Coe *et al.* (2017). The researcher for this research study acknowledged that a literature review (Chapter 2) was undertaken, the intent of which was to inform and shape this research study with key points from this used to guide the design of the quantitative questionnaire (section 3.8.2) and linked to findings from the research for this research study (Chapter 4). Following the collection of research data for this research study the literature review was revised to best align with the research findings. The use of a literature review in this way was considered contrary to a grounded theory approach, as noted by authors writing in this area (Lambert, 2019; Newby, 2013; Obiakor *et al.*, 2010; Savenye *et al.*, 2005). It was more usual for researchers who adopted a grounded theory approach to avoid conducting a review of literature ahead of their research, preventing the development of pre-conceptions about the phenomena studied.

As was discussed earlier (section 2.7.1) this research study was not intended as a study of Bourdieu, however, the work of Bourdieu (1977) had determined in the way that the research findings were examined. Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital influenced the lens through which this research study was viewed.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This research, investigated *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, recognised the importance of research ethics for this research study. Key issues discussed in this section included management of research study participants; maintaining participant anonymity and confidentiality; researcher conduct; power and privilege of the researcher for this study. Drake *et al.* (2011, p. 52) stated how “universities have processes and procedures to protect (research) participants.” Drake *et al.* (2011, p. 52) described ethical research procedures as being “designed so that researchers anticipated ethical issues arising from their research before the project began and considered these carefully and at the outset of the research project.” Menter (2011) noted how those approached to be research participants were under no obligation to oblige and would themselves have competing demands for their time. Commenting on the need for anonymity and confidentiality Menter (2011) discussed how a commitment to anonymity must be taken seriously by a researcher. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 226) expressed their view that “ethics refer to the standards of behaviour that guide conduct in relation to the rights of those who had become the subject of research work or were affected by it.” Curtis (2014) agreed with Menter (2011) and cited a requirement for research participant anonymity and commented that anonymity was important for all participants in research studies. Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 84), discussed the concept of research ethics and stated how researchers “must take into account the effects of the research on participants and act in such a way to preserve their dignity as human beings”.

BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) were reviewed by the researcher for this research study, prior to the research activity commencing, to support ethical, justifiable and sound research for the study. The guidelines recognised, for many educational researchers, research was conducted as part of a researcher’s work for an educational institution, where an ethical review and clearance were required by that institution, as was the case with this research study. In such cases the BERA guidelines were “intended to inform and support researchers as they developed their ethical thinking and practice.” This research study, investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, agreed that ethical consideration was an important aspect of the study, as Basit (2010) noted, to ensure that the research participants were not harmed in any way. Acknowledging the writing of Drake *et al.* (2011) who discussed university processes for the ethical consideration of research

projects, this research study confirmed that it complied with University A's Ethical Review Policy (2019), which applied to anyone undertaking research at University A. Research ethics at University A were based on the principles of autonomy, ensuring that individuals participating in the research, were made aware of its purpose and were free to take part, without any pressure to do so; beneficence, with the research being viewed as worthwhile; non-maleficence, avoiding possible harm to participants with robust precautions; confidentiality, ensuring that personal data remained anonymous to anyone except the research team, unless it was otherwise agreed with participants; integrity, researchers were required to acknowledge any potential conflicts of interest in a way which recognised standards of research integrity. All research at University A required approval, with researchers required to consider the ethical implications of any proposed piece of research before the research commenced. Responsibility for maintaining ethical conduct always remained with the individual researcher, with the University A Research Ethics Committee having central oversight for ethics across University A and having responsibility for monitoring and receiving University A's ethics policies and procedures.

This research study included a participant's information sheet (Appendix 1 and 2), a consent form, a questionnaire, list of focus group questions. Detail relating to the management of participants' data was provided to the ethical panel at University A, demonstrating anonymity and confidentiality for all research participants, as Curtis (2014) and Menter (2011) cited this is important for any research study. Consent was gained from all research participants in this research study, as Cohen *et al.* (2018) and Lambert (2019) recommended. The researcher for this research study advised all participants, at all stages of the research process, of a right not to take part, or to withdraw from the study once the research had started. The voluntary nature of the research activities, forming part of this research study were made clear to all participants.

As a result of the process to obtain full ethical approval from University A (Appendix 8), several changes were made to the research processes. Changes included minor re-wording of the participant information sheet (Appendix 1 and 2), clarifying the data gathered as part of this research study, would not be shared beyond the researcher and highlighting that only fully anonymised quotations would be used in reports and publications. The invitation letter was amended to fully clarify that all participation was voluntary and would not impact on participants' course or module results, or other outcomes in any form. The focus group with semi-structured open-ended interview questions, was re-written in the 'second person'. Finally a number of changes were made to the survey questions, including the splitting of

one question to improve the investigation of 'importance' and 'influence'; splitting a question into three parts to fully explore 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competence'; modification of a question to separately explore 'personal enrichment' and 'professional enrichment'; re-phrasing a question to more appropriately prompt students, to explain what they thought University A could do to improve undergraduate students' participation in an international experience.

3.5.1 Power and privilege of the researcher

Of consideration were issues of power and privilege, as noted by Oakley *et al.* (2020, p. 588 - 607), who highlighted a need to consider "power, privilege and research" and a requirement to "understand [a] researcher's experience of conducting such research" and to reflect on these experiences at all levels (i.e. individual and institutional), through discussion. Whilst citing a requirement for further research around "researcher resilience" and "factors to negate resilience", Oakley *et al.* (2020) reported from their findings that researchers were aware of issues of power and privilege when conducting their research. Oakley *et al.* (2020, p. 590) noted that with qualitative research there was potential for impact on the research process and a need for "continued research into qualitative researcher resilience", along with spaces for "qualitative researchers to share their experiences and critically debate the factors which shape them. Le Bourdon (2022, p. 1) agreed with Oakley *et al.* (2022) and Chavez (2008) and cited a need for "research reflections" as an "integral part of methodological practice". Le Bourdon (2022, p. 7) suggested a need for researchers to "keep learning" and "reflecting on practice" as a process of self-reflection, to address potential issues of privilege. However, Guba (1981, p. 78) opined that when undertaking qualitative research involving human interactions it was impossible for a researcher "to maintain a neutral posture". Guba (1981) additionally noted the importance for qualitative researchers to have had some knowledge of the social context of their research participants, to support "understanding of what was happening". The researcher for this research study acknowledged their role as an employee of University A and the researcher of the study's personal social background and therefore, the potential for bias that this position of privilege afforded. Noting the advice of Le Bourdon (2022), Oakley *et al.* (2020) and Chavez (2008) the researcher for this research study shared the experience of the research process with colleagues at University A, as part of a system of self and critical reflection.

3.6 Limiting factors

This research study, investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, acknowledged the potential for error during all stages of the research process. Scott (2005) opined that however well planned a research study was thought to be, mistakes occurred. Therefore, it was important for a researcher to acknowledge this and to look at how such mistakes could be overcome. Exogenous factors may have impacted on this research. For example, the research has taken place during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and in a climate where it is widely reported by the media, that people did not wish to travel. This may have impacted on participants who may have decided to provide answers indicating a reluctance to travel now, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, when otherwise may have been willing and excited at the prospect of international travel. The concept of reflexivity, (Mann 2016) was relevant, as the researcher for this research study is an employee of University A, whose role is to encourage the development of international links. It was important for the researcher for this research study to have been aware of this bias (section 3.5) to prevent influence with research findings. This research study has taken the view that the only practical method to check for bias is to re-survey, requiring considerable additional resources, outside the scope of this research study.

3.6.1 Issues experienced during the research process

This sub-section followed on from discussion about how the research was organised, to highlight issues experienced and how these were managed. Following distribution of the electronic survey, several follow up reminders were sent to the identified target group. After sending a fourth reminder a reply was received from one member of the target group complaining that they had received all e-mails but did not wish to complete the survey. The researcher for this research study decided at this point that no further follow up reminders should be sent for the survey (section 3.5 BERA guidelines). The survey received a 38% completion rate, which was within the range of 20% – 40% as Cohen *et al.* (2018) described as a typical response rate for an educational questionnaire. After completion of the focus group interviews one participant contacted the researcher for this research study and discussed a concern about the quality of several of this particular participant's responses. Following discussion, this participant asked to withdraw from the research process. As a result of this withdrawal, the participant's responses were not included within

the focus group transcripts and have, therefore, not been used as part of the process of analysis for this research study.

3.7 Methodological choice

3.7.1 Mixed methods

Walliman (2018, p148) noted that there is no agreed definition of 'mixed methods', which can be problematic, however, Walliman (2018) stated there is a definitive distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 480) acknowledged the argument against "multi-strategy approach" (which Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 480) used as a term to mean the same as a mixed-method approach) and identified that there were two strands to this argument. Firstly, "the idea that research methods carried epistemological commitments" and secondly "the idea that quantitative and qualitative research were separate paradigms." Shank *et al.* (2007) noted that mixed methods research could be controversial and advised researchers to carefully decide whether use of a mixed methods approach was most suitable for their educational research. Discussing quantitative and qualitative approaches it was the view of Punch *et al.* (2014) that neither a single method or mixed methods approach was more suitable than the other, further acknowledging that both had pros and cons and that what was important is that the most appropriate method for any study was used.

This section presented a summary of the main discussion and a rationale for the use of a mixed-method approach for this research study. Preskill (2005) was in favour of a mixed methods approach, as it was viewed that by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data this would produce more valued research findings. Shank *et al.* (2007) also favoured a mixed methods research approach commenting that a combined approach enabled a researcher to see a bigger, wider picture. Basit (2010) agreed with Preskill (2005) noting positive aspects to mixed methods research and that a combined approach was now frequently favoured by educational researchers, further enabling the conduction of large-scale surveys which have been followed up by in-depth organisation of smaller numbers of participants. Ahmed *et al.* (2012, p. 936) extensively discussed the mixed methods research approach and expressed their view that this approach "was emerging as a best practice,".

Velez-Solic (2015, p. 3) acknowledged the views of Basit (2010), Newby (2013) and Preskill (2005), noting how for mixed methods researchers “the method was not as important as the type of research question asked”. Velez-Solic (2015, p. 3) noted that those who are strongly in favour of mixed methodology “believed that mono-method research was a great threat to advancement in areas like education”. Coe *et al.* (2017) acknowledged that both qualitative and quantitative approaches had their strengths and limitations. Coe *et al.* (2017) shared their thoughts that using a mixed methods approach enabled triangulation of research findings across the two data collection sources. Coe *et al.* (2017) expressed a belief that this may have enhanced the strength and validity of research findings. Wiggins (2011) agreed with Coe *et al.* (2017), stating that “for social scientists triangulation had come to mean that researchers could have taken greater confidence in the validity of research data if the research drew on multiple methods with converging findings”. Oliver-Hoyo *et al.* (2006) discussed the benefits of triangulating different sources of qualitative data and noted that “triangulation involved the careful reviewing of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct”. Coe *et al.* (2017), Creswell (2003), Oliver-Hoyo *et al.* (2006) and Wiggins (2011) all recognised the benefits of a mixed methods approach which then provided an opportunity to triangulate findings of multiple approaches to research, allowing for increased validity of research findings.

Approach employed for this research study

This research study, investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, adopted a mixed methods approach where data collection used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of a mixed methods approach provided a better understanding of connections and contradictions of findings from both research types. Quantitative data has taken the form of a questionnaire, whilst qualitative research used a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions.

This research study *How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?* has a defined aim and objective (section 1.1) which included research questions relating to, factors that influence a student’s decision to study abroad; challenges, barriers or obstacles for students wanting to study or undertake a work-experience abroad; investigating necessary university support to enable participation in an

international experience. As earlier noted, (section 2.25) there is no single theoretical framework which can be solely linked to this research study and used as a basis for the analysis of the research data. The literature review (Chapter 2) is used as a basis for analysing data from the research study findings (Chapter 4). As noted in section 2.10, the design of participant research questions for both the quantitative and qualitative research were drawn from the literature review, for example, Sweeney (2012 p.30) who discussed "institutional" and "personal circumstance" barriers; Rea (2012) who observed implications of class inequalities, including finance as a barrier to participation; Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) who noted how students consider personal aspects of participation first, with many withdrawing their interest at this point. However, participant questions and data gathering for this research study have extended beyond this framework.

This research study *How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?* has a defined aim and objective (section 1.1) which includes research questions, firstly, relating to factors that influence a student's decision to study abroad and secondly, possible challenges and barriers or obstacles for student's wanting to study or undertake a work-experience abroad. Thirdly, a research question investigating necessary university support to enable participation in an international experience. The researcher for this research study acknowledged that the purpose of a theoretical framework is to support refining the scope of research, identifying key concepts, theories and models relevant to the research question. As earlier noted, (section 2.25) there is no single theoretical framework which can be solely linked to this research study and used as a basis for the analysis of the research data. However, the literature review (Chapter 2) is used as a basis for analysing data from the research study findings (Chapter 4). As noted in section 2.10, the design of participant research questions for both the quantitative and qualitative research were drawn from the context of available authors' work, for example, Sweeney (2012 p.30) who discussed "institutional" and "personal circumstance" barriers; Rea (2012) who observed implications of class inequalities, including finance as a barrier to participation; Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) who noted how students consider personal aspects of participation first, with many withdrawing their interest at this point. However, participant questions and data gathering for this research study have extended beyond this framework.

The work of Bourdieu (1977) (section 2.7.1) who discussed cultural mobility and the concept of cultural capital (a person's knowledge and intellectual skills) is introduced as a leading proponent to support discussion and analysis (Chapter 5) of the research findings, providing a foundation for this chapter. Bourdieu (1973, p. 71) stated a belief that the education

system perfectly reflects the “structure of distribution of cultural capital among the classes”. Bourdieu (1973) introduced the argument that social position is determined by other forms of capital, such as social and cultural capital. Education is seen as a method which can provide an advantage to an individual in achieving a higher social status in society. In this research study, some key concepts introduced by Bourdieu (1977) were examined in relation to the research findings. These included social and cultural capital and also habitus and field. Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus related to how a person’s cultural and family background linked to their characteristics and view of the world. For example, it could be that there is a family tradition of entering the workplace as early as possible and not progressing to further education and/or higher education. Bourdieu (1973) introduced the concept of fields, which are described as a social space in which interactions, transactions and events take place in someone’s life. Linked to fields are forces and relationships of inequality, where some people dominate others with power defining a position within a field. These theories are considered relevant to the research findings and the social context of University A (section 1.3). For example, considering Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus, this research study seeks to identify, what, if any support undergraduate students require from their university, to enable participation in an international experience. The findings of this research study may identify whether or not, current practice by University A supports its students sufficiently, where there may be elements lacking in an individual’s habitus.

Acknowledging and building on the work of Bourdieu (1973) (section 2.7.2) Yosso (2005); Basit (2012); Straubhaar (2013) introduced the notion of aspirational capital which they described as a person’s hopes for the future, beyond their present circumstances and often with barriers to be overcome. At the time when someone is developing their aspirational capital Yosso (2005) noted how they may not, at that point in time, have developed the knowledge and skills required to get there.

Discussing cultural mobility, the influence of Bourdieu (1973) and his belief that capital works within an economy to confer social status, is important because of links to more recent authors. For example, Bennett et al (2004) who discussed social capital as an axis of inequality and Emmisson (2003) who stated a belief that there is a link between someone’s background and their position in society. As was discussed earlier (section 2.7.1) this research study was not intended as a study of Bourdieu, however, the work of Bourdieu (1977) has determined the way that the research findings are examined. Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital influenced the lens through which this research study was viewed.

The view of ontology (section 3.3.1) taken by this research study was a view that individuals construct their own notions of reality through their cognition, influenced by personal beliefs, understandings and acting independently and individually. The researcher for this research study's epistemological position (section 3.3.3) was that reality needs to be interpreted and understood and that it was important to discover and understand the underlying meaning of the research participants' decision making. With this in mind, consideration was given to the positionality of the researcher for this research study (section 3.16) and their extended time spent working within the education sector, supporting students' learning and development. In more recent years the researcher for this research study is employed at University A, working with higher education students to facilitate international experience. The researcher for this research study has developed an awareness of the social context of University A (section 1.3) and the demographics of the student population, for example 45% of students classified as widening participation and just under a quarter of students (23.5%) classified as being within the Index of Multiple Deprivation (23.5%) within the lowest two deciles. The researcher for this research study offers an opinion that the concepts of Bourdieu's (1977) work, social and cultural capital and habitus and field, relate well to their own ontological position and positionality and will therefore enable the research findings from this research study to be clearly interpreted.

The wide ranging debate concerning the use of mixed methods research (Bryman, 2011; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Shank *et al.*, 2007; Velez-Solic, 2015; Walliman, 2018) ultimately agreed with Newby (2013) and Preskill (2005) that by bringing together both types of research, the research findings were of greater value, as the data collection with a dual approach provided a more panoramic view of research findings and an opportunity to investigate more diverse perspectives and links between the research types. It was the researcher's opinion for this research study, that it was the needs of the research that were the driving force, rather than a desire to use a particular mono-method of research, as Newby (2013) acknowledged. Use of a pre-designed questionnaire enabled a larger research population sample, with data collection and analysis in a quantitative way. However, semi-structured open-ended questions for a focus group allowed for analysis of the underlying meaning of participants' decisions. This research study triangulated participants' responses between the two research activities, which added greater value to the research findings, and acknowledged potential difficulties with undertaking triangulation, as Zawacki-Richter *et al.* (2019, p. 31) noted, because of a lack of formalised techniques by researchers for this process. However, this research study considered that triangulation of

the research findings was an important aspect of validity (section 3.10) as supported by Olsen *et al.* (2004) and Babones (2016).

3.7.2 Quantitative research

Described within the mixed methods section (section 3.7.1) a quantitative approach was adopted for part of this research study. Shank *et al.* (2007) expressed a view that quantitative research was a powerful and leading method of research, which had been used many times by leading researchers. Obiakor *et al.* (2010, p. 3) noted that “calls for increased rigor in educational research pointed toward models derived from biological, medical, and physical sciences”, which they stated were “predominantly quantitative”. Identifying an alternative perspective, Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 100) discussed the issue of statistical significance when undertaking quantitative research. This research study agreed with Obiakor *et al.* (2010) about the benefits of employing quantitative research, as part of this research study, to introduce rigour and a scientific approach. A questionnaire was used with standardised questions, designed to generate precise responses, to collect information from an identified research population (further detail on questionnaire design was provided in section 3.8.2). As noted earlier (section 3.7.1 and 2.10) the design of participant research questions for the quantitative electronic questionnaire was guided by the context of available authors’ work. For example, authors discussing barriers to student participation in an international experience had influenced the structure of questioning in this area, as research participants were presented with a list of identified barriers (drawn from the work of existing authors) and were asked to state if any of these barriers were of a concern to them. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 162) noted that “quantitative research was generally associated with positivism, especially when used with predetermined and highly structured data collection techniques” and that this “examined relationships between variables” associating itself with experimental and survey research strategies, which were typically undertaken through the use of surveys and/or structured interviews. Mentioned earlier, a quantitative questionnaire was used by the researcher for this research study. However, the researcher for this research study agreed with Kerry *et al.* (2018) that the use of a questionnaire alone would not provide the data required to fully answer the research question. It was necessary to additionally adopt qualitative research methods, to explore the feelings and behaviours of the research participants and to understand their reasons for making decisions and thereby further knowledge to answer the research question.

Quantitative data was analysed through the measures of central tendencies of mean (average) and standard deviation (difference from mean value) which enabled an explanation of how the data was concentrated and allowed meaningful interpretation of key trends and patterns found within the data. Bryman *et al.* (2011 p. 243) commented on the standard deviation measure, and noted this was “essentially the average amount of variation around the mean”, continuing to state that the calculation was made by “taking the difference between each value in a distribution and the mean and then dividing the total of the differences by the number of values”. A small standard deviation meant that the values in a statistical data set were closer to the mean of the data set, on average. A large standard deviation meant that the values in the data set were further away from the mean, on average. Whitley *et al.* (2002) described standard deviation as “the average deviation from the mean across all observations”, continuing “if the observations were all close to the mean, then the standard deviation would be small” and conversely “if the observations vary widely, then the standard deviation would be substantially larger”.

To support the removal of bias from the research findings, all reported findings were peer validated (section 3.10.1). Descriptive statistics which Whitehead *et al.* (1990, p2) stated, imply sorting of data and summarising data in terms of characteristics and were used to improve “understanding of the raw data”. The researcher for this study opined that managing the data generated from quantitative research in this way, supported describing and understanding the features of each data set. As noted in section 3.3.3 an interpretivist paradigm was employed for both the quantitative and qualitative research. The researcher for this research study agreed with McChesney (2020) and Babones (2015) that this would allow the quantitative data to be triangulated, providing a deepened understanding of the meanings for the participants’ responses to each question, providing more meaningful and understandable results. As Babones (2015) recommended, an extended period was allowed for reflection of the research findings from the quantitative data.

3.7.3 Qualitative research

Lincoln *et al.* (1994) discussed how strong counter pressures against quantitative research methods have emerged because as Lincoln *et al.* (1994) argued it is hard to apply statistical meaning to individual persons. Lincoln *et al.* (1994) opined that only by repeating the same research in the same conditions could quantitative research be properly applied. Lincoln *et*

a/ (1994, p106) argued that qualitative data was better able to provide "contextualised information" and that the behaviour of people could only be understood with "reference to meaning and purpose". Lincoln *et al.* (1994, p106) argued that through the employment of qualitative research, a researcher gained a "rich insight" into individual behaviour, which helped to avoid potential ambiguity which may be present when using quantitative data alone. Describing qualitative research Savenye *et al.* (2005, p. 66) stated that this approach "is based upon paradigms that were unfamiliar to some. Qualitative research designs, methods, and even ways of delineating research questions differed from those typically used in conducting more quantitative, experimental studies." Obiakor *et al.* (2010, p. 23) considered that all researchers must have a "comprehensive, deep" understanding, and "accurately portray participants' perspectives so that their voices were heard." Continuing this discussion, Basit (2010) noted the importance of the way in which a researcher communicated with study participants and the need for a sensitive approach when dealing with research participants. The researcher for this research study agreed with Basit (2010) and Obiakor *et al.* (2010) concerning the importance for researchers of listening carefully to qualitative research participants, to gather accurate and reliable data. To accomplish this, the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions was recorded in situ and later fully transcribed.

Quinlan (2011) wrote from a different perspective and noted how qualitative researchers were not always concerned with measurement and frequently did not support scientific approaches. Walliman (2018, p. 83) discussed the benefits of qualitative research and noted that "qualitative research depended on careful definition of the meaning of words, the development of concepts and variables and the plotting of inter-relationships between these". The researcher in this research study accepted the view of Walliman (2018) concerning the importance of identifying interrelationships between variables, to remove the potential for bias, with the interpretation of findings by a researcher. Menter (2011) noted how information collected through qualitative research methods would need to be organised and made manageable to support analysis. Curtis (2014) agreed, recommending transcribing interviews because it was easier to analyse data when it is in written form. Curtis (2014) made a valid point that by video or audio recording participants' responses, this enhanced the listening skills of a researcher, without being under pressure to record responses immediately. Curtis (2014) agreed with the previous work of Menter (2011) that the process of transcription added validity to the research process. Savenye *et al.* (2005, p. 82) supported the view of Menter (2011), again and commented on the benefit of

transcribing qualitative interviews, recommending that with video and audio recordings they were transcribed to aid analysis of the data. As recommended by Curtis (2014) and Menter (2011) the researcher for this research study transcribed and recorded data from the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions.

This research study sought to understand the reasons why research participants decided to or not to participate in an international experience. Agreeing with Kozleski (2017), the researcher for this research study accepted that the incorporation of qualitative research as a method of research was fundamental to understanding the human behaviours that led to that decision making. Guba (1981) discussed judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies, focussing on human interactions and noted how this research method has become more popular over time. Guba (1981, p. 77) opined that rather than one research method being more important than another, of greater importance for a researcher, was "which [research method] offered the best fit for the phenomenon under study".

Qualitative research analysis

Cohen *et al.* (1995 p. 286) noted that when qualitative interviews had been completed "the next stage involved coding and scoring them". Coding was described as the process of analysing question responses and categorising these so that the data could be analysed. Cohen *et al.* (1995) recognised that it could be difficult for a researcher to code and score open-ended questions. Lambert (2019 p. 20) stated a belief that "analysis offers the researcher an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned". Qualitative data for this research study was analysed using coding as Lambert (2019) further stated to "enable the identification of patterns in the responses provided by interviewees" from the discussions with the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions (Appendix 5). Lambert (2019 p. 20) described the benefits of coding as enabling the common experiences and perspectives of participants to be identified, as well as instances where these diverge. Lambert (2019 p. 20) recognised that the process of coding and analysing data from interviews was demanding on researcher's time but could "reveal very useful insights". A flexible inductive coding process was employed by the researcher for this research study, to cover different topics and insights and used to draw out categories which may have been similar and allowed new categories to emerge. Each sentence and word of the raw data transcripts was scrutinised to explore relationships and draw out words that were like each

other, allowing general categories to emerge from groups of words with a similar meaning. Words were then coded across categories.

Qualitative research bias

Reviewing the issue of potential bias, Savenye *et al.* (2005, p. 68) acknowledged the potential for researcher bias with qualitative research, stating "though researchers strive not to insert their own biases, they too become participants as "human instruments" in the system being studied by interacting with the students, staff, and instructors. For this reason, and because the studies are designed to provide rich descriptions of particular systems, most qualitative researchers suggested that findings from one study may not necessarily be generalized to other environments and systems." Wiersma *et al.* (2009) noted that good research design would provide data that were free from bias with any differences that appear within the data attributed to independent variables. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 396) offered a suggestion for reducing researcher bias and identified that bias was reduced using audio recording and transcribing, stating "audio-recording your data where permission is given, making notes, compiling a full record of the interview immediately or soon after it has occurred and producing a set of contextual data and related memos, are all means to control bias and produce reliable data." Continuing the discussion, Grant (2019, p. 150) noted how reliance on an individual ethnographer "could result in bias in data collection." Commenting about this issue, Grant (2019, p. 150) stated "there were calls for ethnographers and qualitative researchers to be reflexive (section 6.1) about their role as an actual person with a physical body and presence in the field and the possible biases in data collection resulting from this."

This research study acknowledged the potential for bias within the research process as noted by Grant (2019), Saunders *et al.* (2012), Savenye *et al.* (2005), and Wiersma *et al.* (2009). In particular, the researcher for this research study's position as an employee of University A may have provided a potential source of bias, as the researcher for this research study interacted with participants. This research study agreed with Wiersma *et al.* (2009) that research should be designed to minimise the potential for bias and the importance of considering and addressing bias at every stage of the research process. To reduce the potential for bias within this research study, qualitative research questions used simple language and avoided wording that may have induced bias, questions used were

open-ended with the researcher conducting this research study remaining neutral, so as not to influence participants. A pilot study (section 3.9) was used to test the research design, review the use of questions, identify unclear terminology and any potentially inappropriate questions for the research participant group and establish the overall feasibility of the main study. Research data was analysed for this research study concisely and with an unbiased mind (section 3.10), with the researcher for this research study mindful of their position of privilege and a requirement for reflection and recognition of their own subjectivity as noted by Le Bourdon (2020) and Oakley *et al.* (2020) (section 3.5) and in particular, a requirement for a researcher to regularly reflect on their experience of conducting their research and to discuss and share their experiences critically (Oakley *et al.* 2020). Le Bourdon (2022) has taken a view that the reflection and learning process should be continual and in doing so, a researcher better addressed any issues arising because of their position of privilege. As earlier noted, (section 3.5), Guba (1981) opined that it is extremely difficult for a researcher involved in qualitative research to take a neutral stance. In the case of the research for this study, it was a study about people and their interactions with the research phenomenon, with the study approached from a belief in socially constructed reality (section 3.2) and taking an interpretivist stance, with individuals having their own reality or truth as they knew it and using this as a basis for their own decision making. The researcher for this study followed the advice of Le Bourdon (2022) and Oakley *et al.* (2020), reflecting regularly to remove potential positive tendency towards a, but false, conclusion. The researcher for this research study acknowledged the potential for bias across the research design, which Simundic (2013) described as a "deviation from truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication, which could cause false conclusions" and the importance of strategies to minimise bias. Smith *et al.* (2014, p. 100) opined how it was important for a researcher to understand research bias because it existed "in all research, across research designs and was difficult to eliminate". Smith *et al.* (2014, p. 100) noted that bias may impact on the validity of "study findings and misrepresentation of the data could have had important consequences for practice".

Smith *et al.* (2014, p. 100) stated that "having a well-designed research protocol" and "explicitly outlining data collection and analysis" supported reducing the potential for bias by a researcher. Commenting specifically on the reduction of bias with qualitative research, Smith *et al.* (2014, p. 100) stated that researchers must "demonstrate rigour associated with openness, relevance to practice and congruence of the methodological approach". Smith *et al.* (2014, p. 100) acknowledged that qualitative researchers may interpret data differently

and that "appreciating how the themes were developed was essential "to ensure robust findings. Simundic (2013, p. 13) discussed how a researcher provided preference to conclusions "if in favour of a research hypothesis" when analysing research findings data. Simundic (2013, p. 14) noted how when interpreting research findings it was important for a researcher to ensure that "results were presented correctly" and that data was only interpreted where there was a statistical significance", otherwise bias would exist. Simundic (2013, p. 14) cited the importance of a researcher being cautious and not over generalising research conclusions to an entire population. Simundic (2013, p. 12) acknowledged the difficulty of managing issues relating to researcher bias and advised that researchers should have "declared the known limitations of their work".

Dwyer *et al.* (2009) acknowledged a developing discussion about a researcher's role and the importance of understanding this within the context of research. Mercer (2007 p. 2-6) discussed the challenges educational researchers faced when investigating their workplaces and noted how traditional methodological textbooks "tended to gloss over the intricacies of insider research conducted at one's place of work". Dwyer *et al.* (2009 p. 57) concurred with the opinion of Mercer (2007) and noted that an insider researcher could "enhance the depth and breadth of understanding of population that may not be available to a non-native scientist". Mercer (2007 p. 5) described a "double-edged sword" and argued that an insider researcher had a better comprehension of "context, groups, statuses, cultures links between situations and events" because they had "socialised into the group" themselves. Mercer (2007) argued that there was a general presumption that an insider researcher had easier access to the research population and that, therefore, data collection would be easier to complete. Dwyer *et al.* (2009 p. 58) opined that an internal researcher "provided a level of trust and openness in participations that would not have otherwise been present". Dwyer *et al.* (2009 p. 58) continued to note how research participants would have been more willing to share their experiences with an insider researcher "because there was an assumption of understanding of shared distinctiveness". However, Dwyer *et al.* (2009 p. 59) also acknowledged that an insider researcher would have undue influence but that being an outsider researcher "did not create immunity to the influence of personal perspective". Chavez (2008 p. 481) noted how insider researchers could "expect to draw advantage from their positionality ", and stated that benefits could include understanding "cognitive, emotional and/or psychological precepts of participants" as well as historical knowledge of the research field. Chavez (2008 p. 491) cited a requirement for "reflective exercises" to "verify or falsify assumed interpretations" and to allow reflection on "own multifarious roles

and identities” that influenced the research. The conclusions of Chavez (2008) concurred with the work of Le Bourdon (2021) with recommendations for reflective discussion of research findings. Issues of power and privilege relevant to the internal nature of this research were discussed in section 3.5.1 Table 3.7.3.1 provides an overview of strategies for reducing identified bias in this research study.

Types of research bias identified by Smith <i>et al.</i> (2014, p. 101)		
Bias	Description	Relevance to this research study – strategies employed to reduce potential bias
Design bias	Poor study design e.g. where a researcher's beliefs influence the choice of research question and methodology	<p>Care was taken to ensure that the research questions for this research study did not suppose any answer. Methodology chosen for this study was explained within this thesis, with the selected research methods employed as the most appropriate to investigate the phenomenon and reflected the researcher for this study's positionality (section 3.2).</p> <p>Simundic (2013, p. 13) advised that a research study was kept as simple and closely matched to the research question. The research question for this research study focussed on undergraduate students at University A who had participated in an international experience and had experienced the phenomena investigated.</p>
Selection/participant bias	The process of recruiting participants and study inclusion criteria	<p>As the identified target research population was 91 participants, it has not been necessary to employ a sampling strategy.</p> <p>Participants identified for this research study had all experienced the phenomenon.</p>

<p>Data collection bias and measurement bias</p>	<p>Bias can occur when a researcher’s personal beliefs influence the way information or data is collected. Participants may not remember or recall events accurately.</p> <p>In qualitative research how questions are asked will influence the information elicited.</p>	<p>For qualitative research semi-structured open-ended questions were used as a strategy for minimising potential bias as the use of a standardised interview process ensured that the same questions were asked to all participants. Use of a semi-structured interview format with open ended questions allowed for flexibility with participant responses, while also allowing the researcher for this research study necessary focus with a structured set of pre-designed questions. Questions designed for use with the focus group were open-ended and allowed for descriptive answers; asked one at a time; allowed time for any unexpected insights from the participants.</p> <p>Care was taken with the structure of questions to ensure that participants were not encouraged to respond in a particular way.</p>
<p>Analysis bias</p>	<p>A researcher may naturally look for data which confirms a hypothesis overlooking data inconsistent with personal beliefs.</p>	<p>Quantitative data was processed using Qualtrics software with all research findings presented using descriptive statistics in Chapter 4 (section 4.1).</p> <p>Qualitative data was transcribed and coded with findings presented in Chapter 4 (section 4.2).</p> <p>As recommended by Simundic (2013, p. 14) care was taken not to over generalise research findings from this study, which focussed on undergraduate participants in an international experience at University A.</p> <p>Findings between the two data sets (quantitative and qualitative) were triangulated.</p>

Table 3.7.3.1 Types of research bias identified by Smith et al (2014, p. 101) and strategies for reducing identified bias in this research study

3.8 Research strategies

3.8.1 Focus groups

As previously discussed, (section 3.7.3), qualitative research for this research study had taken the form of a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions to gather participants' personal experiences. For example, table 3.8.1.1 illustrates a few of the semi-structured interview prompts used:

Do you recall being advised about any opportunities to participate in an international experience as part of your study?

What do you remember?

What were the format of experiences offered and for which subject areas?

Prompt for researcher - What was the initial response of participants? Were they interested?

Did you undertake any planning/further investigation of your potential participation?

(e.g. development of language/inter-cultural/communication skills. Increased confidence / adding value to CV / 'seeing the world' / network with future employers / challenging yourself)

If you chose not to participate, did you perceive any benefits to participation?

Table 3.8.1.1 Examples of semi-structured interview prompts

A full list of qualitative research focus group with semi-structured questions has been provided in Appendix 7

Savenye *et al.* (2005) acknowledged that focus group interviews could be structured or unstructured. Dawson (2009, p. 85) discussed the concept of a focus group and how the goal (for a researcher) was to "achieve a free-flowing, useful and interesting discussion." Savenye *et al.* (2005, p. 78 - 79) suggested, therefore, that factors such as the choice of venue were extremely important as "this would affect the participation levels, the level of discussion and the standard of recording." Dawson (2009, p. 79) recommended that the moderator allowed time to "help participants to relax and explain the purpose of the group; what was expected of participants; what would happen to the results and discussed anonymity and confidentiality." This research study had taken a view that the use of semi-

structured open-ended questions would keep the conversation moving along and help avoid any one individual dominating the discussion, to achieve, as Dawson (2009, p. 85) noted a "free-flowing discussion." Menter (2011) and Dawson (2009) both cited the importance for a researcher to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity for their research participants. The researcher for this study had reminded the semi-structured interview participants about the confidentiality of their information provided, which was noted on the Participants' Information Sheet (Focus group) (Appendix 2). Time was allowed, as Dawson (2009) recommended for the semi-structured focus group research participants to relax at the start of the group meeting, which the researcher for this study opined, supported "free flowing discussion", as Dawson (2009) cited. Menter (2011) noted how qualitative interviews had for practical purposes only involved a relatively small number of research participants. However, Menter (2011) acknowledged that even when using only a small number of research participants for a focus group, large amounts of interview notes would be generated. The focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed for this research study (section 3.7.3).

Menter (2011) stated a belief that focus groups are better suited to investigative research or where there was little research on a topic, or when researchers wanted to ask 'why' questions. In the case of this research study, as earlier noted (section 2.2) literature was spread across a wide range of themed areas relevant to international experience. Discussing the use of semi-structured interviews, Menter (2011) stated that this type of interview had a small number of focus areas with corresponding questions and related probes. Quinlan (2011, p. 299) noted a similarity with a focus group to a 'group interview', and noted that a key difference with a focus group was that the "researcher facilitated the group, focussing on the phenomenon under investigation in the hope of developing from that focus new information and new insights into that phenomenon." Quinlan (2011, p. 299) stated that, conversely, in a group interview the interviewer "interviewed the group about the phenomenon under investigation." Discussing the use of focus groups further Quinlan (2011, p. 299) acknowledged the importance of a researcher ensuring that they had the capacity to "properly facilitate the discussion" and to "ensure that the discussion stayed focussed". Quinlan (2011) noted how this demanded confidence and diplomacy on the part of a researcher to effectively manage the focus group. This research study used a pre-prepared set of questions, with the researcher for this research study, who listened closely to participants, to determine whether the questions were answered and decided when follow-up was needed. As Menter (2011) noted the ability for a researcher and research

participants to have had dialogue and for a researcher to have been able to adapt questions and probed responses, that would enhance the value of research data and enabled a level of understanding and supported the development of knowledge. Continuing the discussion on focus groups Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 369) expressed a view that this type of research allowed people who had encountered a particular experience to be interviewed "in a relatively unstructured way." This research study had chosen to use a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions, which resulted in lengthy narrative and allowed the researcher for this research study to probe and to have explored the behaviour and meaning of the research participants' actions. Bryman (2011) acknowledged, this method allowed understanding thoroughly the reasons for answers provided.

Curtis (2014) noted how focus groups offered the potential for the collection of large amounts of data quickly and efficiently. However, they recommended care was taken when deciding on the size of a focus group sample, as too many participants would be intimidating for some members, who then decided not to speak. Curtis (2014) also noted that visual and aural elements were included as elements of this type of research and made a change to just questions alone. Coe *et al.* (2017) stated that researchers decided how many groups; group size; group composition and recommended that when using this method of research, a researcher decided when they had collected sufficient data to have achieved their research goals. The importance of preparing a participant information sheet, a consent form and ethical approval for qualitative research is acknowledged by Coe *et al.* (2017). This research study had full ethical approval granted by University A (Appendix 8). As part of the ethical approval process the researcher for this research study had prepared participant information sheets (Appendix 1 and 2), consent forms and considered a range of aspects of research ethics (section 3.5).

Walliman (2018) emphasised the particular importance for a researcher to effectively have managed the group, so that all members could provide input. Walliman (2018, p. 110) also acknowledged the convenience of interviewing by video conference and recommended recording focus group meetings to allow a researcher to "retain a full uninterrupted record of what was said." Prior to the advent of mass use of video conferencing, Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 371) noted that when undertaking qualitative research "the interview was usually tape-recorded and transcribed" with Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 371) who also noted that qualitative researchers were usually "not only interested in what was said, but also the way it was said." As Bryman *et al.* (2011), Saunders *et al.* (2012) and Savenye *et al.* (2005) recommended, the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions was recorded

and fully transcribed. Cohen *et al.* (2018) noted how group interviewing as a research method, had increased in popularity with advantages cited as including the potential for discussions to develop and the bringing of people together with varied opinions. However, Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 432) acknowledged a disadvantage of “not allowing personal matters to emerge.” Wiersma *et al.* (2009) opined, there were distinct differences between the use of interviews and questionnaires. Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 142) commented how interviews allowed for “face to face confrontation, an oral exchange, between an interviewer and an individual or group of individuals, whilst responses to a questionnaire “ranged from a checkmark to an extensive written statement.” Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 142) acknowledged how an “interview had an advantage of being a flexible measurement device.”

The researcher for this research study was aware of the need to hold the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions in an environment where the research participants would be comfortable and relaxed. As Dawson (2009) recommended, the discussion was conducted using a classroom at University A, which provided a private quiet space free of distractions, or through the use of on-line video conferencing, both of which were familiar to the research participants. This research ensured clear explanation of the interview process, including the expected length of the session, reminding participants that they could refuse to answer any questions and were free to withdraw their participation from the study at any point. The researcher for this research study was also able to re-clarify issues of confidentiality, anonymity and consent at the start of the session and acknowledged and gained approval for recording the session.

3.8.2 Questionnaire design

Quantitative research for this research study was undertaken using a questionnaire (Appendix 6). Dawson (2009, p. 97) recommended that when designing a questionnaire, a researcher made this “as interesting as possible and easy to follow.” Dawson (2009, p. 97) specified that “layout and spacing were extremely important. If a questionnaire looked cluttered, participants would be less likely to fill it in.” Dawson (2009, p. 97) offered advice that when designing a questionnaire, easy questions were first used to encourage participants to start completion, with open-ended questions, which required greater effort to complete, left until the end, as Dawson (2009) stated participants were then more likely to continue with completion of the full questionnaire. As recommended by Dawson (2009), to

support a good layout and ease of participant response, this research study used Qualtrics software for the design and management of the quantitative survey. Most questions used rating scales. The researcher for this research study understood that the enhanced layout and ease of completion encouraged identified research participants to fully complete the survey. Wiersma *et al.* (2009) noted how questionnaire surveys were frequently criticised because of excessive non-response rates; poor construction and/or organisation; participants not being truthful; questions that were considered trivial; data from different questions that were difficult to synthesise. This research study was mindful of potential low completion rates for the survey. Strategies to enhance completion were discussed in section 3.8.2. Although Wiersma *et al.* (2009) suggested use of a questionnaire survey to probe participant feelings, instead the researcher for this research study made use of a qualitative approach and used a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions for this purpose, as the researcher for this research study considered qualitative research more beneficial for probing participants' feelings (section 3.8.1).

Menter (2011) noted how the use of surveys was commonplace to support collection of quantitative information about people in a population. Menter (2011) noted how surveys were typically administered on an individual basis and collected information in a quantitative manner. Having supported the use of questionnaires Menter (2011) noted that the benefits of survey questionnaires were that they were fast and relatively easy for a researcher to administer and could collect vast quantities of data in an organised way over a short time duration. By using a survey, a researcher could conduct a large sample research more easily than by using interviews and focus groups alone. Surveys were also able to improve data analysis because information was collected and analysed in a standardised way. Menter (2011) noted several disadvantages with questionnaire use including variations with the way participants decided to answer because of their motivation, mood and honesty and pressure on their own time. Menter (2011) cited that surveys relied upon participants to read and understand written questions accurately and that all too frequently issues occurred with survey data because of participant non-response. Menter (2011) further noted that a limitation of using a survey was that a researcher was not able to follow up and further explore their understanding of participants' responses. In the case of this research study a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions was employed to allow the development of an understanding, following completion of the quantitative questionnaire, discussed in section 3.8.1. Bryman *et al.* (2011) identified the benefits of questionnaire surveys as cheap; quick; the absence of interviewer effects; no interviewer variability;

convenience for participants. Bryman *et al.* (2011) acknowledged limitations with this form of research as an inability to prompt and probe participants; not knowing the identity of participants; inability to collect additional data; difficulty asking a lot of questions; low response rates. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 378) identified limitations with the use of questionnaire surveys, particularly with participant completion and stated "potential research participants who received a questionnaire via the Internet, the intranet or through the post could be reluctant to complete it for several reasons. They may have felt that it was not appropriate to provide sensitive and confidential information to someone they have never met." Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 379) warned that participants "would be reluctant to spend time providing written explanatory answers, where these were requested." and recommend that researchers considered the use of interviews as an alternative strategy and noted "personal interviews, where appropriate, therefore achieved a higher response rate than using questionnaires." Saunders *et al.* (2012) acknowledged the need for a researcher to spend time planning precisely what data they intended to collect from a questionnaire, as there was no opportunity with this form of research to prompt respondents or to explore issues further with participants. The points made by Bryman *et al.* (2011), Menter (2011) and Saunders *et al.* (2012) were pertinent to this research study, as the authors discussed positive aspects with the use of questionnaires and included ease of administration. However, this group of authors (Bryman *et al.*, 2011; Menter, 2011; Saunders *et al.*, 2012) also highlighted negative factors, particularly with participation/completion rates. Previously mentioned, the survey design for this research study used almost entirely closed questions and was designed using a software package that would have enabled participant completion on either a desktop, laptop or mobile telephone. Identified participants received a personal approach from the researcher for this research study, together with a participant information sheet (Appendix 1 and 2) which explained the nature and purpose of the research. The researcher for this research study opined that this supported the participation rate.

Walliman (2018) noted that questionnaires were a particularly suitable tool for gaining quantitative data, but they could also be used for qualitative data. Walliman (2018) noted that the use of a questionnaire enabled a researcher to organise questions and to have received responses without the need to talk to every respondent. Thus, a questionnaire was considered as a flexible tool, which had the advantage of having a structured format, but was also easy and convenient for participants. For a researcher, a questionnaire could be quickly administered to many participants across a large geographical area, without the personal influence of a researcher. However, Walliman (2018, p. 106) noted that

"questionnaires required a lot of time and skill to design and develop", with Walliman (2018, p. 106) who recommended that questionnaires "need to be short and simple to follow, so that complex question structures are not possible." Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 144) discussed how researchers were often concerned about their sample size and acknowledged that "there is no clear-cut answer" to this question. Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 144) advised that "a sample size of 30 was held by many to be the minimum number of cases if researchers planned to use some form of statistical analysis on their data." Cohen *et al.* (2018) noted it was important for researchers to have ensured that they identify an appropriate minimum sample size which reflected accurately their population forming the survey" Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 144) described how coding was assigned to each research question to reduce the data and allowed interpretation and findings. Use of an electronic questionnaire for surveying for this research study, had enabled a larger potential research population to be invited to participate, than was possible through use of a small number of focus groups using semi-structured open-ended questions alone, as suggested by Menter (2011). The researcher for this research study was of the opinion that an electronic survey would be convenient for respondents and as Walliman (2018) opined would offer respondents convenience and flexibility to have enabled their participation in this research study.

3.8.3 Questionnaire – potential non-response

Wiersma *et al.* (2009) acknowledged the potential for low response rates to surveys and stated that it is common practice for many researchers to ignore this issue. Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 155) considered that an important factor with non-response to a questionnaire was the length of the survey and recommended that researchers avoided overly long surveys. Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 155) advised researchers to request immediate responses to surveys, rather than having provided long windows for completion as a further method of enhancing the participant response rate. Bryman *et al.* (2011) advised researchers to have considered the issue of non-response, as it was likely that not everyone in an identified sample would agree to participate in research. Both Bryman *et al.* (2011) and Wiersma *et al.* (2009) suggested that structured interviews were used to overcome issues associated with low survey response rates. Cohen *et al.* (2018) suggested that a typical response rate for an educational questionnaire was in the range of 20% to 40% on the first attempt. However, Cohen *et al.* (2018) noted that with follow up this response rate could be

increased to 75%. The advice provided by Bryman *et al.* (2011) and Wiersma *et al.* (2009) to consider low response rates to surveys was acknowledged by the researcher for this research study. The survey was designed with both ease and time of completion in mind and used almost entirely closed questions. Identified participants were advised at the point of initial contact of the expected time the survey would take them to complete and were politely requested to respond as soon as possible. As previously noted in this section, the survey was designed using Qualtrics software and allowed participants to complete the survey using an e-mail link that would open the questionnaire on any device and enhanced the survey completion rate.

Saunders *et al.* (2019, p. 211) stated that gaining “cognitive access to participants” was determined by whether they decided to take part in research following a request. Groves *et al.* (2000) referred to salience-leverage theory, where different people responded to different levers when asked to participate in research. Understanding what made people want to take part in research and what discouraged them was important for the researcher of this research study. For example, if the topic of research was of interest to them, then they were likely to respond. Saunders *et al.* (2019) stated the way in which a request for participation in research was presented, would affect how participants responded, for example, the offer of incentives, the purpose and use of the research and the requirements of participating. Saunders *et al.* (2019) noted that there could be sampling bias if only those that were interested in the research topic responded. This research study was mindful that provision of an incentive for participation provided an interest for research participants to participate that could result in such a bias as identified by Saunders *et al.* (2019) and therefore, no incentive for participation was offered.

3.8.4 Field notes

Newbury (2001 p. 1) described how “the process of research involved many forms of writing, from letter writing and minute taking to academic papers and formal research reports”. Newbury (2001 p. 3) described the benefit of fieldnotes and stated “fieldnotes could be understood as an objective record of observations made in a particular setting”. Oliver-Hoyo *et al.* (2006 p. 42) noted that “data-collection methods of qualitative research commonly included field notes, student journals or documents, surveys, and interviews”. Lambert (2019 p. 42) described the use of field notes as, at times “writing extensive notes”

and at other times “I jotted down just a few key words in a small notebook, in this way I maintained a more active role”. Lambert (2019), Newbury (2001) and Oliver-Hoyo *et al.* (2006) suggested that the use of field notes provided a researcher with an additional method for collecting research data, which as Lambert (2019) noted could be a simple and fast method of data capture. Field notes were created by the researcher during the act of conducting this research study as supplementary evidence to further supported meaning and understanding of the phenomenon investigated. Field notes included discussions with the University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator and Placements Administrator, both of whom agreed for discussion notes to be used as part of this research study.

3.9 Pilot study

This section provided a rationale and overview for a pilot study for this research study investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?*

Savenye *et al.* (2005, p. 87) recommended using a pilot study to identify potential issues with data collection and noted how some qualitative researchers “have suggested a study cannot be conducted without running a pilot study to test out assumptions, data collection methods, and approaches.” Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 151) agreed with Savenye *et al.* (2005) and noted the importance of testing questionnaires with “a small group as a pilot run” and that this group should be formed of those “familiar with the variables under study and should be in a position to make valid judgements.” The questionnaire for this research study had been piloted with two members of University A staff who regularly worked with undergraduate students enquiring about study or work-experience abroad. Both staff had many years of experience working with and understanding the needs of students who were travelling internationally. Therefore, the researcher for this research study opined that these staff made valid judgements, as Savenye *et al.* (2005) noted is of importance.

Walliman (2018, p. 107) and Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 151) stated that the benefits of a pilot study included identification of misunderstandings, removing ambiguity and unwanted items. Having supported use of a pilot study and discussed issues with the use of questionnaires, Dawson (2009, p. 98) recommended asking people who were not involved with questionnaire design to pilot the survey. In the case of this research study, neither of the University A staff completing the questionnaire pilot had been involved in the questionnaire

or research design, as recommended by Dawson (2009). Basit (2010), further added a belief, that by conducting a pilot study, a researcher improved the overall validity and reliability of a study. A pilot study was described by Basit (2010) as being conducted before the main research had taken place. By completing a pilot study Basit (2010) considered that overconfidence by both beginner and experienced researchers could be avoided. Reviewing the key advantages of a pilot study as Basit (2010) noted, the pilot for this research study aimed to receive feedback on questionnaire design; confirmed the feasibility of the proposed study and by asking the pilot study participants to complete the proposed survey, confirmed the validity and reliability of the data.

Curtis (2014) highlighted the importance for a researcher of acting on the feedback they received from a pilot questionnaire. Curtis (2014) stated that if these considerations were not taken into account, there was a risk that participants would have made up their answers or left the questions out, which would have resulted in data becoming statistically skewed and therefore, not reliable. Curtis (2014) noted how a pilot survey would have helped to ensure that questions were appropriate and written in a language that participants understood and that the overall length of the questionnaire was suitable. Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 451) also agreed with Curtis (2014) and Walliman (2018) and strongly advocated the use of a pilot questionnaire recommending that researchers asked, "an expert or group of experts to comment on the representativeness and suitability of questions" and allowed suggestions to be made as to the structure of the questionnaire. The researcher for this research study had carefully taken account of all feedback received from the pilot study and made adaptations to the questionnaire, as necessary. Further detail on findings from the pilot study and changes actioned was available in section 3.9.1.

This research study acknowledged the advice provided by authors writing in this area (Basit, 2010; Curtis, 2014; Dawson, 2009; Savenye *et al.*, 2005; Walliman, 2018; Wiersma *et al.*, 2009) to pilot both the survey and semi-structured open-ended questions for the focus group. The researcher for this research study accepted the importance of engaging a pilot study, particularly to support development of the research study questionnaire and semi-structured open-ended questions for the focus group. The pilot study involved University A's staff, who regularly had contact with students travelling abroad and were extremely experienced, having had many years of expertise with this type of work. Staff were asked to review both sets of intended questions; intended data collection methods, identified unclear terminology; potential ethical issues including citing any inappropriate questions. Findings from the pilot study were used to assess the feasibility of the intended research

approach and enhanced planned questions, as noted in section 3.9.1. Data from the pilot study was not included in the research findings and analysis.

3.9.1 Findings from the pilot study

Findings from the pilot study conducted during February 2021 confirmed that it was appropriate for the research study questionnaire to proceed, with minor changes made to one survey question that allowed for multiple answers (rather than a drop-down list, where only one response could be selected). The University A pilot study participants recommend that additional researcher prompts were included for the semi-structured open-ended questions for the focus group, which better supported clarity of the questions posed to the participants.

The pilot study group, who had provided permission for their notes to be used as part of this research study, further recommended that although ethical approval (Appendix 8) had been granted for approaching the identified research participant group by text message, in the first instance, contact would be made by e-mail, as the pilot study participants considered this method to be less intrusive. Following consideration of this feedback and acknowledgement of the point made by Savenye *et al.* (2015) that experienced pilot study participants made valid judgements, the researcher for this research study had decided not to use text messaging as a method of communication with the identified participant target group and only used e-mail communication, as recommended by the pilot study group.

3.10 Validity of research findings

This section considers the validity of the research results. Wiersma *et al.* (2009) noted that the concept of validity involved the extent to which the results could be accurately interpreted (internal validity) and the extent to which the results could be generalised to populations and conditions (external validity). Wiersma *et al.* (2009) continued to note how well-designed research helped to overcome issues of validity. Quinlan (2011, p. 306) suggested that issues of validity were handled differently in quantitative and qualitative research and commented how “many researchers objected to the application of quantitative measures of quality to qualitative research”, because they were of the opinion that qualitative research should not be involved with the use of numbers. Bryman *et al.* (2011)

agreed with the concepts of internal and external validity noted by Wiersma *et al.* (2009), expanding the discussion with interrelated concepts, including, external reliability (the degree to which a study can be replicated and the degree to which findings can be generalised across social settings) and internal reliability (whether members of the research team agreed about what they saw and heard and whether there was a good match between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they developed). Continuing this line of discussion, Saunders *et al.* (2012, p. 428) discussed the validity of survey-based research, and noted that "the internal validity and reliability of the data collected and the response rate achieved depended, to a large extent, on the design of research questions, the structure of the questionnaire, and the rigour of the pilot testing." Haiying-Long (2017, p. 209) acknowledged the importance of validity of research claims and noted "because quantitative and qualitative components of mixed methods research included the same types of validity claims, it is the validity claims, rather than research design or procedure that became the focus of the validation process." Haiying-Long (2017, p. 210) considered that the examination of validity issue in mixed methods was of critical importance and that "validity was central to the quality of educational research." The researcher for this research study accepted that the research methods used must accurately and consistently measure their intended aims. To support internal validity, this research study ensured clarity with the research question and that the features of this study were congruent with the research question (Chapter 1); accurately described the researcher for this study's role within University A (section 3.5); conducted a pilot study (section 3.9); undertaken face validity, as noted by Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 77) by asking staff at University A who usually worked with participants planning an international experience, who had expertise in this field, if the "research result measurement seemed to reflect the concept concerned" . Considering external validity, findings from this research study were compared with available published literature and assessed how the results correspond to established theory and concepts and therefore, the generalisability of the research findings.

Cohen *et al.* (2018) discussed the concept of triangulation as a strategy for enhancing the validity of research findings, which Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 195) described as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour". Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 195) noted how a single method approach alone may "bias or have distorted a researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality they were investigating" and encouraged a mixed approach to research. Qualitative research from the focus group findings for this research study was triangulated with findings from the quantitative survey

research, which as Cohen *et al.* (2018) acknowledged enhanced the overall validity of the research findings for this research study. The qualitative and quantitative methodologies employed as part of this research study were used to provide a method of methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation supported, as Olsen *et al.* (2004) noted validating and corroborating the research study findings by having provided multiple perspectives on the research study evidence, having better supporting accuracy and reliability of the research study findings. In particular, triangulation and extended reflection, were described by McChesney (2020) as providing a deeper understanding of the underlying meaning for each of the participant responses to the quantitative questions. As noted in sections 3.7.1 and 2.10 a holistic paradigmatic stance of interpretivism was used across all research elements of this study. The researcher for this research study agreed with McChesney (2020) and Babones (2015) that this provided a more holistic and meaningful interpretation of the research data. To further improve validity, this research study had identified the largest possible sample size from University A. It had been previously noted within this chapter (section 3.8.2) that the electronic questionnaire survey had been designed with ease of completion in mind, to encourage participation by the identified research population. Research findings were discussed in the Analysis and Discussion chapter (Chapter 5), later in this work.

3.10.1 Peer validation of research findings

Creswell (2003) described the process of peer review of research findings as providing an additional, external check of the research process. Creswell (2003) advocated that a peer reviewer should be an individual who was best placed to sense check the research and to have asked questions about method, meanings and interpretations of data. Newton (2010 p. 130) noted how the process of peer review provided a "stamp of approval", but there could be shortcomings to the peer review process involving situational, personal, social and ethical factors. Newton (2010) described how it was common to have had research articles reviewed by at least two people with knowledge of the same field. Newton (2010 p. 132) stated that without the correct knowledge, understanding and ability, a reviewer would "find flaws where there were none". Newton (2010) identified that there was a tendency with reviewers to favour arguments which agreed with the reviewers' beliefs and were negative towards new ideas. Koutropoulos (2015) argued when undertaking peer review, the best that can be done is for a peer reviewer to have asked questions and sought clarifications.

Creswell (2003), Newton (2010) and Koutropoulos (2015) acknowledged that peer review was a noted method of validating research findings, although as Newton (2010) and Koutropoulos (2015) suggested there were limitations to this method. Peer validation of findings has not formed part of this research study because firstly, the researcher for this research study, did not have any established contact with other researchers and authors working in this field of knowledge and secondly, was aware of potential bias towards a reviewer's beliefs, as Newton (2010) noted.

3.11 Data collection methods

The characteristics of the research population for this research study included age, gender and ethnicity. A description of participants allowed for comparisons with the general population of University A students in any future replica studies. Whilst this data collection was presented in a general context for the target research population, the ethical approval feedback for this research study, from University A Ethical Approval Panel, recommended that this data should not be attributed to individual responses to the quantitative questionnaire. For this reason, the findings data were not split by personal characteristics of the questionnaire participants. Table 3.11.1 identifies the research population compared to University A full-time undergraduate cohort.

Data type	University A % (full-time undergraduate)	Target research population %	Variance %
Female	54	48	-6
Male	46	52	+6
Other	0	0	-
 			
BAME.	20	23	+3
Unknown/Refused	3	3	-
White	77	74	-3
 			
Under 19	33	3	-30
19-21	33	36	+3
22-25	14	41	+27
26-35	14	16	+2
36+	6	4	-2

Table 3.11.1 Data Collection target research population compared to University A full-time undergraduate cohort

The above data (table 3.11.1) represents the broad group (classifications) data set for University A full-time undergraduate students, at the time of this research study.

It is important to have acknowledged that the target research population data set for this research study, included all full-time undergraduate students recorded by University A as engaged in an international experience during the year that the research had taken place and the previous two years. University A staff who supported international experience (section 4.3) were asked to identify students enquiring about an international experience but chose not to participate during the current year and previous years. (The total research population was 91 students). Ethical approval from University A, as part of this research study, (Appendix 8) provided authorisation for the identified research population to be contacted as part of this research study. University A was chosen as the focus for this

research because of its socio-economic context (section 1.3) and because few students chose to engage in an international experience, as part of their time studying for an undergraduate degree. As University A had a <1% undergraduate participation rate in an international experience, it was not possible to have expanded the target research population data set further.

The data set for gender showed a variance of +/-6% compared to the general population, which was just above the conventional threshold for the statistically significant level of 5% noted by Lambert (2019) and Wiersma *et al.* (2009). There was a small variance of +/-3% for the BAME category. When comparing age profiles more significant variances were evident. This was explained because international experiences / outward student mobility did not usually take place during the first year of an undergraduate degree programme, (hence a variance of -30% compared to the general student population at the lowest end of the age groupings). Most study exchanges and placement year outward mobility had taken place between the second and third year of undergraduate programmes (hence a variance of +27% for 22–25-year-olds as this group of students was slightly older, as a minimum age, during the third year at University A).

3.12 Target research population

Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 89) discussed how in their opinion there was no clear-cut answer for the correct survey population size and that the correct sample size depended on the purpose of the survey and the population under scrutiny. They opined that a research population sample size of 30 was “held by many to be the minimum number of cases” when planning to use “some form of statistical analysis”. Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 89) continued to note that researchers must consider how they wished to use data before they made an informed judgement about a target research population and must have had a minimum sample size to represent the population under survey and that the larger the population, the larger the sample that must be drawn. Bryman *et al.* (2011, p. 101) agreed with Cohen *et al.* (2018) and stated that “the decision about sample size was not a straightforward one” and that “there was no definitive example” and continued to note that this opinion was often “of great disappointment to those who posed such questions”. As earlier noted, (section 3.11) the total research population for this research study was identified as a maximum of 91 participants.

3.13 Extending the research beyond the original data set

Consideration could be given to extending this research study to encompass identical research at a different UK university located in a social mobility cold spot, as defined by The Social Mobility Index (2021). However, it was evident that in undertaking additional research at another higher education institution, a further set of data would be generated. In producing additional data, this would have sat outside the first set and comparisons would need to be made between the two data sets. The focus of this research would then have changed from a single focus on University A to become a comparison study of international experience for undergraduate students across two universities, residing in areas of identified social mobility cold spots. Likewise, surveying further students at University A who had participated in an international experience, at a later point in time, since the research for this research study was completed, would also produce a second set of data, which would have sat in isolation to the original data set, with comparisons needing to be drawn between the two data sets. Whilst this research study was not intended to be a comparison study, the researcher for this research study acknowledged future research opportunities were possible, with comparison studies related to this research question (section 6.10).

3.13.1 Following research completion

As the global pandemic had disrupted travel, the number of students travelling at University A, since the original research was completed (pre-pandemic) was relatively small at <30 students. The borders of some countries were not yet fully open, at the point in time when this research study was written up, some countries had requirements for Covid-19 tests and/or vaccinations, which impacted negatively with some students' willingness to travel abroad and/or experience of travel, when they participated in an international experience. Continued disruption to international travel could have influenced the responses of students involved in any second sample, which would in turn not have provided for reliable comparison data (section 3.13). For these reasons it was decided not to proceed with a second sample of data at University A. This view was shared by Wiersma *et al.* (2009 p. 140) who, when discussing extending the length of surveys over time stated that "the passing of time would have reflected a change in the measurement between individuals

measured earlier and those measured later in the survey” because the population might have changed with respect to dependent variables. However, it was acknowledged that this research study provided potential for further research later (section 6.10), either a repeat of this research study at University A to create a comparison study across a set period and/or at another university to create a comparison study across two institutions.

3.14 Rich Picture

This research study *investigating how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, was represented using a rich picture, as described by Checkland (1999), who provided guidance as to what should be included to gain a better understanding of a situation and should have included structures, processes, climate, people and issues expressed by people and conflict. Checkland (1999) discussed how a rich picture could be used to explore, acknowledge and define a situation and express it through a diagram, thereby it created a mental model. The rich picture shown (figure 3.14.1) is created and used by the researcher for this research study and was used to promote discussion and shared understanding of the study during The British Council Going Global 2021 Virtual Conference.

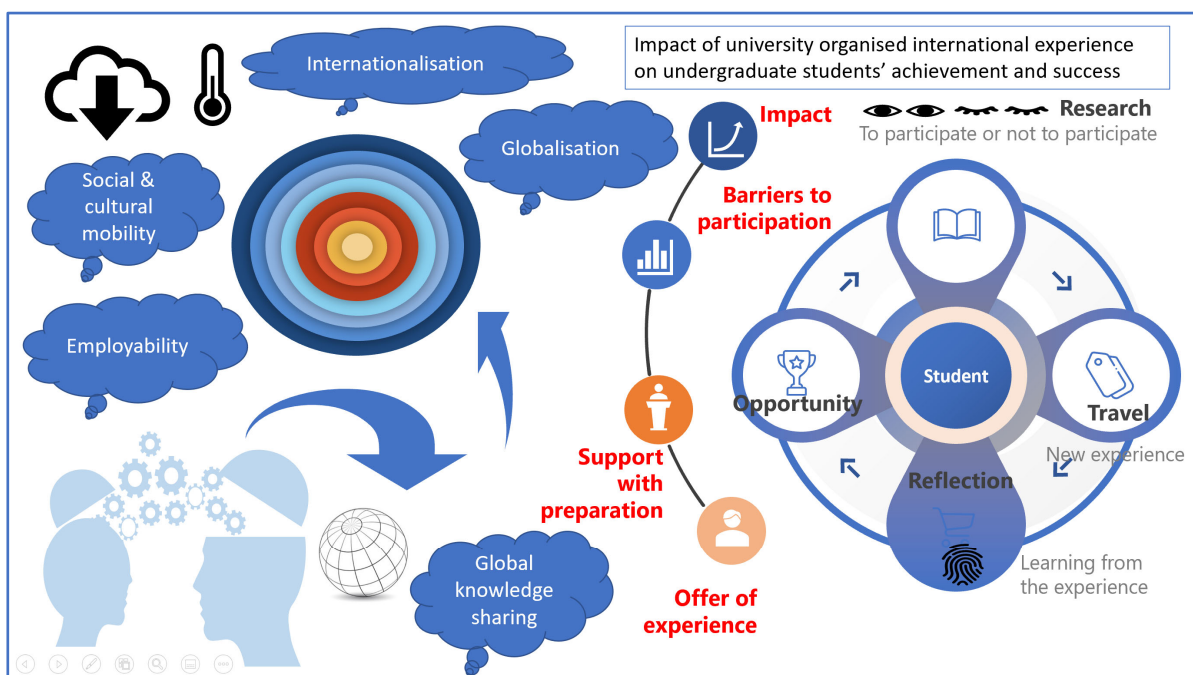


Figure 3.14.1 Rich picture

The rich picture poster is used to support a presentation of the research study demonstrating how University A students are presented with an opportunity to participate in an international experience. In deciding whether to participate they may have had to overcome barriers to participation. Following participation, there are a range of potential benefits that according to the available literature, it may have been possible to derive from the international experience itself.

This research study explored the experience of a specific group of students and tied in with the choice of interpretivist methodology, because the research focussed on a single group of students who were or had studied as full-time undergraduate students at University A. As Cohen *et al.* (1995) identified, this paradigm was better used to enable study of the complexity of human behaviour and provided indirect indications of phenomena. The literature (Basit, 2010; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Newby, 2013; Saunders *et al.*, 2012) demonstrated that a positivism paradigm developed knowledge of the world through direct observation, aligning itself with logical reasoning where something can either be proved or not. As this research study is a 'study of society', the researcher for this research study understood it was more relevant to adopt an interpretivist paradigm which provided an approach to understand the feelings and behaviours of the research participants. A mixed methods approach was adopted for this research study, within the context of an interpretivist paradigm. In acknowledging the concept of axiology, the researcher for this research study is aware of his position as an employee of University A and his role in the development of international links, which Killam (2013) noted, could be considered as valuable and ethical by a researcher but also a potential source of bias, whereby a researcher had the potential to influence the data collection as it happened. The researcher for this research study was mindful of this potential bias.

A mixed methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was used for the research study. This research study acknowledged the view offered by Newby (2013) who stated that mixed methods were driven by the needs of the research and that what is ultimately important were the research findings, rather than the need to adopt a mono-method approach and the view of Ahmed *et al.* (2012, p. 936) who stated that mixed methods are an "emerging best practice" which "led to better research within a single project." The researcher for this research study agreed with the writing of Punch *et al.* (2014) who recommended that research methods were combined, when appropriate. For qualitative and quantitative research, a sample was used, broadly taking account of a cross

section of different age groups; ethnicities; gender, representative of the undergraduate population at University A.

Qualitative research was appropriate for this research study as it focussed on people, their feelings, emotions, understanding of reality and objectives and as Kozleski (2017) noted qualitative research lent itself well as a method in these circumstances. This research study used a focus group, with a list of pre-determined semi-structured open-ended questions, to facilitate collection of personal descriptions of participants' experiences. The interview guide and semi-structured open-ended questions were developed based on a review of the literature. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, as recommended by Curtis (2014), Menter (2011) and Savenye *et al.* (2005), and which provided a complete record of what was said and improved the transparency and validity of this aspect of the research process. Qualitative data was coded as recommended by Bryman *et al.* (2011), Cohen *et al.* (2018), and Lambert (2019). Bryman *et al.* (2011 p. 206) specifically stated that this process would enhance the transparency and objectivity of the research process. The coding process (Appendix 5) used key word analysis, identified key words used by participants and facilitated thematic analysis of the qualitative research findings.

Quantitative data was acquired using a survey so that this data could be methodologically triangulated with the qualitative findings of the focus group and field notes. The quantitative survey findings for this research study were processed numerically. A questionnaire was used to provide quantitative data for the research study, which Menter (2011) noted was usually employed for this type of data collection. The questionnaire contained mainly closed questions and as Chu *et al.* (2017) opined provided a researcher with an opportunity to tailor the research to their exact needs and as Basit (2010) stated supported a researcher to interpret the social phenomena under scrutiny. As recommended by Lambert (2019), Newbury (2001) and Oliver-Hoyo *et al.* (2006), field notes were collected to support quantitative and qualitative data findings and the triangulation of data which authors (Coe *et al.*, 2017; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Oliver-Hoyo *et al.*, 2006; Wiggins, 2011), noted as a method for ensuring objectivity with the research findings.

Several authors recommended (Basit, 2010; Curtis, 2014; Savenye *et al.*, 2005; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Walliman, 2018; Wiersma *et al.*, 2009) a pilot study of the questionnaire design and qualitative semi-structured interview questions. A pilot study was undertaken involving University A staff to predict issues and to establish the feasibility of the main study. The pilot study additionally checked interpretation of intended quantitative and qualitative

questions. Staff involved in the pilot study were drawn from those who usually worked with students planning an international experience.

The findings of this research study have been viewed through a lens of cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu (1977). As was discussed earlier (section 2.7.1) this research study was not intended as a study of Bourdieu, however, the work of Bourdieu (1977) is so pivotal that it influenced later analysis and discussion (Chapter 5).

3.15 Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis offered a flexible way to analyse qualitative data and was compatible with constructivist paradigms. Describing the concept of thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006, p6) stated that this concept involved "analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" and "interpreted various aspects of the research topic". Braun and Clarke (2006, p7) acknowledged how it was common to read about themes emerging from data and described this as a "passive account of the process of analysis, noting how a researcher always played an active role in identifying themes and patterns in data. Braun and Clarke (2006, p7) continued to discuss how "thematic analysis was not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework" and "could be a method which worked both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality".

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified a theme as being something important about the research data that linked with the research question. Describing thematic analysis at the end of research, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 13) opined that "the development of the themes themselves involved interpretative work, and the analysis that was produced was not just description, but was already theorised", adding that "latent thematic analysis" was more popular within the context of a constructionist paradigm and that this "sought to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enabled the individual accounts that were provided". Discussing the best use of thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006) stated how use of this technique involved searching across multiple data sets and identified repeated patterns of meaning and that writing and engaging with literature was relevant to the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2016, p. 5) cited developments in the field of qualitative research and commented how "qualitative research was a rich and robust field" and also noted attempts to "fit qualitative research into quantitative standards",

stating a belief that this was not always necessary because the qualitative paradigm “had its own quality standards”.

The researcher for this research study followed the thematic analysis step-by-step guide described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly the researcher for this research study familiarised themselves with the data by reading through the qualitative research findings on multiple occasions and noted thoughts and started to consider patterns and meanings. Secondly, research data from the qualitative findings was transcribed, with initial codes produced manually. Thirdly, codes were organised into themes, with a further fourth phase undertaking review of initially identified themes and the production of a thematic grid (Appendix 5). As Braun and Clarke (2006) noted a further phase considering the meaning of themes and making further adjustments has taken place, which ensured that themes were clearly defined. The final phase saw the inclusion of the qualitative data into this research study.

Nowell *et al.* (2017) supported the view of Braun and Clarke (2006) and stated that thematic analysis was a valid way of analysing qualitative data. Nowell *et al.* (2017, p2) noted how this flexible approach provided a “rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” and as a method for forcing a researcher to have taken a well-structured approach, was a beneficial technique for “summarizing key features of a large data set”, which in turn supported the writing of clear reports. Having acknowledged the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) and advice of Nowell *et al.* (2017) a process of thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative research findings for this research study (Appendix 5). Factors influencing the thematic approach to analysis are shown in figure 3.4.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THEMATIC APPROACH

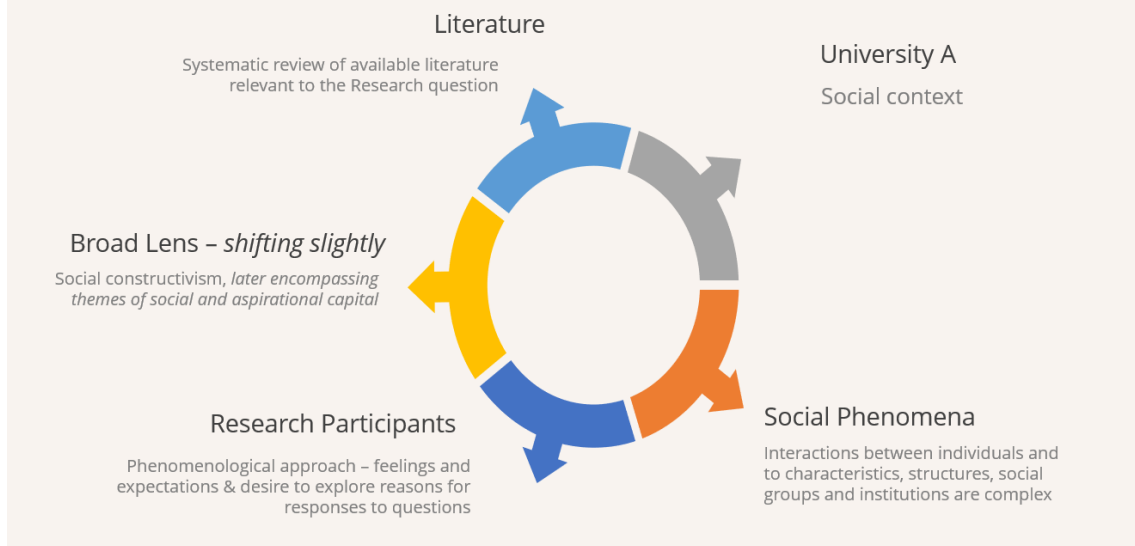


Figure 3.15.1 Factors influencing the thematic approach to analysis

The social context of University A is noted in section 1.3. As cited earlier (section 3.2), this research study was a study of social phenomena, where all of the participants had experienced the phenomenon investigated. This research study was influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1977) and the findings have been viewed through a broad lens of cultural capital, drawn from the available literature.

Holmes (2020) discussed how a researcher's view of the world was impacted upon by their ontological assumptions and the way in which a researcher interacted with and related to the environment. Holmes (2020) stated that these factors "reflected the position that the researcher had chosen to adopt within a given research study" and this influenced the way in which research was conducted, research outcomes and results. Holmes (2020, p. 3) opined that if discussion of positionality was open and honest this would show "where and how a researcher" may have influenced their own research". Several factors influenced the thematic approach taken to this research study. Firstly, review of the available literature relevant to the research question which provided background and supported establishing the research theme. The researcher for this research study has taken a phenomenological approach with a desire to have explored the feelings, expectations and reasons participants provided to the research questions asked (section 3.3.3). Connected to this is an awareness of the complexity of social phenomena and the social context (section 1.3) of University A, which was the focus institution and was central to this research study.

3.16 Reflexive account

This research journey and thesis writing were undertaken solely by the researcher for this research study. At the outset of this research, the researcher for this research study intended to focus only on the benefits of international experience for undergraduates through the lens of a group of participants. Within this broad lens an exploration of national and institutional policies such as the Bologna Declaration (section 2.3.1) and ERASMUS programme (section 2.3.3 and 2.3.4) needed to be considered, as each, along with changes to funding mechanisms, affected participants' ability to travel as well as the participants' experience during international travel.

Data from the participants was presented in sections 4.1 and 4.2 with discussion later in Chapter 5. The work of Bourdieu (1977) and his notion of cultural capital was viewed as pivotal and has influenced analysis and discussion (Chapter 5) of the research study findings. When considering the research findings, the lens through which this research was originally viewed shifted slightly, as the development of cultural and aspirational capital, which Yosso (2005) described as an overlapping form of capital, emerged as a central and overlapping theme. This was considered particularly important given the context of University A (section 1.3). It was not expected at the outset of this research but has developed as an important emerging theme. This finding had fundamentally changed the view of the researcher as the researcher of the study had been able to make connections between the actions of University A, with encouragement for its undergraduates to participate in an international experience and changes in the undergraduates who participated, relating to their confidence, competence, professional enrichment and developing a clearer idea of future career goals. The researcher for this research study had not anticipated development of cultural and aspirational capital and neither foreseen a requirement for student support, to be outcomes of this research study. By undertaking this research, the researcher for this research study was aware that in situations where undergraduates could be successfully encouraged to participate, there was increased potential for the development of cultural and aspirational capital, employability and global mindedness in terms of knowledge and skills achieved through time at University A.

BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) were reviewed by the researcher for this research study, prior to the research activity commencing (section 3.5). Whilst the BERA guidelines have been updated (BERA 2024), following completion of the research study, the researcher for this research study opines that having reviewed the revised BERA

(2024) publication, is confident that the research processes employed by this research study remains within the boundaries of the revised BERA (2024) guidelines. Some of the research participants are known to the researcher of this research study, who has worked with them in a professional capacity to facilitate university mobility experience. This professional familiarity supported the focus group who were asked a series of semi structured open ended questions and it may have made it easier for the researcher to ask more detailed questions and the establishment of rapport and dialogue with the participants. Whilst aware of the advantage this position may have provided, the researcher of this research study was equally aware of the need to manage potential bias. This enabled the researcher to use character-based coding to create codes and analyse themes, providing an organised and structured approach to analysis of qualitative data (Appendix 5).

Personal reflexivity and positionality

Reviewing my own personal reflexivity and positionality, my professional journey involves over 25 years employment in a variety of educational settings, including secondary education, further education and with the last 8 years spent working in the higher education sector. The primary objective of all the roles I have held, working across education sectors, has been to support students' learning and development, by imparting knowledge to them and by creating environments and opportunities in which students can and will learn effectively. I first considered this research study, whilst employed in a role managing student placement and practice learning. An issue arose locating placements for Biological Science students within proximity to University A. Frequently, local laboratories could not accommodate undergraduate student placements because they had accepted Apprenticeship trainees and no longer had capacity. To overcome this issue, I developed group organised visits to European and Turkish universities, as a method for expanding placement provision (before the Covid-19 pandemic). Students were able to attend a short, university organised visit, and consider returning for a longer summer placement, financially supported by the European ERASMUS programme. Through leading these visits, I developed an interest on the impact of international mobility for undergraduates, as I started to notice that undergraduate students from University A were surprised how widely English language was spoken in professional environments at other European universities to which we travelled. University A students were not always aware that modules of study, delivered in English were frequently available at European universities. University A students also appeared surprised that core texts e.g. for Biological Sciences were written in English. It is from these

early beginnings that I started to notice University A students becoming aware of opportunities for further study and work experience and potential future employment in an international context.

Building on these early beginnings, I created further international university links, for Sport & Exercise, Psychology and Education students, which opened opportunities for University A students to visit international universities, before deciding whether or not, to participate in ERSAMUS supported study-exchange or placement opportunities. After this point, when the Covid-19 pandemic had occurred, my role at University A changed, with a move to the International Development directorate and a role which involves managing student mobility across the university. It was shortly before this change of job role that my interest in designing and developing this study, as part of a PhD thesis occurred.

Designing and undertaking this study, has further developed my knowledge in this area. I am now better informed about types of international experience and regions of the world where international mobility is most developed. These perceptions shaped my research, and my personal characteristics of proficient organisation and good investigative skills, both of which have boded well for managing this research study. My career journey to this point has influenced my research across several stages. I have worked with University A students and informally observed them by leading short international study visits with groups of University A students, I have centred this research on University A, noting its social context (section 1.3), as my role working at University A has provided me with access to knowledge and data connected to the contextual setting and intake of University A. For example, I am aware that 45% of University A students are drawn from widening participation backgrounds and that just under one quarter of students (23.5%) are from households within the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) lowest two deciles. The majority of University A students commute daily to one of the university's main campuses. The knowledge I have gained through working in a student mobility setting in higher education has enabled me to reflect on the literature read as part of this research and to distinguish clearly between examples of placement and practice learning. My choice of methodology reflects my experience of working with young people and adults across a variety of educational settings and my belief that people are individuals and there is a need for educational practitioners to work with students, supporting them on their unique journeys, overcoming obstacles to enable success. It is the researcher for this research study's view that access to education at all stages of life is important and that education can change future outcomes and lives for individuals. My time spent working in further education has left a lasting impression on me

and I believe in supporting individuals to enter education at any stage in their life and to receive help to enhance their academic ability and future career prospects. It is for this reason that the position of ontology taken by this research study is that of interpretivism, in that I have a belief that reality is socially constructed and individuals have their own view of reality as they see it.

My time spent working at University A, particularly managing a small team of staff who work with students participating in an international experience, has shown me the importance of one-to-one support in enhancing the confidence of some students with travel abroad. It is for this reason that when analysing the findings of this research study I have included the work of Bourdieu (1977) and his notion of cultural capital (discussed in section 2.7.1). I believe that cultural capital is of consideration given the available data for University A and its social context (section 1.3).

Given my position involved in student mobility and now managing mobility across University A, I acknowledge the potential for bias within the research process as noted by Grant (2019), Saunders *et al.* (2012), Savenye *et al.* (2005), and Wiersma *et al.* (2009) with the interpretation of findings from the research data. In particular I am aware that my perspectives as a researcher may be shaped by my background of employment within the education sector. This positionality may introduce biases (consciously or unconsciously) which may impact on my interpretation of the data. This research study agrees with Wiersma *et al.* (2009) that research should be designed to minimise the potential for bias and the importance of considering and addressing bias at every stage of the research process. Issues of power and privilege relevant to the internal nature of this research are discussed in section 3.5.1 Table 3.7.3.1 Strategies for reducing identified bias in this research study, include semi-structured open-ended questions with focus groups, used as a strategy for minimising potential bias and the use of a standardised interview process to ensure that the same questions are asked to all participants. Findings between the two data sets (quantitative and qualitative) will be triangulated, as recommended by McChesney (2020), which will provide for a deeper understanding of the quantitative data, along with extended reflection of the underlying meaning for responses to each of the quantitative questions. .

Finally, in undertaking this research study my personal knowledge base has increased, for example, undertaking this research study has enabled me to distinguish clearly between mobility for work experience and practice-based mobility, which is more typical in some

world regions, with long established practices. I have significantly developed my skills of reflection during the time span of this research study, making presentations and have discussed my research findings with others, reflecting on these, particularly when audience members had been external to University A. The process of undertaking this research study is an interesting and powerful personal learning experience.

The impact of this research experience on my position as a researcher is a deepening of my knowledge of international student mobility; barriers to participation, how to overcome these and benefits of participation for students, particularly the enhancement of transversal employability skills. I am better aware of the requirement for higher educational institutions to support their students to enable participation in an international experience and how this is more important for those entering higher education establishments from non-traditional backgrounds. Through participating in this research I have significantly deepened my understanding of the research process and have experienced personal growth in areas such as open mindedness, curiosity and allowing my critical thinking skills to grow. As a PhD candidate I have been able to build up a stock of resources and experiences that will be useful in my future academic career. By participating in opportunities to disseminate my research (Appendix 3) this has driven me to synthesise and clarify the aims of my research. The opportunity to explain myself and present my research to an audience has improved my own understanding of my research.

In considering my positionality, drawn from 25 years of employment within the education sector, I have clarified my beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge, with the philosophical stance influencing the research design and practice, as earlier described in this section. I acknowledge that individuals' experiences are diverse and mine is one among many. The choice of a social constructivism ontology aligns well with my own viewpoint, drawn from my career working in several education settings. I have also been supported by my supervisors, who helped and encouraged me, supporting my choice of ontological position. I found this initial philosophical positioning helpful, as it provided a structure and confidence to align the research and to support my choice of methodological approach. My philosophical stance remained static throughout, as I continued my research journey and reflections, as this research has progressed. In reflecting on my philosophical stance, I am aware that through discussions with my supervisors and reading published work, I have incorporated what I have read and learnt from others, with my own experience and prior learning to develop my own personal understanding. I consider this process of reflection and engagement with my chosen ontological position and application in my analysis and

discussion, with further reflection upon my positioning, as a means by which to continue to inform my research practice and my own skills as a researcher.

This chapter presented and identified methodological choices relevant to the research question including the positionality of the researcher for this research study; chosen research philosophies; research approach; ethical considerations. Discussion of the research approach, methodological choices and target research population have been discussed, along with a requirement for a pilot study and the validation of research findings. Finally, this chapter has finished with a reflexive account, acknowledging the researcher for this research study's role in the research journey.

4. Findings

This chapter firstly presents the quantitative research data findings, following the order of questions asked to participants in the electronic survey. Secondly qualitative findings from the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions are presented, in the order asked to participants, finishing with a summary of field notes. Findings are analysed and discussed, with reference made to available literature in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

Burnard *et al.* (2008 p. 429) noted that “one of the most bewildering aspects of research is, perhaps, how to analyse and present the data once it has been collated”. Sandelowski (1998 p. 376) discussed how “there is an expectation that findings would be organised in a results section, with the results addressed in turn”. Bryman *et al.* (2011 p. 522) noted this section would “provide a general description of the findings” and with the next chapter leading to a more detailed discussion. Discussing the format of research findings, Pitchforth *et al.* (2005 p. 5-6) noted how it is standard practice to support the implementation of data “with quotations from interviews or focus group transcripts” and “to use tables and boxes to present data”. Following the recommendation of Bryman *et al.* (2011) this chapter only presents the findings from this research study, with the next chapter (Chapter 5) analysing and discussing identified findings.

Data collection involved identifying students from University A who had participated in an international experience either during the current academic year or previous two academic years (section 3.11). Records were searched (section 3.11) to provide this information which confirmed a target research group of 66 students. Further checks against University A records were made to confirm the number of current students (i.e. those still enrolled at University A) and those who had completed their University A course. Participant data for this research study revealed that 63% (42) of this group were current students with 37% (24) having left University A. Further enquiries were made with identified academic staff to gather records of students who had participated in an international experience. A further 25 students were added to the research population from this search. The total target research group was therefore 91 students. Table 4.1.1 provides a breakdown of survey completions, by group.

For the quantitative aspect of this research, a questionnaire has been designed, following recommendations from Dawson (2009) and Wiersma *et al.* (2009), with analysis completed by Qualtrics software (section 3.8.2). Having gathered contact information for the identified

research population, drawn from University A student records (section 3.1.1), the researcher for this research study sent a questionnaire link by e-mail to all identified participants. The e-mail included a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1 and 2), as discussed in section 3.5. Three follow-up requests were made during a three-week period which resulted in a 38% completion rate for the study, which was within the range of 20% – 40% described by Cohen *et al.* (1995:2018) as a typical response rate for an educational questionnaire (sections 3.6.1 and 3.8.3). An analysis of survey completion data, evidenced in table 4.1.1 below, reveals that current students were most likely to complete the survey, however, overall survey participation was drawn from all identified groups, with completion percentages as shown in the table 4.1.1 below and the actual participant count shown in brackets.

Survey Completion Percentages	
Current students enrolled at University A	69% (63)
Previous students – completed their course and are no longer enrolled at University A	31% (28)

Table 4.1.1 Survey completions by group

Following a final reminder requesting completion of the electronic survey, the design of which was discussed earlier (section 3.8.2), the identified research target group received an invitation to participate in a follow up focus group. Again, this request was made by e-mail attaching a copy of the Focus Group Information Sheet (Appendix 1 and 2) outlining the purpose of the study; voluntary nature of participation; confidentiality and data protection. As with the survey invitation several e-mail reminders were sent to the identified group over a three-week period to follow up on the target research group and to remind identified participants of the opportunity to participate further by joining a focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions, thus improving the number of participants volunteering to join a focus group. Potential participants confirming a wish to participate in the focus group, were booked into a Microsoft Teams virtual focus group meeting by the researcher for this research study and were provided with a consent form at this point. A reminder about the focus group meeting was sent by the researcher for this research study, the day before the meeting was due to take place.

4.1 Findings from the electronic survey

Participants were asked about the *extent to which they believe a variety of factors were important to them when considering participating in an international experience*. Results from this question are in the table below as percentages, with the actual number of participants for each response in brackets.

From the Likert Scale shown below (tables 4.1.2, 4.1.3. and 4.1.4), numerical values are assigned to each category where strongly disagree is given a value of 1, somewhat disagree a value of 2, somewhat agree a value of 3 and strongly agree a value of 4. The mean, providing a measure of central tendency, as Wiersma *et al.* (2009) noted, was calculated by finding the sum of all the values, each category was multiplied by its frequency and then the total of the results found (section 3.7.2). The mean is the sum of all the values, divided by how many values there are (i.e. 4). Therefore, for example, a mean of 3.43 indicates the average response to be between somewhat agree and strongly agree. Standard deviation, as Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 248) noted is “a measure of variability commonly used” with quantitative analysis. Wiersma *et al.* (2009, p. 248) explained how “deviation means the difference between an observed score and the mean of the distribution”. Standard deviation for participant responses is shown on the Likert tables 4.1.2, 4.1.3 and 4.1.4

	Question	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	To add value to my CV	0.00% (0)	5.71% (2)	45.71% (16)	48.57% (17)	3.43	0.60
2	To distinguish myself from peers who will graduate with the same qualification	5.71% (2)	11.43% (4)	40.00% (14)	42.86% (15)	3.20	0.86
3	To travel and 'see the world'	0.00% (0)	5.71% (2)	25.71% (9)	68.57% (24)	3.63	0.59
4	To network with future employers	5.71% (2)	8.57% (3)	48.57% (17)	37.14% (13)	3.17	0.81
5	To challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone	0.00% (0)	8.57% (3)	25.71% (9)	65.71% (23)	3.57	0.65
6	To immerse myself in a different culture	0.00% (0)	5.71% (2)	22.86% (8)	71.43% (25)	3.66	0.58

Table 4.1.2 The extent to which participants believe given factors are important to them when deciding whether to participate in an international experience (survey question 3)

A finding from this question is that *'to immerse myself in a different culture'* is identified as most important (71% strongly agree) and received the highest mean score of 3.66. *'To travel and see the world'* received the second highest overall scoring (68% strongly agree) giving a mean score of 3.63. *'To challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone'* ranked third (65.7% strongly agree) with a mean score of 3.57. *'to network with future employers'* received the lowest overall scoring (37.1% strongly agree) with a mean at 3.17. These findings agree with the research of Carlson *et al.* (1990) who identified that study abroad developed cultural interest and that in terms of student perception was the most significant factor when students decided whether to participate in an international experience. Cultural interest and the development of inter-cultural skills were cited by several authors (Carlson *et al.*, 1990; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; Campbell and Walta, 2015; DeMartini, 1992; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Ozek, 2009; Pence *et al.*, 2008; Sweeney, 2012; Waters *et al.*, 2011).

Reviewing the standard deviation (section 3.7.2) for the question, *the extent to which participants believed given factors were important to them when deciding whether to participate in an international experience*, evidenced little variation from the mean demonstrating that participants to this question were generally in similar agreement with their responses. More variance was evident in responses to statements about *distinguishing oneself from peers* and *networking with future employers*. Participants were asked *to what extent they believed the same group of factors had influenced them to participate in an international experience*. The results from this question are presented in table 4.1.3 on the next page.

	Question	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	To add value to my CV	0.00% (0)	20.00% (7)	42.86% (15)	37.14% (13)	3.17	0.74
2	To distinguish myself from peers who will graduate with the same qualification	5.71% (2)	14.29% (5)	48.57% (17)	31.43% (11)	3.06	0.83
3	To travel and 'see the world'	0.00% (0)	8.57% (3)	31.43% (11)	60.00% (21)	3.51	0.65
4	To network with future employers	2.86% (1)	17.14% (6)	42.86% (15)	37.14% (13)	3.14	0.80
5	To challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone	2.86% (1)	2.86% (1)	28.57% (10)	65.71% (23)	3.57	0.69
6	To immerse myself in a different culture	0.00% (0)	8.57% (3)	31.43% (11)	60.00% (21)	3.51	0.65

Table 4.1.3 The extent to which participants believe given factors influence their decision to participate (survey question 4)

A review of the data for this question identified that *'challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone'* was considered most important (65.7% strongly agree) with a mean score of 3.57. *'to immerse myself in a different culture'* and *'to travel and see the world'*, scored second highest (60% strongly agree) with mean scores of 3.51. *'Distinguishing myself with peers who will graduate with the same qualification'* received the lowest scoring (31.4% strongly agree) with a mean score of 3.06. Findings for this question synthesised with Barker *et al.* (2010) who concluded that students thrived in situations which are outside their comfort zone, developing skills and adding value as to how they handled challenges in later life. This research study concurred with Naffziger et al (2017) who noted the

importance of the development of cultural awareness as an outcome of participation in an international experience.

When comparing Table 4.3 and Table 4.2 focussing on factors considered to be important and to influence decisions to participate in an international experience it can be seen that *challenge and getting out of one's comfort zone; immersion in another culture and distinguishing oneself from peers*, were the most important and influential factors for the participants to this survey. Reviewing the standard deviation (section 3.7.2) for this question evidenced that responses received were close to the mean. Greater variance was evident with answers to statements *about distinguishing oneself from peers and networking with future employers*.

Participants were asked which region of the world their international experience had taken place. The survey identified almost all international experiences were in either Europe or Turkey (91.4%) with 2.86% in Asia and 5.71% identified as 'other location'. The figure below presents findings from the question asking participants which region of the world their international experience had taken place. The total number of participant responses for this question is 35.

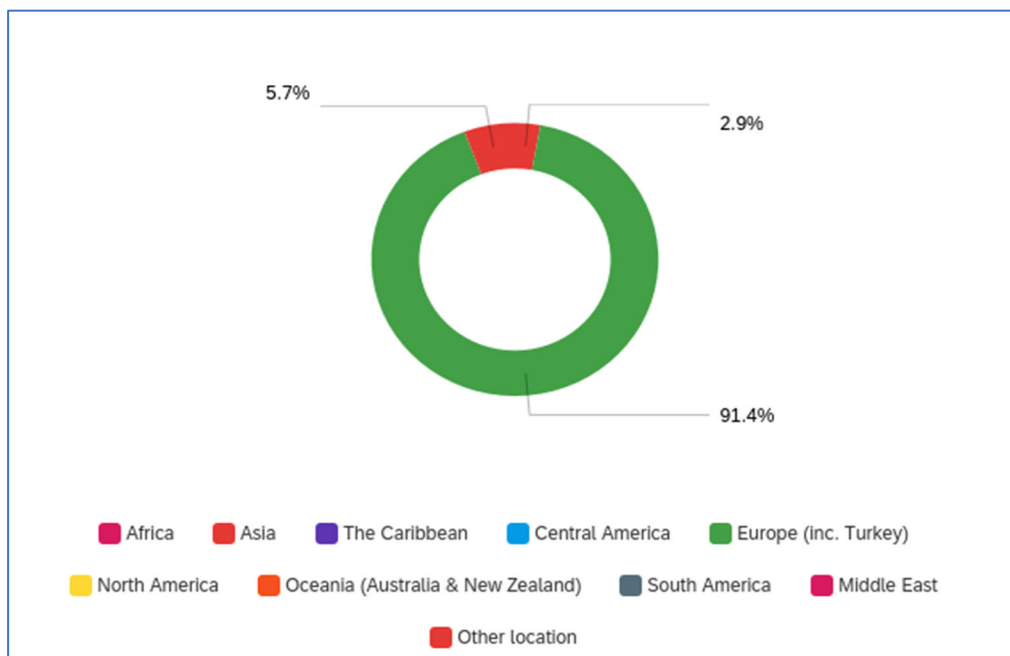


Figure 4.1.1 Geographic location of international experience for survey participants (survey question 5)

Participants were provided with a series of statements which could be considered important when reflecting on their international experience. Table 4.1.4 below presents the findings from this question.

	Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	The experience has improved my overall confidence	2.86% (1)	11.43% (4)	48.57% (17)	37.14% (13)	3.20	0.75
2	The experience has developed my knowledge	2.86% (1)	11.43% (4)	42.86% (15)	42.86% (15)	3.26	0.77
3	This experience has developed my skills	2.86% (1)	17.14% (6)	45.71% (16)	34.29% (12)	3.11	0.78
4	This experience has developed my competence	5.71% (2)	14.29% (5)	48.57% (17)	31.43% (11)	3.06	0.83
5	I found the experience personally enriching	2.86% (1)	8.57% (3)	25.71% (9)	62.86% (22)	3.49	0.77
6	I found the experience professionally enriching	2.86% (1)	8.57% (3)	37.14% (13)	51.43% (18)	3.37	0.76
7	I am better able to adapt to new people and situations	5.71% (2)	14.29% (5)	34.29% (12)	45.71% (16)	3.20	0.89

8	My experience has helped me to better develop a clearer idea of my future career goal	5.71% (2)	20.00% (7)	28.57% (10)	45.71% (16)	3.14	0.93
9	My experience has helped me to better focus on what I need to do to achieve with my undergraduate degree	8.57% (3)	20.00% (7)	28.57% (10)	42.86% (15)	3.06	0.98
10	I am now more focused on achieving a high grade with my undergraduate degree	5.71% (2)	14.29% (5)	28.57% (10)	51.43% (18)	3.26	0.91
11	My intercultural awareness has improved	2.86% (1)	17.14% (6)	34.29% (12)	45.71% (16)	3.23	0.83
12	I found my experience of being abroad disorientating	42.86% (15)	37.14% (13)	11.43% (4)	8.57% (3)	1.86	0.93
13	My future study plans have changed as a result of completing my international experience	22.86% (8)	28.57% (10)	37.14% (13)	11.43% (4)	2.37	0.96
14	I would recommend an international experience to other undergraduate students	2.86% (1)	2.86% (1)	20.00% (7)	74.29% (26)	3.66	0.67

Table 4.1.4 Reflections on international experience (survey question 6)

A review of the mean scores for this question revealed that participants scored highest for *'recommending the experience to a friend'* and then *'finding the experience personally enriching'* and for *'finding the experience professionally enriching'*. Scoring next highest were statements relating to the experience *'developing knowledge'* and being *'now more focussed on achieving a high grade with my undergraduate degree'*. Other statements scoring high included the *'development of intercultural awareness'*, *'being able to adapt to new people and situations'* and *'the experience developing self-confidence'*. Areas with the lowest mean score included *'future study plans changing because of completing an international experience'* and *'finding the experience of being abroad disorientating'*. When reviewing the standard deviation (section 3.7.2) for this response it should be noted that this is <1 for all statements. More variation in responses was received for statements including *'the experience helping me to better focus on what I need to do to achieve my undergraduate degree'*; *'my future study plans have changed as a result of completing my international experience'*; *'my experience has helped me to better develop a clearer idea of my future career goal'*; *'I found the experience of being abroad disorientating'*; *'I am now more focussed on achieving a higher grade with my undergraduate degree'*.

Participants were asked to reflect on their international experience and indicate to what extent the factors of developing their career internationally and their interest in international affairs were important to them. Findings from this question are in table 4.1.5 below.

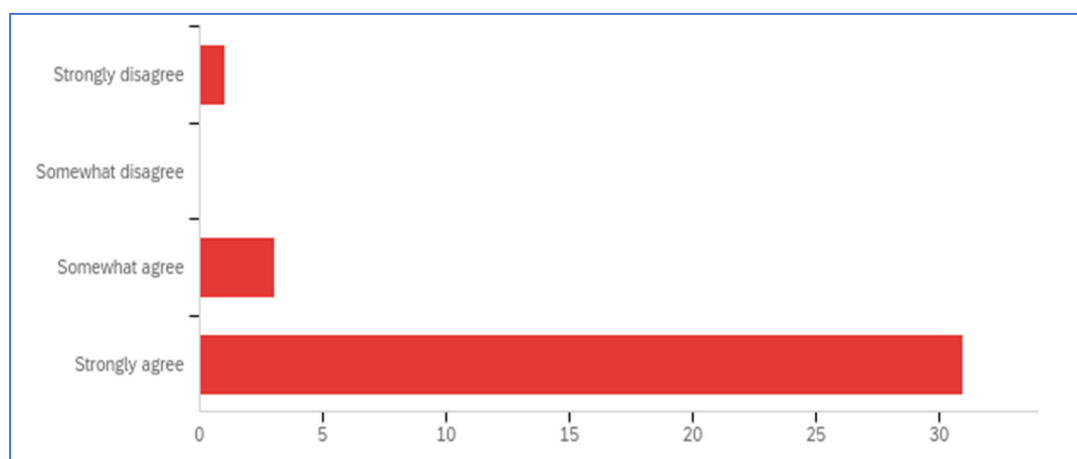
	Statement	Minimum (range rating from)	Maximum (range rating to)	Mean	Std Deviation
1	Developing my career internationally	1.00	10.00	6.94	2.66
2	My interest in international affairs	1.00	10.00	6.57	2.69

Table 4.1.5 Reflection on international experience against developing a career internationally and interest in international affairs.

This question had the highest standard deviation of any question, indicating that there was a large difference in the range of responses to each of the statements. A range of authors linked the development of employability skills to international experience (Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Crossman *et al.*, 2010; Ozek, 2009; Teichler *et al.*, 2001) and concluded from their study of quantitative and qualitative data a connection between international experience and graduate employability.

Participants were asked whether University A should provide opportunities for participation in organised international experience. Feedback from this question demonstrated that participants were in clear agreement, with 31 out of 35 respondents strongly agreeing, as evidenced in figure 4.1.2 below, that opportunities should be provided for undergraduate students to participate in an international experience at University A.

Participant statements



Count of participants (total of 35 responses)

Figure 4.1.2 Should University A promote opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in university organised international experience? (survey question 8)

Participants were asked *what could be done to support undergraduate students' participation in an international experience*. As recommended by Dawson (2009) (section 3.8.2) this open-ended question was included later in the questionnaire design. Use of a

qualitative style question supported the view of Wiersma *et al.* (2009) (section 3.8.2) as it explored interrelations and variables of how people felt. Overall, participants suggested that University A could do more. 16 participants responded to this question. Participant comments were, broadly, situated within two categories: -

Advertising

- More advertising and group presentations to undergraduate students for international experience opportunities
- Publicising financial support more widely
- Extending the range of financial support available to undergraduate students to subsidise the cost of international experience

Participants commented more fully about advertising. For example, one respondent stated University A should:

“explain funding better, especially the student experience fund. Many students don’t know it exists and have missed out on the opportunity, whereas others that knew about it, were able to have multiple trips funded, which seems unfair”.

A further respondent offered a suggestion for improving the promotion of international experience, commenting:

“advertise more and let undergraduates talk to alumni who have gone on trips like this, and [how] they have influenced or encouraged those alumni to take the decision they did to get to where they are now”

and:

“advertise them more, make the process of how to apply clearer and reassure students the experiences won’t get in the way of other studies”.

Another respondent stated:

“give us a greater amount of information and provide more opportunities to visit different countries and see how they work at a university level”.

Developing experiences

- Building international experience into programmes of study
- Offering international experience that does not coincide with assignment or examination periods
- Creating a greater number of university organised experiences

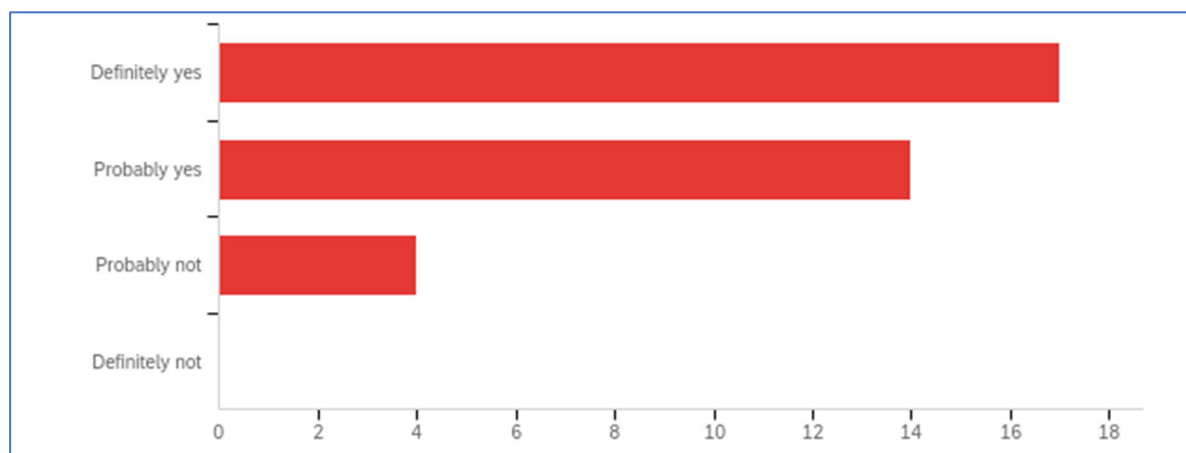
Other responses were more limited, for example:

“promote it more to raise awareness” and “make it cheaper”.

Whilst authors (Aamaas *et al.*, 2019; Baty, 2009; Gerhards *et al.*, 2018) discussed the internationalisation of higher education and the importance of international placement opportunities to universities, they did not mention how higher education institutions should introduce and promote such opportunities to their students.

Participants were asked *if there was anything University A could do to support undergraduate students to participate in an international experience?* Responses to this question, confirmed most participants (31 participants replied definitely or probably ‘yes’ out of 35 responses) considered there is more University A could do, as shown in the figure 4.1.3 on the following page.

Participant statements



Count of participants (total of 35 responses)

Figure 4.1.3 Is there anything the university could do to support undergraduate students to participate in an international experience? (survey question 9)

Participants were provided with a list of concerns drawn from themes of concerns emerging from the literature, which suggested that these factors were a cause of prevention for participation in an international experience. Concerns included language skills Cleak *et al.* (2016); Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013); Sweeney (2012); finance Cleak *et al.* (2016); Naffziger *et al.* (2017); Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013); Sweeney (2012); organisation of the experience Petzold *et al.* (2018); health and safety Cleak *et al.* (2016); travel arrangements Cleak *et al.* (2016); own well-being Naffziger *et al.* (2017), Petzold *et al.* (2018); accommodation Cleak *et al.* (2016); Sweeney (2012); friendships/relationships whilst away Sweeney (2012); distance from home and isolation Fox (2017); lack of support from the university Fowlie *et al.* (2018); problems with setting up a placement/work experience Cleak *et al.* (2016); supervision of my placement by the university Chinnappan *et al.* (2013); Cleak *et al.* (2016); Cranston *et al.* (2020); Crossman *et al.* (2010); Jones *et al.* (2018); Space was also provided for participants to add concerns of their own which were not already listed. Participants were asked to drag and drop each concern to one of four boxes, categorised as '*not something I was concerned about*'; '*I had some concern*'; '*I was extremely concerned*'; '*not applicable for my international experience*'.

Responses are provided below in figure 4.1.4, showing the relevant key:-

The total number of participant responses for this group of questions is 35.

- Not something I was concerned about
- I had some concern
- I was extremely concerned
- Items in this box were not applicable for my international experience

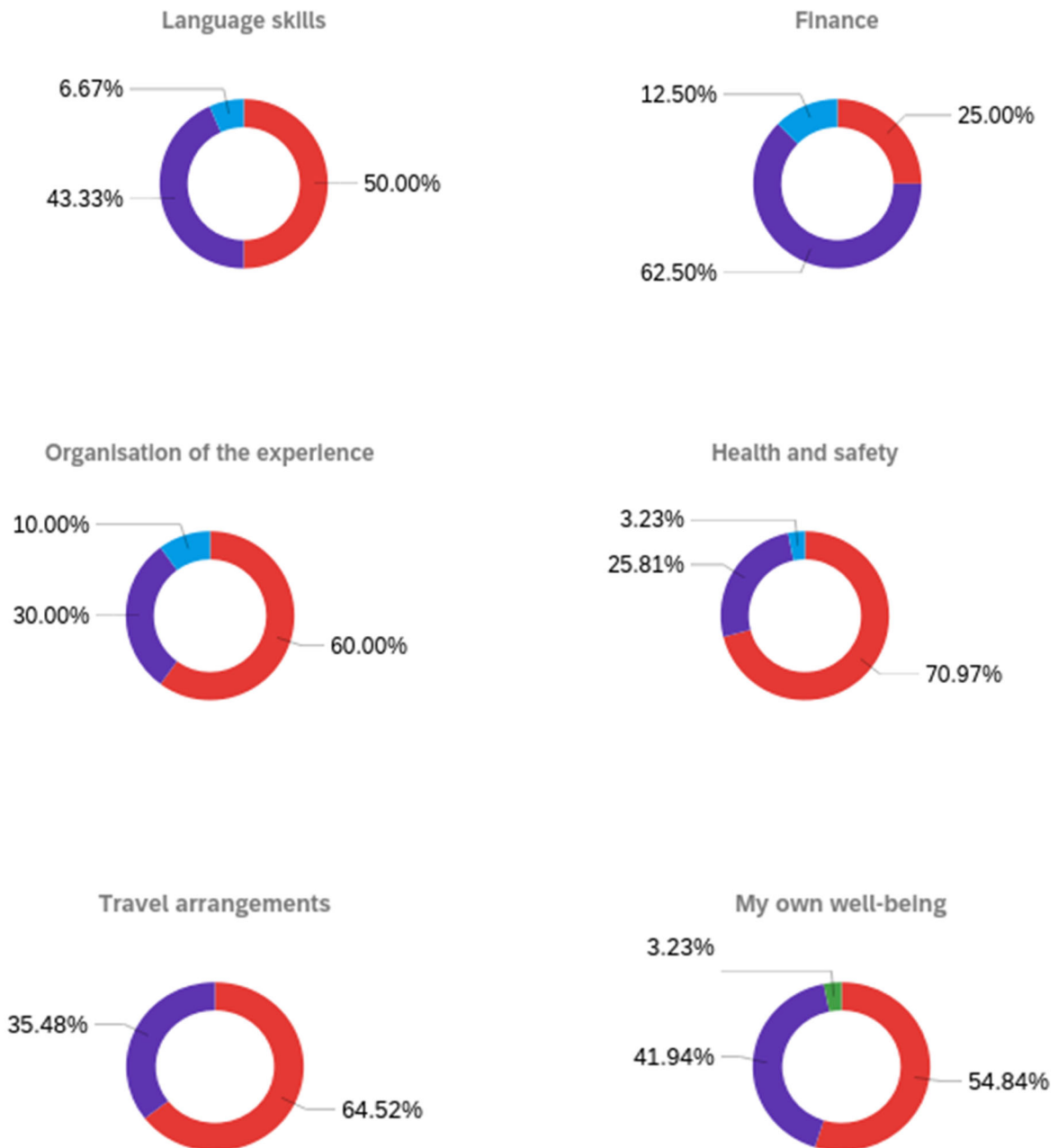




Figure 4.1.4 Concerns by type (survey question 10)

Figure 4.1.4 identifies areas of the greatest concern for participants, for example, finance (75% some concern or extremely concerned), language skills (50% some concern or extremely concerned), problems with setting up a placement or work-experience (43.3% some concern or extremely concerned), own well-being (41.9% some concern or extremely concerned) and organisation of the experience (40% some concern or extremely concerned). Areas of least concern are friendships and relationships whilst away (77.4%

not a concern), lack of support from the university (73.3% not a concern), health and safety (70.9% not a concern), distance from home and isolation (67.7% not a concern) and accommodation (67.7% not a concern). These findings correlated with the work of Cleak et al (2016) and Souto-Otero et al (2013) who reported that finance was an issue for students when considering an international placement. Sweeney (2012) considered that financial considerations and language concerns were personal barriers to student participation in an international experience. Analysis and discussion of participants concerns by type are later in Chapter 5. Specific sections include provision of a range of support (section 5.10), spending time in another culture (section 5.14), financial support (section 5.15), language as a barrier (section 5.16), organisation of the experience (section 5.17), health and safety issues (section 5.18), own well-being (section 5.19), friendship ties and travel arrangements (section 5.20), accommodation (section 5.21), format of the international experience and placement set up (section 5.23), supervision of international experience placements (section 5.24) and preparation for international experience (section 5.25).

Participants' mean, scored University A 3.06 out of 4 for preparation of the international experience, as shown in Figure 4.1.5 below. The total number of participants responses for this question is 35.

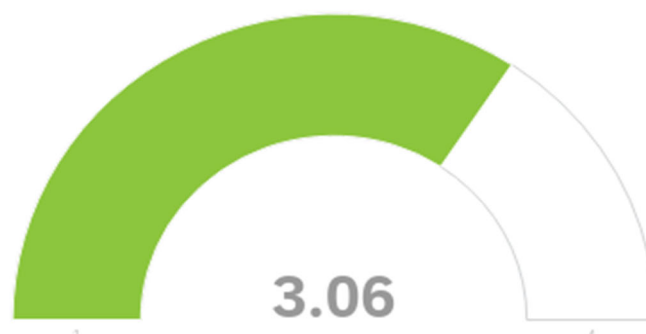


Figure 4.1.5 Extent to which the university prepares students for their international experience – out of a total score of 4 (survey question 11)

When asked for further comments about their international experience, 7 participants responded, stating:

"It was genuinely incredible and only served to make me want to go on more international experiences",

"Great opportunity, amazing experience that opens more perspectives"

and

"I really enjoyed it; we had freedom and were able to explore and discover things for our self".

However, some participants commented "not what I expected, seemed unorganised" and "it didn't deliver as much as I had expected".

When asked a question about *what more University A could have done to prepare its students for their international experience?* 7 participants responded to this question with one respondent stating "honestly, nothing as it was well planned and put together".

Suggestions for improvement included:

"had a few more meetings just to ensure we were all aware of what we were doing etc. we had one meeting, which I couldn't attend and a few emails but that was it",

"Probably a few more Japanese lessons before we left!"

and "more information about the area".

One respondent was particularly critical of University A's administration arrangements and stated:

"All the paperwork at my sending University was a nightmare (the responsible people were on a mental health break without giving anyone else the authorisation to sign the contracts). There should have been a substitute person. We were also not very well informed on deadlines and forms we needed to hand in, a simple bullet point list with dates would have been nice".

Several authors cited the need to prepare students adequately for their period of international experience. Chinnappan *et al.* (2013), Cleak *et al.* (2016) and Spooner-Lane *et al.* (2009) confirmed the importance of providing pre-departure support for students. Campbell and Walta (2015) noted from their study findings, that most pre-departure briefings provided for students, tended to focus on the logistics of a visit. However,

Campbell and Walta (2015) concluded that the most effective pre-departure support focussed on developing students' cultural awareness, specifically reflecting on one's own culture and identifying the challenges associated with cultural adjustment. Dunlap *et al.* (2017) agreed with Campbell and Walta (2015) recommending the provision of pre-departure briefings to improve students' cultural adaptability.

4.2 Findings from the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions

The findings for this research study were drawn from a quantitative survey (section 3.7.2) and a qualitative study (section 3.7.3) using a focus group. Qualitative research was generated from semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions designed following the advice provided by Dawson (2009) and Menter (2011). To support data analysis the focus group was designed to use semi-structured open-ended questions with the recording transcribed to aid data analysis. As Cohen *et al.* (1995) and Lambert (2019) advised, a process of coding (Appendix 5) has been completed (section 3.7.3 and Appendix 5) and to support the development of clearly articulated findings from this part of the research (Appendix 5).

The researcher for this research study has undertaken analysis of the focus group with semi-structured open-ended questions (section 3.8.1). The recording has been transcribed and participants' responses coded into similar categories (section 3.7.3). This summary presents the concepts discussed during the focus group discussion, documenting the process of conversation and the development of participants' thought processes.

Focus group discussion started with questions about how the participants had *developed an awareness of opportunities to undertake an international experience*. The question introduced participants to the discussion topic and aimed to make them feel more comfortable sharing their opinions. Overwhelmingly participants became aware and identified with international opportunities, because of a presentation made by key members of University A staff during one of their course lectures, with one participant commenting:

(Respondent 4) "I remember people coming to our lab sessions and telling us about different types of opportunities that were available".

A further participant (*Respondent 2*) commented that they had become aware of opportunities during 'welcome week' for their course and two participants noted that they had received information by e-mail in addition to University A staff visiting their lectures. Only one participant recalled information being provided by their peers, stating:

(Respondent 3) "I want to say it was from other students, there were students from years above me and I got it from them because it was their peers that had done it".

This early discussion developed with the group talking about the reaction of other members of their classes when informed of potential opportunities with one participant commented:

(Respondent 9) "I heard a lot of other students talking about them [opportunities] and we were all interested in joining, meeting different people and meeting people from different cultures".

Noted earlier, with reporting of survey findings it was evident that whilst there was much discussion by authors concerning the internationalisation of higher education (Kreber, 2009; Morley *et al.*, 2018; Svensson *et al.*, 2010; Uzhegova *et al.*, 2020; Wit, 2020) and also the concept of globalisation (Reich, 1998; Spring, 2008; Svensson *et al.*, 2010), there was a gap in the literature identifying and discussing how higher education students should be made aware of international experiences available to them and in discussing how HEIs, should promote and introduce their students to the benefit of an international experience.

Discussion continued with participants commenting about their perceived benefits of participating in an international experience. Again, this question received a high number of coding references, scoring joint second highest. A wide range of benefits were identified by participants including work experience and gaining practical experience; informing future career pathways; enhancing future employment prospects; meeting other professionals; seeing different things and meeting people from another culture. One participant was very specific, explaining that they had chosen their international experience because the university abroad offered a speciality in cancer research and this participant wanted work experience in this area, with this participant stating:

(Respondent 6) "see how things work and hopefully I might make a connection"

with the same participant later commenting:

(Respondent 6) "I made some links"

Several authors discussed the benefits of international experience including Attrill *et al.* (2019) who identified the sharing of intercultural knowledge, Bagnasco *et al.* (2020) who noted the development of abilities and confidence and Martel (2020) who also noted the development of competencies along with the employability skills of flexibility, adaptability, understanding and listening.

Participants were asked about their awareness of the range of types of international experience available to them at University A. It was clear during this part of the focus group discussion that participants acknowledged they had received information from University A staff about some types of experience, during visits to their lectures, with one participant explaining that the opportunities discussed:

(Respondent 9) "[were] appealing to me",

However, as is evident from the discussion that participants did not have a broad awareness of the full range and types of international experience offered by University A. Consequentially, coding references (Appendix 5) for this area were second lowest. When discussing the ERASMUS programme, which the UK was a member of during the participants' time undertaking their international experience, participants commented positively, for example:

(Respondent 1) "I felt that if I was to participate in the ERASMUS programme there would be an exposure to a cultural way of life and this would also be an opportunity for me to learn a language whilst being on the programme".

This participant continued to describe in detail the point when their interest in the potential of ERASMUS peaked, stating:

(Respondent 1) "when we got to Turkey and we got to check the hospitals out and how the labs were working, that's when I gained the most interest about what ERASMUS was about and how I could participate in it".

Participants were asked about any preparation they may have undertaken before travelling. One participant commented:

(Respondent 2) "I tried to brush up on my Spanish skills, but to be fair it didn't go very well, so I gave up pretty quick".

another participant described how they had relied solely on details supplied by University A, commenting:

(Respondent 7) "I just went off what the university told us because the schedule was so jam packed and full"

Another participant *(Respondent 4)* described how they had spoken to a member of staff at University A to gain further information to help them to prepare for their international experience.

Several authors discussed the benefit of preparation including Lough (2009) who identified a preparation requirement to correctly set student expectations for their international experience. Fox (2017) agreed with Lough (2009) in noting a requirement for preparation to minimise potential issues. Wake *et al.* (2017) discussed their findings that few students received appropriate preparation for international experience. This view was shared by Conroy *et al.* (2019) and Dunlap *et al.* (2017) who both identified a lack of support for students during their preparation for international experience. Maginnis *et al.* (2017) suggested a requirement for academic staff could be to offer support for students with their preparation for international experience including input on cultural differences.

The focus group was asked about any concerns they may have had when considering participation in an international experience. An analysis of coding for this area (Appendix 5) demonstrated a stronger response by participants who offered a wide variance with their range of answers. For example, one respondent confirmed they had no concerns, commenting:

(Respondent 2) "it sounds really selfish, but I didn't have any concerns because the majority of countries that you go to are English speaking".

Other participants offered a small range of concerns including *(Respondent 9)* being able to go out into the local area alone, *(Respondent 8)* a self-consciousness about travelling alone and *(Respondent 3)* being worried about sharing facilities with others who they did not know. The conversation developed during this part of the focus group discussion when participants were prompted by the researcher for this research study, with a range of factors drawn from the literature, which suggested that each factor was perceived as a barrier to participation for some students. Some participants *(Participants 2 and 4)* described

concerns they had experienced because of the timing of their international experience with one commenting that because their planned international experience was towards the end of a semester:

(Respondent 2) "when work was due in and [because of this] some students missed out on some of the lecture time and had deadlines due while they were away and were, therefore, having to complete work while they were away, which was quite difficult for them".

A further participant elaborated on the same issue stating:

(Respondent 4) "I travelled during the end of January when I had two assignments that were due in, so I was doing work during the evening and with being at the international university all day, it was very packed with work that we had to do".

The concerns raised by focus group participants in this research study were also discussed within the literature, for example, geographical differences Fox (2017), diffidence (e.g. levels of confidence); lack of confidence in language skills; friendships, relationships and language concerns; financial considerations; housing considerations; the need for information to be provided early enough for students to consider and act upon (Sweeney *et al.*, 2012).

Several authors (Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Naffziger *et al.*, 2017; Souto-Otero *et al.*, 2013; Sweeney, 2012) identified finance as a concern for students and a possible barrier to their participation in an international experience. However, many participants stated that finance was not a major consideration for them. Comments received from participants for this prompt included:

(Respondent 4) "finance was not that big an issue because it was subsidised",

(Respondent 5) "finance was not really a problem for me – it was not a barrier to me"

(Respondent 8) "for me finance was not an issue as I have savings"

and:

(Respondent 9) "it wasn't too much of a barrier".

Other participants identified some concern with finance stating:

(Respondent 7) "I thought they were really good opportunities, but they were quite expensive"

When reflecting on language as a potential barrier to participation, focus group participants were unanimous that this had not been a barrier for them stating:

(Respondent 1) "for me Turkey was great, because they all spoke English"

and:

(Respondent 3) "language was not an issue at all, in Barcelona everyone spoke English".

Further probing and asking participants to consider how they felt before their experience, rather than afterwards revealed that some members of the group had considered potential language barriers and undertaken some preparation. For example, one participant stated

(Respondent 4) "I did look at how to say, hello and thank-you in Dutch but when I was at the university the majority of lecturers spoke English"

and another quoted:

(Respondent 9) "I was concerned about being slightly embarrassed in some situations because I did not speak the language".

As previously noted, another participant considered enhancing their Spanish language skills and another stated:

(Respondent 8) "I don't know how to speak Turkish, but I was ok with that and willing to study it, it wasn't like a big issue and I learned a bit of the language".

Although not a formal part of the questioning, during conversation focus group participants, acknowledged surprise at how widely English language was spoken at international universities they had visited and at the availability of English language delivered modules with one participant commenting:

(Respondent 7) "yea, the whole course was taught in English".

Accommodation, travel and friendships and relationships whilst away were discussed by participants but were not perceived as potential barriers to participation in an international experience. Comments relating to this area include:

(Respondent 8) "I have been away a couple of times, so it was ok" and "no concerns".

Discussing keeping in touch with others at home, one participant stated that this was not an issue as the time difference in mainland Europe was only one hour ahead of the UK.

Another participant noted that they enjoyed time away from home, stating that:

(Respondent 2) "to be honest, one of the reasons I went was to get out of touch with people!"

Participants described their general feelings about their international experience before departure as:

(Respondent 2) "I was excited"

(Respondent 4) "I was initially excited and it was about wanting to experience what it would be like at another university in another country. It is interesting to see the way my course is taught over there"

(Respondent 3) "initially I was very excited, the second I heard about it I wanted to go"

(Respondent 9) "my first thoughts were that it was really exciting and different and I was excited"

Previously noted within this chapter, a wide range of authors (Chinnappan *et al.*, 2013; Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Fowlie *et al.*, 2018; Kent-Wilson *et al.*, 2015; Souto-Otero *et al.*, 2013; Sweeney, 2012) identified and discussed potential barriers to student participation in an international experience.

After completion of travel, reflecting on their experience, focus group participants cited:

(Respondent 2) "definitely, it was a really enjoyable experience and it was really useful"

(Respondent 3) "it was so eye-opening and it has informed the path that I want to take in my career"

(Respondent 8) "we all couldn't wait for there to be another opportunity to go on another one"

(Respondent 9) "it would have been a big regret for me if I had not gone to Barcelona"

When discussing the impact and perceived benefits of undertaking an international experience, participants' responses tended to be in one of two coding categories. Firstly, linked to career pathways, for example:

(Respondent 2) "going and experiencing it has made it more real and made me realise that it's a bit more accessible than I originally thought".

Secondly, for others conversation focussed more on their potential degree level qualification, linked to career ambition, for example:

(Respondent 4) "it's made me think that there is so much more outside of the UK, there are so many more opportunities that are available across the world and to be able to go and experience that and speak to other people about the different things that they have to offer has made me want to work harder with my degree so that if I want to in the future, I would be able to go abroad"

Discussing the wider student experience and impact of an international experience, Teichler *et al.* (2001) identified that students who completed an international experience were more likely to consider employment abroad. Data from the Combined Evaluation of ERASMUS and Predecessor Programmes (2017) indicated that 86% of participants considered that the ERASMUS programme developed the skills and competencies of participating students. The ERASMUS and Higher Education Impact Study (2019) noted how ERASMUS students frequently changed their study plans and career goals after their time abroad. Cranston *et al.* (2020) identified a link between outward student mobility and employment in a global labour market.

Discussing *ways in which University A may choose to improve undergraduate student participation in international experience*, suggestions from focus group participants included:

(Respondent 6) "widening out advice to make study abroad appealing",

(Respondent 9) “providing information on the way of living abroad and how to stay safe abroad”

and encouraging more students who have already undertaken an international experience to present the experience to their peers.

Baroutsis *et al.* (2016) noted the importance of respecting the student voice, as a method for enhancing active participation which Baroutsis *et al.* (2016) identified as fundamental for the development of students. However, it is important to acknowledge participants in this research study provided suggestions and opinions through a participant’s personal lens and without a working knowledge of higher education. As McLeod (2011 p. 186) noted, there are many advantages to including the student voice, however “an exclusive focus on listening had the potential for as many pitfalls as problems”.

4.3 Findings from field notes

Field notes by the researcher during the act of conducting this research study are evidenced to support meaning and understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. (section 3.8.4) Field notes intend to supplement conventionally collected quantitative and qualitative data collection methods used for this research study. Field notes are categorised in the following areas and record that: -

Short visits

- University A students participated in short University A organised visits to other Higher Education Institutions based in Finland, Turkey, The Netherlands and Spain.
- Discussion with the University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator and Placements Administrator confirmed that some students who had participated in a University A organised short experience returned for ERASMUS Traineeship (work-experience) placements during the summer period of the same academic year where they had undertaken a short-experience. Spain – 5 students. Turkey – 3 students.
- University A Procurement Manager confirmed that only authorised educational travel agents may be used for booking student group visits abroad (flights and accommodation). Suppliers used by University A must meet threshold standards,

which included health and safety checks on accommodation used abroad and financial protection in case a supplier became insolvent.

Funding

- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator, Placements Administrator and researcher for this research study were aware that some participants of this research study undertaking work-experience abroad, received funding support from the ERASMUS programme.
- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed that staff had predominantly promoted opportunities connected with the ERASMUS programme, which the University A was a member of until the end of the UK programme during May 2022. The Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) had been promoted since its launch at the start of the 2021/2022 academic year. University A was successful with its bid to join the Turing Scheme.
- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed that most students participating in ERASMUS funded activities received uplift disadvantaged funding
- The researcher for this research study was aware that University A students were required to contribute towards the cost of University A organised short experiences to Finland, Turkey, The Netherlands and Spain
- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator and Placements Administrator confirmed that ERASMUS funding did not cover the full cost of study abroad or work experience abroad and was only intended as a contribution towards total costs associated with travel
- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator, Placement Administrator and researcher for this research study confirmed that some students undertaking international experiences were able to access additional funding from a University A Student Experience Fund. This fund was not connected with ERASMUS or Turing Scheme funding streams.

Support for students

- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed that pre-departure briefings were provided for students participating in short, organised group visits.
- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed that for students travelling outside the ERASMUS programme area, e.g. South Africa pre-departure briefings were held, which included discussion of Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice. Following travel, contact was made with students to confirm their safe arrival at intended destinations.

University A organisation

- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed that University A had inter-institutional agreements in place to facilitate outward and incoming student mobility for study, during the time this research was completed, as part of the ERASMUS programme.
- Although extending beyond this research study, it was recorded that the University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed, following launch of the UK Government Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) that University A was actively setting up new inter-institutional Agreements to facilitate student mobility financed by the Turing Scheme.
- As an employee for University A, the researcher for this study was aware that University A had launched a new strategic plan which incorporated an internationalisation strand with its staff during May 2022

Data

- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed the percentage of outward student mobility for University A undergraduate students was consistently below 1% during the time this research study was completed and for at least the three years prior.
- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed that University A had an internal target of 20% undergraduate engagement in an international experience.

- The University A, ERASMUS Co-ordinator confirmed a steady rise over time (excluding COVID-19 interrupted years, when country borders had been closed) in the number of students participating in an international experience.

Conference attendance

- As a European mobility conference delegate – Participant 1, member of staff from a UK Russell Group University (Russell Group (2024) described themselves as “24 world-class research-intensive universities”) commenting about how they were not able to make full use of their Turing Scheme budget allocation, as they were struggling to identify students who met the disadvantaged funding criteria.
- As a European mobility conference delegate – Participant 2, member of staff from a UK post 1992 university based in the East Midlands who discussed how their institution shared many similar challenges to University A, in terms of incentivising undergraduate students, many from disadvantaged and minority ethnic backgrounds, to participate in an international experience.
- As a European mobility conference delegate – Participant 3, member of staff from a Spanish University, who discussed how they managed over 500 outward mobilities annually with a small team of staff and therefore, could not provide an individualised level of pre-departure support for participants.

Chapter 4 presented findings from the quantitative and qualitative research data and field notes, collected by the researcher for this research study. The following chapter (Chapter 5) discusses and analyses these findings within the context of the research question *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?*

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Firstly, this chapter presents several emergent, independent and inter-related themes drawn from the research findings (Chapter 4), linking each theme with relevant authors' writing in this area, as these emergent themes are significant features of this study. Secondly, critical reflection and synthesis of findings takes place with connections made between the different elements of this research study and literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter interprets and describes the significance of the findings and explores new understanding and insights that emerge following the research.

Acknowledging the importance of presenting data accurately and clearly, Wiersma *et al.* (2009 p. 245) state that "data consists of scores, frequencies, or some type of responses in the form of numbers. They usually have quantitative meaning of some sort and the usual approach is to perform an appropriate type of statistical analysis." Taking account of advice by authors (Anderson, 2010; Wiersma *et al.*, 2009) the analysis for this research study begins by looking at the quantitative findings from the questionnaire, which uses tables and graphics with descriptive statistics (section 4.1), before discussing any related responses to the semi-structured open-ended questions from the focus group (section 4.2).

This research employs inductive reasoning using a process of analysis and discussion to generate meanings from the data set collected, learning from the experiences of the research participants, who have experienced the phenomena investigated themselves. The process of analysis takes each of the research questions in turn, introducing emergent themes and where relevant, makes links with literature to derive ultimate insights and present accurate and reliable data. The poster below (figure 5.1.1), provides an overview of findings analysed in this chapter, forming part of a formal presentation made by the researcher for this research study, as a delegate, at a European mobility conference during March 2020. The poster (figure 5.1.1) visualises findings from this research study including perceived benefits to participation in an international experience and the need to offer such experiences and acknowledges potential barriers to participation.

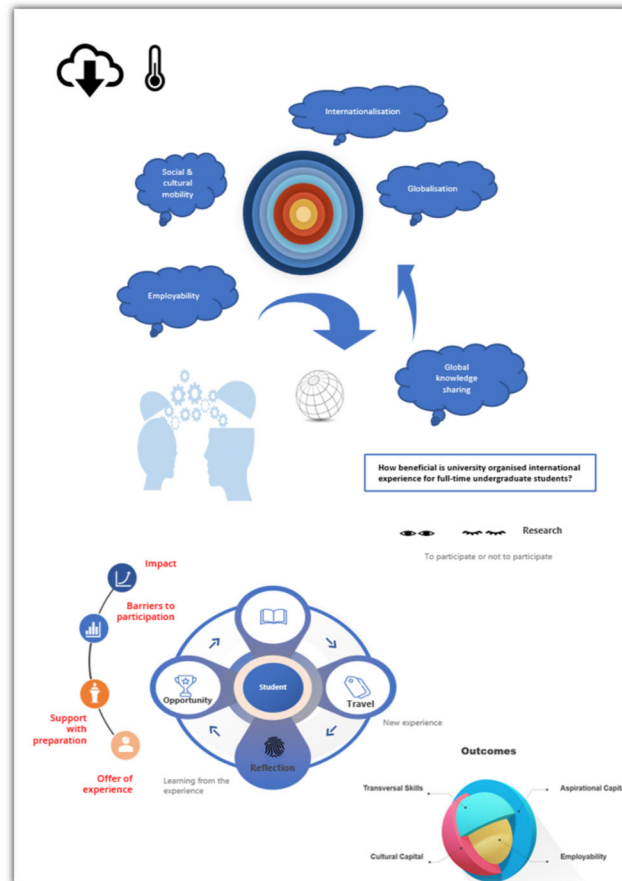


Figure 5.1.1 Research poster forming part of a presentation made at a European mobility conference, March 2022

This analytical section explores the quantitative and qualitative responses from the research participants, within the Findings Chapter (Chapter 4) and in this chapter (Chapter 5) The notion of cultural capital is a theme that emerges from the findings (Chapter 4) and is important to this research study given the social and economic context of University A (section 1.3) and the demographic profile of the University A intake. Findings show a close link from cultural capital to the development of aspirational capital (section 2.7.2) a connection, which the available literature rarely discusses, particularly in the context of undergraduates.

5.2 Emerging themes

This research study identifies several emergent independent and inter-related themes when examining the question, *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?* These themes are:

- Development of cultural and aspirational capital – emerging from questionnaire and focus group findings (section 4.1, table 4.1.5 and 4.1.2) where participants reflect on learning from participation in an international experience. Also discussed in existing literature (Bourdieu, 1973; Cincinnato *et al.*, 2016; Gripsrud *et al.*, 2011; Vryonides, 2007; Yosso, 2005)
- Enhancement of employability as a benefit of participation in an international experience – emerging from questionnaire and focus group participants' reflections of international experience (section 4.1, table 4.1.4 and section 4.2). Also discussed in existing literature including (Basit, 2012; Brooks *et al.*, 2016; Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Ozek, 2009; Straubhaar, 2013; Teichler *et al.*, 2001)
- Development of global mindedness – emerging from focus group discussion (section 4.2) and discussed in existing literature (Akkari, 2019; Ciu, 2016; McGladdery *et al.*, 2017; Perry, 2013; Rhodas, 2011)
- Support for undergraduates participating in an international experience – emerging from questionnaire findings (section 4.1, figure 4.1.3 and figure 4.1.4) and focus group findings (section 4.2) and discussed in existing literature (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009; Maginnis *et al.*, 2017; Petzold *et al.*, 2018),

The emerging themes from this research study are now taken in turn and discussed in greater detail.

5.2.1 Development of cultural and aspirational capital

From the analysis a theme of cultural capital develops, as Bourdieu (1973) and Sullivan (2001) identify (section 5.5). Sullivan (2001 p. 893) notes how "the possession of cultural capital varies with social class, yet the education system assumes the possession of cultural capital". Given the socio-economic setting and intake profile of University A, (section 1.3),

Prieur *et al.* (2013 p. 5) opine that “people who resemble each other in matters of both social position and cultural practices, tend to lump together in the same neighbourhoods, marrying each other, choosing the same schools for children etc”. Whilst some people are happy staying close to family and friends in closely knit social networks, others, may aspire to change personal lives in some way and desire to immerse in a different culture (section 5.3). University A has an important role in developing its undergraduates’ cultural capital and preventing social exclusion. In doing so, it is not possible to simply give someone additional cultural capital, however, it is possible to provide them with opportunities that will enable development of this cultural capital. University A exposes its undergraduates to a variety of opportunities to develop cultural capital. These do not necessarily include international travel, as there are other forms of cultural capital (social and cultural knowledge) that can be gained from a university experience. The interest of this research study is undergraduate student participation in international travel. Previously noted (section 5.6), University A aims to develop its undergraduates as global citizens, embedding cultural awareness into its curriculum. One way it does this is by introducing undergraduates to wider elements of HE, such as the potential to undertake an international experience as part of an undergraduate degree.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in a policy paper Regulation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (2019) introduces the notion of a Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR or Industry 4.0). This paper notes how technology is creating new industries with artificial intelligence and biotechnologies, at the forefront of a new industrial revolution. Brown (1995 p. 30) introduces the concept of social exclusion discussing a belief that “there will be an increasing polarisation in the fortunes of students from middle-class backgrounds” as HE seeks to fulfil demand for jobs requiring scientific and technical knowledge. Universities have an important role to play in providing the skills that employers demand, in particular, transversal skills, (section 2.2.1) (UNESCO, 2019). Levitas (2004 p. 49) expresses an opinion that the main cause of social exclusion is because “the poor/excluded have the wrong values and attitudes that they pass on to their children [who] fail therefore to acquire the appropriate skills and qualifications to succeed”. This adds an emphasis for University A to make available accessible educational opportunity, along with support mechanisms and benefits such as international experience, allowing undergraduates to develop cultural capital.

The profile intake of University A, (section 1.3) evidence that 45% of full-time students are from widening participation backgrounds. Therefore, whilst it is beneficial to widen access

to HE, which develops students' cultural capital, an international experience can further increase cultural capital. As previously argued (section 5.28), an international experience for undergraduates at University A is anything but "frivolous travel" (Topping 2021), indeed it is an important method for growing cultural and aspirational capital. This research study demonstrates that undergraduates at University A are not immediately aware of the possibilities to participate in a range of international experiences, due to a deficit of personal cultural capital, in part because many reside in an area which the Social Mobility Index (2021 p. 3) classify as an "entrenched social mobility cold spot", (section 1.3). Without University A introducing its undergraduates to international experiences, focus group findings (section 4.2) evidence engagement in an international experience would not have been possible for the participants in this research study. Participation in an international experience, whilst not a mandatory requirement for the award of an undergraduate degree at University A, the researcher for this research study perceives participation in an international experience as a hidden benefit of HE. The findings of this research study (section 4.1, table 4.1.4) evidence that participants report positive personal and professional enrichment; development of knowledge; development of self-confidence and in particular, development of intercultural awareness, hence the widening of participants' cultural capital, which several authors (Brooks *et al.*, 2016; Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Teichler *et al.*, 2001) attribute to participation in an international experience. There is a strong link here with the work of Zobotkina (2013 p. 59), discussed earlier in (section 5.12), who cites the importance of outward student mobility to the employability of graduates "in the context of the world economy". Zobotkina (2013 p. 60-63) discusses a belief that Higher Education and outward student mobility provide an opportunity for students to develop transferable skills "which are essential pre-requisites in the development of expertise" and which enhance a person's employability. Therefore, the development of these factors enhances cultural capital of the participants in this research study.

Cultural capital, as Vryonides (2007) notes, is intrinsically linked to economic and social capital, in that access to economic and social capital allows greater access to cultural capital. Cultural capital is an indicator of how well an individual can succeed academically and engage in wider society. Therefore it is important to take a holistic view of education and for undergraduates, to be able to access additional opportunities during time in education, to support improvement of personal cultural capital. Yosso (2005) identifies navigational capital (section 2.7.2) as an important factor in a person's ability to manoeuvre through systems and institutions that historically are not designed for them. This research study

evidences how the participants of this research choose to undertake an international experience during time at University A, although originally unaware of the opportunity to participate, until after the point of enrolment. It is only because of the promotion and support from University A staff, after enrolment, that participants become aware of the possibility to engage with an international experience during time at University A. Participation in an international experience enables participants of this research study to realise positive benefits in terms of development of cultural capital, leading to aspirational capital; enhancement of employability; development of global mindedness.

5.2.2 Aspirational capital

This research study, investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, evidence how the aspirational capital of the research study participants, (section 2.7.2) improves through delivery of a clearer focus on participants' career and future employability plans, by participation in an international experience. Participants' international experiences are available as part of an undergraduate educational experience, as Straubhaar (2013) discusses it is this experience that is providing the enhancement of aspirational capital. Basit (2012), notes this gain in aspirational experience acts as a substitute for a deficiency in participants' cultural and social capital. Basit (2012) suggests that where an individual may have a deficiency in personal cultural and social capital then this limits aspirations, for example, holding back career ambitions. This research study agrees with Yosso (2005) and argues that aspirational capital overlaps with other forms of capital and is not mutually exclusive. For some, cultural capital handed down from parents may mean such participants have the skills and experience to succeed in education and chosen careers. This group of participants may not require the development of aspirational capital, because participants possess the skills and knowledge to know what to do to succeed. However, for others who do not have high levels of cultural capital handed down from families (Bourdieu 1973), there is a far greater opportunity to develop personal aspirational capital through participation in an international experience and in doing so, hopes and dreams for educational achievement and later future careers may materialise. This research study demonstrates through participation in an international experience, undergraduates at University A can widen inter-cultural awareness and personal aspirational capital, that introduces a range of career pathways and professional connections which previously, participants were not aware, as table 4.1.4 illustrates. Hence, a rise in personal

aspirational capital as participants focus more on attributes that relate to employability, following participation in an international experience, evidenced in section 4.1, table 4.1.4 and discussed in section 5.5 of this chapter.

This research study recognises that currently only limited literature is available discussing the development of aspirational capital, which exclusively focusses on the experiences of minority groups within educational settings, therefore, there are only limited points of reference available. The researcher for this research study has not found it possible to identify any existing literature focussing solely on the development of aspirational capital within a higher education context. This research study, investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, adds to the body of knowledge of aspirational capital.

5.2.3 Enhancement of employability as a perceived benefit of participation in an international experience

A third emerging theme for this research study investigating *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, is the change in benefits for the participants undertaking an international experience, from a dominance of immersing oneself in a different culture before participation, to a clearer focus on career and employability benefits following participation. When participants reflect on an international experience, following travel, the survey participants are more positive about statements relating to employability (section 4.1, table 4.1.4). Nearly half of survey participants indicate that there is now a change to future study plans. (section 4.1, table 4.1.4). This compares well with data that the ERASMUS Higher Education Impact Study (2019) present, noting that students frequently amend study plans following time abroad, as personal career goals become clearer. Focus group participants discuss in depth how international experience impacts on personal career ambitions (section 4.2). This shift in the significance of the employability strands of the international experience is more significant for some participants than others, as the focus group discussion evidence (section 4.2). For three quarters of the participants (table 4.1.4), an international experience impacts positively in terms of developing minds and thinking about future careers and employability, thereby enhancing aspirational capital (section 5.2.2).

This research study finds similarities with Sweeney *et al.* (2012 p. 21) and the British Council YouGov survey, which also focus on students, noting how many participants (78%) state that international perspectives and open-mindedness are important. This research study argues that participation in an international experience also enhances some aspects of participants' transversal skills, particularly the development of interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills and global citizenship and as Lopez *et al.* (2020 p. 2) also note an international experience develops skills to "prepare students for functioning well in society and the workplace". Without this opportunity for an international experience, this change in aspirational capital towards developing a clearer idea of future career goals may not occur. The researcher for this research study argues that the international experience reveals new horizons for the participants of this research study, in terms of personal career ambitions (table 4.1.4 and section 4.2). Providing good jobs and career opportunities in the areas where people live, is central to the UK Government's levelling up ambition. The UK Government commits to policy interventions to improve opportunities in all regions of the UK. The launch of the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) by the UK Government demonstrates that this scheme is specifically of a global nature and provides additional financial support for disadvantaged groups.

The UK Government promotes the Turing Scheme as evidence of its desire to level up opportunities for young people, enabling more disadvantaged students to participate in an international experience. As such, this research study views the Turing Scheme as an important opportunity for University A to increase the percentage of its undergraduates participating in an international experience. Cranston *et al.* (2020 p. 146) note how "young people are encouraged to engage in ventures to increase their employability under the mantra of self-improvement, where some experiences are perceived as higher value than others". Focussing on international work placements, Cranston *et al.* (2020 p. 146) state that such placements have "the potential to perpetuate inequality, as select individuals are able to translate the cultural capital conferred by working overseas into advantages at the expense of others". Cranston *et al.* (2020 p. 146) recommend further research to explore how international work placements may reproduce these inequalities. This research study demonstrates how University A participants, following participation in an international experience, highly value the employability aspects of this experience (section 4.1, table 4.1.4). Enhancing employability through participation in an international experience, is in turn supporting a greater awareness of the world and in particular, career opportunities abroad. This could be seen to support the development of global mindedness and global

citizenship and is an aim of many universities (section 1.4.2 and 1.4.3). This research study evidences how the minds of participants are open to a range of career pathways abroad, as focus group discussions (section 4.2) and field notes (section 4.3) imply. The researcher for this research study advocates that the international experience acts as a method for the enhancement of employability and development of global citizenship (section 4.1 table 4.1.4).

5.2.4 Development of global mindedness

This research study opines that there is a connection between the encouragement and support that University A provides for its undergraduates, to participate in an international experience and the outcomes or benefits this experience provides. An international experience opens participants' minds to future career possibilities in a global context (section 4.1, table 4.1.4 and section 4.2, also discussed in section 5.6 and 5.12) and links to the strategic aims of University A (section 5.26), for example, developing entrepreneurs and graduates with employability skills to compete in global environments, transcending traditional career boundaries. Zobotkina (2013) implies, there is a link between participation in an international experience and employability and an expectation that graduates will make use of skills in an international context. This development of student thinking is most evident from the focus group discussion (section 4.2) when participants mention meeting other professionals, observing that there is "much more outside the UK" and note worldwide opportunities. Previously discussed (section 5.3), participants are not always aware of international career opportunities before participation in an international experience and this connects to development of aspirational capital. It is apparent that University A recognises the importance of introducing its undergraduates to opportunities outside the UK. By providing international experiences University A is facilitating a greater local awareness, enabling the development of understanding and building cultural relations that Mayo *et al.* (2018) cite. Whilst undergraduates may not necessarily pursue personal careers abroad, this knowledge, as Mayo *et al.* (2018) and Perry (2013) note, will better support undergraduates in managing future personal lives in an interconnected world.

Whilst some benefits are almost tangible, for example, benefits relating to employability or future career development and aspiration, other, softer benefits are reported by study participants. For example, improving ability to adapt to new people and situations and

improving inter-cultural awareness (section 4.1, Table 4.1.4). The concept of edu-tourism has already been discussed with reference to Eluwole *et al.* (2020) and McGladdery *et al.* (2017) (section 1.4.2). McGladdery *et al.* (2017 p. 294) state a belief that through the process of participation in outward mobility, students become “aware of the interconnectedness of people and the environment that transcends local and national boundaries, and which ultimately results in a change in behaviour to one that is more mindful of those relationships”, developing the softer skills reported by participants of University A in this research study. Mc Gladdery *et al.* (2017 p. 292) continue to note how “personality traits that include curiosity, altruism and being open minded to new experiences” are predictors of global learning. Mc McGladdery *et al.* (2017) agree with Ciu (2016) that to develop global mindedness it is necessary for students to travel abroad. However, this is in direct contrast to the view of Nigel Topping (2021), UK High-Level Climate Action Champion, who suggests that educational travel may not always be necessary and is sometimes (in the words of Nigel Topping) “frivolous” (section 5.28). Noted earlier in this chapter (section 5.8), travelling to a different country may not be perceived by some as being outside a personal comfort zone, however, it is important to remember the context and social setting of University A (section 1.3). Focus group participants (section 4.2) confirm they are keen to experience another culture, which Mc McGladdery *et al.* (2017) identifies as fundamental to the development of global-mindedness, and some participants understand that this represents being outside a traditional comfort zone. Further noting the employability benefits of international experience, Cranston *et al.* (2020 p. 146) describe how students who undertake work placement abroad can “demonstrate a ‘global mindset’” which is often “assessed by many students as being at the ‘top’ of a hierarchy of experience”. University A recognises a desire to support its undergraduates as global citizens (section 5.26.2). Field notes (section 4.3) reveal that University A has a target of 20% undergraduate participation in an international experience and evidently views participation in an international experience as a method by which its undergraduates can become global citizens, enabling undergraduates to put a degree into a wider global context. The launch of the Turing Scheme by the UK Government (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) heralds a change in support for international study and work experience, with the scheme being truly global and for example, by offering financial support for short-term four-week higher education international experiences, which were not previously available, through the scheme’s predecessor, the ERASMUS programme. This short period of an exchange, with finance support is to ensure students with

responsibilities, who may not take part in a longer period of exchange abroad, are not left out.

Following the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, the UK government announces its intention for a Global Britain. Higher Education has a significant role to play in supporting a Global Britain and with the advent of the Turing scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) there is an opportunity for University A to offer more of its undergraduates a chance to both live and work overseas, to enrich a higher education experience and future career success. This research study evidences how participants (figure 4.1.2) are of the opinion that University A should promote international experience opportunities for its undergraduates and many participants (figure 4.1.3) also consider that there is more work University A could undertake to support undergraduate participation in an international experience.

5.2.5 Support for undergraduate students participating in an international experience

Another emerging theme concerns the provision of support for undergraduates undertaking an international experience, including, pre-departure, whilst on experience and following completion of a period of international experience. There is much variation in the areas of concern identified by participants in this research study (section 4.1, figure 4.1.4 and discussed earlier in sections 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20, and 5.21). Participants agree, (section 4.2), that there is more University A could do to support its undergraduates to take part in an international experience. Whilst acknowledging that more can always be done, participants did provide some specific examples e.g. making use of peer-to-peer promotion, where undergraduates have participated in an international experience previously and greater clarity on financial support to reduce the cost of participation in an international experience. Other participants' suggestions for improvement include, improved promotion and awareness raising; enhancing the quality of information provided; building an international experience as an integral part of more undergraduate degrees; encouraging alumni to speak to current undergraduates sharing thoughts of how the experience impacts on "where they are now". Significantly, this links with the concept of development of global mindedness, by encouraging participation in an international experience and creating global citizens, discussed previously in sections 5.6, and 5.9.

The research findings discussed in sections 5.4 and 5.10 evidence participants for this research study would not participate in an international experience without the promotional

support work undertaken by University A staff, as they were not aware prior to enrolment about the opportunity to participate in an international experience during time at University A. However, this research study also evidence (sections 4.1 and 4.2) that there is scope for University A to continue to improve support, to address several areas where participants indicate a concern, including finance as a barrier to participation; pre-departure support for language skills; setting up a placement; own well-being; accommodation; supervision arrangements; lack of support from the University A whilst abroad. Without participation the benefits this research study identifies, such as, development of cultural and aspirational capital (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2); enhancement of employability skills (section 5.2.3); development of global mindedness (section 5.2.4) may not have been possible. This research study agrees with the work of Crozier *et al.* (2009) who cite a need for higher education institutions to provide more support for entrants from working class backgrounds and specifically a need for more flexible practices of integration to enable participation in pedagogic practices, rather than a need for the student alone to change. This research study concurs with Devas (2011 p. 827) that there is a need for universities to provide greater guidance and support for widening participation students so that they can access social and cultural opportunities during their time at university “which are usually unavailable to working class students” because “middle-class students have greater economic capital” and can position themselves to take advantage of these opportunities more easily.

A range of authors concur with the vital importance of preparing students for periods of international experience (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009; Wake *et al.* 2017;) Several authors focus on the importance and benefits of pre-departure briefings for students (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Maginnis, 2017). Effective supervision during a placement is seen as important by Mayer (2002). It is evident that support encompasses addressing a wide range of potential concerns by students and may take a variety of different forms. The researcher for this research study also considers there is a danger with providing too much support, to an extent to which participants become merely passive travellers and a very high level of support diminishes the learning experience for participants (section 5.4 and 5.7). Some may consider that part of an international experience is for the participant to undertake personal research and preparation, perhaps with support from university staff who are able to offer guidance and advice. There is a careful balance for University A to provide enough support to encourage its undergraduates to consider participation in an international experience,

which this research study identifies, that participants would not have done so, without promotion by University A (section 5.10).

This research provides evidence that there is scope for University A to enhance the support it provides for undergraduates considering participation in an international experience (section 4.1, figure 4.1.3 and section 5.26). During the student international experience journey, support needs to occur at key points i.e. before departure, with enhancement of the quality of promotional material to make better use of peers and alumni, who have already undertaken an international experience. Also, improving the quality of financial advice, to include clear signposting to UK government schemes (e.g. Turing Scheme) and internal university support funds, as Connor *et al.* (2001) suggest and the survey and focus group participants recommend (section 4.2 and figure 4.1.3). Several authors, as previously noted in this section, encourage use of pre-departure briefings. Carter *et al.* (2019 p. 191) advocate that “pre-departure training is essential in preparing students” Use of structured pre-departure briefings would enable University A to prepare participants for culture change, as Campbell and Walta (2015), Maginnis (2017) and Dunlap *et al.* (2017) recommend; to correctly set student expectations, as Lough (2009) describe; to discuss and mitigate any risks as Cleak *et al.* (2016) state; to optimise the experience for participants as Chinnappan *et al.* (2013) discuss. Support for undergraduates during an international experience is a further key area where University A may wish to consider enhancement, particularly for supervision arrangements for its participants whilst abroad, as Chipchase *et al.* (2012), Diack *et al.* (2014) and Lough (2009) recommend, and the de-briefing of participants following a return to the UK, to consolidate learning, as Mayer (2002) advises.

Specifically discussing the issue of finance, in the context of factors which encourage or discourage participation in higher education, Connor *et al.* (2001 p. 110) state a need for more relevant and timely information on student finance as well as greater financial assistance that is more accessible “to those students in greatest need”. The findings of this research study confirm that focus group participants specifically criticise a lack of clear communication to participants about the availability of financial support to help fund an international experience (section 4.2). Some participants knew about and accessed financial support, whilst others have no knowledge about the types of financial support available. Connor *et al.* (2001 p. 110) recognise that affording the cost of higher education “does have a negative impact on the decisions of some”, recommending that “access funds and university’s own funds should be made more available and early in the decision-making process, in a user-friendly way”. There are similarities here with student access to finance

for participation in an international experience. As already acknowledged earlier within section 4.2, participants in this survey recommend greater provision of access to financial information and available sources of finance, including the University A student experience fund. Connor *et al.* (2001 p. 110) suggest that socio-economic backgrounds may act as a determiner for the choices a student makes, therefore, provision of support, particularly finance, may encourage more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to participate in an international experience at University A. The Turing Scheme (2.6.5, 5.10 and Appendix 4) aims to level up support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable this group of students to participate in and benefit from an international experience. Specific changes from the predecessor programme aim to better support those from disadvantaged backgrounds include, making the scheme global to specifically allow travel to other English-speaking nations worldwide; reducing the minimum time abroad to qualify for funding to four weeks; providing an enhanced level of funding to students qualifying according to disadvantaged criteria.

University A needs to balance the provision of support for its undergraduates, particularly financial support, against a potential reduction in student experience, discussed earlier in this section. It is important to recognise a view that the provision of too much financial support, perhaps to the point where an international experience is provided entirely free of charge, without the need for any financial investment on the part of a participant, may diminish the level and outcomes from the experience. It could be argued that some participants may visualise a free of charge experience, as just something to attend, without the need to consider self-gain from the experience. However, it could be further argued that where there is a cost implication, participants are more likely to carefully consider any personal gain from the experience. The level of financial support and its impact on the benefits of an international experience is not within the remit of this research study but is a potential area for further research.

5.2.6 Independence of emergent themes

The themes that have emerged from the data gathered for this research study are both independent and inter-connected.

Undergraduates do not arrive at University A seeking an international experience and this is not discussed during interview and enrolment processes. It is only through promotional

work undertaken by University A and the support offered by its staff, that undergraduates become aware of this possibility. When undergraduates partake in an international opportunity, a key benefit is expansion of cultural capital, given the personal socio-economic status and limited cultural capital in the field of travel. A further benefit from the international experience is the development of employability, particularly career ambition as participants see and discuss a range of careers in a chosen employment sector during time abroad. In turn, this develops participants' aspirational capital as there is a realisation that there are career opportunities available to them beyond the UK. However, the student journey to an international experience at University A is dependent on support available to a participant at key points (and in a variety of formats discussed in section 5.2.2). Through participation in an international experience, participants at University A begin to develop global mindedness and interconnectedness because the experience provides an intercultural awareness; intercultural sensory experiences; an ability to visualise an employment sector in a global perspective; to make international connections that are rewarding for future careers.

Therefore, although each emerging theme is independent, the themes are also interconnected as shown in the figure 5.2.6.1 below. When the component parts of support for participants are in place and participants engage in an international experience, by University A, the over-arching themes of development of aspirational capital (section 5.2.2) and enhancement of employability skills (section 5.2.3) are achieved.

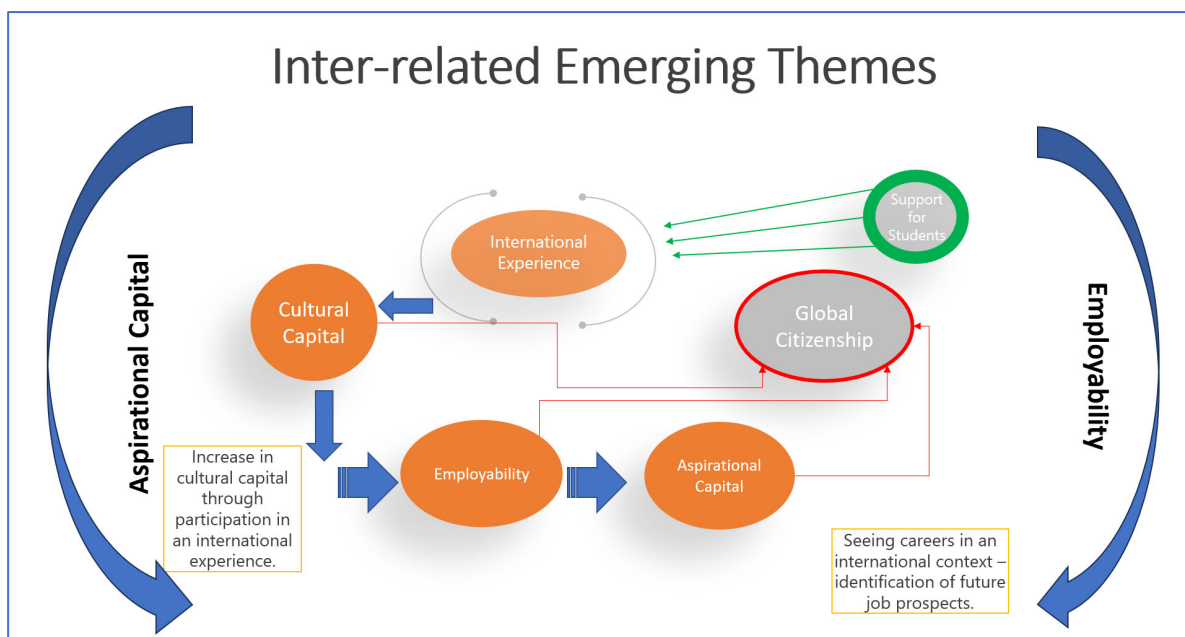


Figure 5.2.6.1 Rich picture demonstrating the inter-relationship of emerging themes from the research study

Support for student participation is integral to all emerging themes, as without this support, participation and the subsequent realisation of benefits would not be possible. Support makes the international experience happen (section 5.2.5).

Through undertaking an international experience, a student develops personal cultural capital (section 5.2.1); employability skills (section 5.2.3) and through seeing a career sector in an international context, can develop aspirational capital (section 5.2.2). Each of these elements (cultural capital; employability; aspirational capital) contribute to the development of a student as a global citizen (section 5.2.4).

This chapter will now move forward to interpret and discuss the significance of the research findings in relation to the research question, explaining new understanding and insights that have emerged as a result of analysis of the findings (Chapter 4). Critical reflection and synthesis of findings is undertaken, providing a more profound understanding of how the emerging themes have developed.

5.3 Immersion in a different culture

The quantitative questionnaire data (section 4.1, table 4.1.3) highlights participants' desire to travel and see the world and for cross-cultural exposure through travel. Given the social context of University A (section 1.3), this level of interest in cultural awareness and travel is seen as an encouraging starting point for generating interest in participation in an international experience. The quantitative questionnaire findings from this research (section 4.1, tables 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) evidence that participants have an interest in travel and cultural development, with several authors including Attrill *et al.* (2019) acknowledging this provides potential for positive placement experiences to support sharing of intercultural skills and knowledge. Bagnasco *et al.* (2020, p. 6), Carlson *et al.* (1990), Drynan (2013), Yashima (2010) acknowledge the benefit of development of inter-cultural awareness from participation in an international experience. This research study evidences that at the point where participants consider participation, there is a desire to, as Campbell and Walta (2015, p. 14) describe, spend time in another culture. The context of University A (section 1.3) evidences a high percentage of widening participation undergraduate entrants. Many of these are first in family university entrants or from groups which are currently under-represented in HE. The focus group findings (section 4.2) evidence, participants do not expect to travel as part of an undergraduate degree. Considering participants' desire to experience another culture, the focus group findings identify that participants are surprised that modules at European universities use English as a medium of delivery. The findings of this research study (section 4.1, table 4.1.4) evidence that participants report positive personal and professional enrichment; development of knowledge; developing self-confidence and in particular, development of intercultural awareness, hence the widening of participants' cultural capital, which several authors including Brooks *et al.* (2016), Cleak *et al.* (2016) and Teichler *et al.* (2001) attribute to participation in an international experience. The development of Cultural capital is an emergent theme in this part of the analysis and from the overall research findings (section 5.2.1) However, given the context of University A (section 1.3) and the work of Bourdieu (1973), the limited cultural capital of some participants means that some participants are not previously aware of the dominance of English Language across European Universities, particularly module teaching in English, therefore, have not considered future careers in an international context. Field notes (section 4.3) reveal that several research study participants are also first-time travellers abroad. The data indicates (section 4.3) participants' surprise at the widespread use of

English language in employment and academic contexts, that some participants experience little beyond their own culture, at the point where they were offered an opportunity to participate in an international experience. However, when there is a chance to travel, participants are keen to participate, hence the initial focus on wanting to spend time in another culture as a key driver for participation.

Given the context of University A (section 1.3) and a high percentage of widening participation students from underrepresented groups, the work of Bourdieu (1973) is significant, particularly his notion of habitus and fields (section 2.7.1) and the role that education plays in social class reproduction and a belief that the educational system, is the key factor in legitimising existing social structures and class relations for all. However according to Bourdieu (1973), the system does not compensate for the lack of such competencies to the children from less privileged family backgrounds, where their family upbringing may not provide standards and knowledge to support them with high levels of educational achievement. The participants of this research study are drawn from a geographic area where the area is an “entrenched social mobility cold spot” according to the UK Government Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission Social Mobility Index (2021 p. 3). Bourdieu (1973) extends his theory to all people, with cultural capital and how it is created or transferred from other forms of capital playing a central role, in habitus as a non-financial form of hierarchy. King (2000) and Webb *et al.* (2017) offer criticism of Bourdieu’s (1973) theory, citing a need to interpret this in a more modern-day context and note that habitus and fields will change over time, in part through changes in politics and legislation. However, cultural norms in different areas and regions of a country may be slower to change because of ingrained stereotypes. Given the context and social setting of University A (section 1.3), it is possible that this may play out in some of the research participants of this research study, who may discover when travelling that views of society and what is possible, are very different from a participants’ home setting. Some participants (section 4.2), having travelled to an international university for the first time meeting international academic staff and students, openly expressed a desire to investigate further working in an international context, something that they had not previously considered. These comments evidence a noticeable change in the participants’ habitus and future aspirations, because the findings evidence (table 4.1.2) that factors relating to employability were not considered a significant reason for participation in an international experience. Participation in an international experience for the participants of this research study is driven by a desire to travel.

5.4 Experiencing something new

UUKI (2021) conclude from research focussing on the long-term benefits of short-term mobility, that 80% of study participants “went abroad to experience something new”. This aligns with data findings from this research study, whereby participants identify a strong desire to travel and to move out of a comfort zone (section 4.1, tables 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) The comfort zone is the habitus, which Bourdieu (1973) cites and where in the case of the participants for this research study it is the context of University A (section 1.3). Waters (2023 p. 317) states that habitus “impacts the likelihood” of whether a student will decide to undertake an international experience during their time at university. Participants construct personal ideas, practices and behaviours based on their own social and cultural surroundings. Linked to this is the notion of Bourdieu’s (1977) fields, where the participants work within personal fields and social settings, which form part of personal daily lives. The participants of this research study did not intend to travel abroad as part of a university experience (table 4.1.2). However, when an opportunity to participate in an international experience arises, participants wish to “experience something new” and indeed this new experience impacted on participants when thinking about future careers and study in an international context. The emergent theme of employability is highlighted within this section and discussed earlier in section 5.2.3

Bourdieu (1973) views people from less privileged family backgrounds as lacking cultural capital at home and are therefore in an inferior position in the education system. Bourdieu (1973) is of the opinion that a person’s cultural capital is based upon what parents have achieved and where parents have achieved more, parents are able to pass down this enhanced capital to children. Considering the social setting of University A (section 1.3), this research study takes a view that any university will expose its students to opportunities to enhance cultural capital, through meeting and interacting with the vast array of personalities, cultures and activities that any university has to offer. However, some students will be able to do more with such opportunities than others, depending on a student’s personal social setting. Prieur et al (2013) consider that success in education can be directly attributed to how well your parents achieved educationally. Cincinnato *et al.* (2016) also discuss a belief of how social background relates to educational achievement (section 2.7.2). This research study considers that some societal groups can better navigate the educational system than others, therefore some children are able to achieve to higher levels. However, some groups of students, require higher levels of support to empower

access to, thrive and succeed in higher education, which aligns with the view of Reay (2004 p. 75), who argues a need for a broad understanding of cultural capital, which takes account of “levels of confidence and entitlement”. In the case of this research study, participants acknowledge that it is only through the direct promotion of an opportunity to join an international experience by University A staff, that participants become aware of a possibility to travel as part of a university study. Participants are positive about the necessary support to enable participation in an international experience and consider that University A should do more to promote international opportunities to its undergraduates. Given the study participants are from a geographic area (section 1.3) where levels of educational attainment remain below the national average and the likelihood of a young person progressing to higher education, is significantly lower than the national average at 28% locally, compared with 38% nationally, it is not surprising research study participants value the promotion and support by University A staff, to encourage and enable participation in an international experience (figure 4.1.2). Participants recommend further promotion of international experience by University A, which presently is only after enrolment.

The focus group participants (section 4.2) recall that University A staff promoted opportunities to participate in an international experience, but not until after enrolment onto a chosen University A course. Without this promotion and support, participants would not have undertaken an international experience at University A and outcome benefits from this activity would be lost. However, it is equally the view of this research study that in providing a high level of support, where there is little for participants to undertake with preparation for an international experience, participants may become merely passive travellers, when the work associated with planning and organising an international experience, is completed by university staff. There is a balance between encouraging participation in an international experience, supporting inclusion for all groups of participants and devaluing learning from the experience, by removing the need for participants to plan and prepare themselves for travel abroad. However, this view must be counterbalanced against University A offering no publicity and/or support for its undergraduates to access an international experience and the non-participation of undergraduates, in which case any potential learning and development may never be realised. A requirement for support for undergraduates participating in an international experience is an emergent theme from the research findings (section 5.2.5).

5.5 Development of cultural capital

The findings of this research study build on findings from other studies (Cranston *et al.*, 2002; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2002; Teichler *et al.*, 2001; Universities UK, 2017), all of which relate to student participation in an international experience and factors relating to participants' development of cultural capital. Significantly, the researcher for this research study argues that University A participants value such experiences because this is the first time, for the majority, through the promotional activity of University A staff, that undergraduates are made aware that such experiences are available to complement chosen programmes of study (section 5.4). Given the context of University A (section 1.3) and poor level of local area social mobility, this research study evidence the importance of University A staff in promoting the availability of international experience, particularly as The Social Mobility Commission (2021, p. 8) note that "the UK Government has committed to levelling up the country" and "has signalled a strong desire to ensure where you grow up does not impact where you go in life". Emmisson (2003 p. 214) discusses the importance of "the element of choice" which Emmisson (2003) views is central to the notion of cultural mobility, with Brown (1995) acknowledging the importance of cultural capital for re-production of the middle classes. Brown (1995) writing in the mid-1990's in a different era where Post-1992 Universities had recently been established and would not be promoting international experience across entire student cohorts. Since this time the HE sector has evolved significantly, with the UK Government questioning value for money and the impact of a higher education degree. The Social Mobility Commission (2021, p. 8) discusses a process of "levelling up" (section 2.6.5) and creating a "level playing field" of opportunity across the UK. In doing so, it is important that undergraduates studying at University A have equal access to and can derive benefits from participation in an international experience. The notion of cultural capital discussed earlier (section 2.7.2) by Brown (1995), Cincinnato *et al.* (2016), Gripsrud *et al.* (2011), Prieur *et al.* (2013) and Vryonides (2007).

Economic and poverty indicators (section 5.3), for the city location of University A are important factors of this research study, as study participants are clear that participation in an international experience does not form part of any personal consideration of participants when making a university choice and application. As many are first in family to attend university, guidance from family about what to expect from a university experience, is limited and confines mostly to information given by the university. Moreover, as well as this, it is a deficit in participants' cultural capital with regards to international travel. O'Shea

(2016), along with others (Basit 2012; Prieur *et al.*, 2013), acknowledge the work of Bourdieu (1997) when discussing first in family university entrants and how in some cases, a student lacks the necessary cultural capital, to ensure success as personal cultural capital and knowledge of society is based on what an individual's parents did. Although the work of Bourdieu (1973:1977) takes place in a very different timeframe than this current one, his work is continually critiqued and modelled with confirmation given to the importance of family upbringing on educational achievement by authors including Basit (2012) and Prieur *et al.* (2013).

The UK Government Social Mobility Commission discussing the State of the Nation 2021 (2021 p. 8) state "today, you are still 60% more likely to be in a professional job if you were from a privileged background rather than a working-class background". A further finding from this research study relates to factors relating to employability, (table 4.1.4), where study participants recognise the prestige and recognition of capital beyond personal locale, for example finding the international experience professionally enriching and developing a clearer idea of their own future career goal . However, it is not known and does not form part of this research study how participants choose to use international experience to support their own future employability. This is an area for potential future research. However, these factors are the least important for quantitative questionnaire research survey participants, when first considering participation in an international experience (table 4.1.2), with the main driver for participants as a desire to travel and experience another culture. As earlier discussed (section 5.4) participants of this research study do not intend as part of time at University A to travel abroad, however, when an opportunity arises to participate in an international experience participants want to "experience something new" and have a desire to move out of their own "comfort zone" (section 5.4) which is the habitus and fields as Bourdieu (1973) describes (section 2.7.1) of their own geographic locality (section 1.3). However, following participation (table 4.1.4) factors relating to employability such as professional enrichment, adapting to new people and situations and future career goals, have high levels of agreement. Findings (table 4.1.5) support enhanced interest in future development of their own careers in an international context, with some participants commenting that no previous consideration has been given to the development of a future career in an international context. This research study evidences how participation in an international experience, although not considered before commencing an undergraduate degree, impacts positively on the development of cultural capital for study participants, by encouraging participants to consider their own

future employability. The opportunity to participate in an international experience is one of several ways in which University A exposes its undergraduates to potential development of personal cultural capital. Although, despite the efforts of University A staff, not all undergraduates accept this offer (barriers to participation are discussed later in this chapter), for undergraduates who do, cultural capital develops. The findings of this research study (table 4.1.4) identify the development of cultural capital as an emergent theme (section 5.2.1), where factors relating to employability (section 5.2.3) increase in significance, following the participation by undergraduates in an international experience.

5.6 Development of employability skills and aspirational capital

Using an international experience as a driver for improving employability skills is not a significant reason for initial uptake for participants in this research study, as the questionnaire findings (tables 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) demonstrate. This could be because the promotion of international experience for undergraduates at University A does not start until after enrolment and the context within which the promotion takes place, does not focus strongly enough on the development of employability skills. There is scope for University A to enhance its emphasis on employability aspirations from the start of courses, thereby encouraging further consideration and uptake of international experiences and the development of confidence (Wake et al: 2017) and employability through participation in an international experience. However, this research study demonstrates a change in the importance of employability, including developing a clearer idea about a future career goal, following participation in an international experience (table 4.1.4). Authors (Cincinnati *et al.*, 2016; Gripsrud *et al.*, 2011; Vryonides, 2007) acknowledge that the transfer of cultural capital encompasses a much wider context than employability alone. The enhancement of employability skills is an emerging theme from the research findings (section 5.2.3).

For participants who are first time travellers, barriers to participation (section 2.6.5) may be more significant, having not previously encountered such challenges involving travel and for some participants, setting up an international experience. The researcher for this research study argues that having not travelled at all or travelled widely previously, participants for this research study have an interest in the prospect of travel. The researcher for this research study further argues that some University A participants have a deficit in respect of cultural capital regarding international travel. Basit (2012 p. 130) cites Bourdieu (1997) who

uses the concept of cultural capital to explain unequal academic achievement between different social classes, by relating academic success to the distribution of cultural capital. The UK Government Social Mobility Commission report, *State of the Nation 2021* (2021 p. 23) notes the importance universities play as a “crucial component for individuals’ social mobility prospects”.

This research study evidence as an emerging theme (section 5.2.1), the development of aspirational capital as an outcome of participation in an international experience by undergraduates at University A. Aspirational capital (section 2.7.2) develops in the form of career ambition whereby participants see employment opportunities within a chosen employment sector internationally, as part of an international experience. The focus group findings (section 4.2) evidence multiple comments where participants cite enthusiasm for seeing and realising for the first-time international career opportunities. Also, the questionnaire findings (table 4.1.4), evidence participants’ awareness of widening career goals and development of careers internationally, following participation in an international experience. It is evident (table 4.1.2 and section 4.2) that participants do not consider employability as a significant factor when considering participation in an international experience, rather participants of this research study have a desire to experience culture and something new (sections 5.3 and 5.4). However, following participation, participants experience a career sector in an international context and develop personal aspirational capital, with the formation of personal career ambitions for the future. Basit (2012) notes (section 2.7.2) this development of aspirational capital, particularly in educational and career settings is particularly important for widening participation groups and will support success both educationally and in later careers. This research study agrees with Yosso (2005) that it is the development of employability, by way of the participants visualising personal future career goals, that develops the aspirational capital of the participants of this research study. The participants are as Yosso (2005 p. 78) describes “dreaming of possibilities beyond their current circumstances” and it is in this way that aspirational capital is enhanced. Yosso (2005) notes how aspirations develop within social and familial contexts. The development of aspirational capital, through participation in an international experience is an important mechanism to support participants of this research study, to overcome the economic and social challenges that are present within the context of their own area of residence.

An international experience provides participants with an opportunity to develop inter-cultural awareness and cross-cultural competencies, (tables 4.1.2 and 4.1.3), as authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Carlson *et al.*, 1990; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; DeMartini, 1992;

Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Ozek, 2009; Pence *et al.*, 2008; Sweeney, 2012; Waters *et al.*, 2011) concur. Participants in this research study value opportunities to develop personal inter-cultural skills (table 4.1.4). As the previously mentioned authors note, an international experience provides participants in this research study with an opportunity to develop inter-cultural awareness and cross-cultural competences. Development of interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills and global citizenship is as UNESCO cites (The Skills Education Group 2019) a transversal skill, which The Skills Education Group (2019) identify as the most significant skill employers demand and as Lopez *et al.* (2020 p. 16) describe, important for preparing students for society and the workplace. Again, this is further evidence of the ways in which participants undertaking an international experience, can develop personal employability skills and therefore, advance their aspirational and cultural capital.

5.7 Short visits

As UUKI (2021 p. 86) notes short visits provide students with the security of an organised university led experience accompanied by members of academic staff. In the case of University A, field notes (section 4.3) confirm that several short visits to international universities are organised by academic staff to provide a standalone experience and to introduce undergraduates to the idea of either a work-placement or study abroad. Field notes confirm that several UK universities are setting up short visits as a method by which to introduce undergraduates to the idea of a more formalised study or work-experience abroad. In the case of one post-1992 university, subsidised international short visits are financially subsidised for undergraduates. Responses to the questionnaire for this research study confirm that some survey participants participate in short visits (section 4.1). Field notes (section 4.3) further evidence that emerging from these visits, five participants who travelled to a university in Barcelona and three participants who visited a university in Istanbul as part of a short visit, subsequently returned to the host university cities for longer work-experience placements later during the same academic year, making their own travel and accommodation arrangements with guidance and support from University A staff. Some of these participants later involved themselves in the production of promotional video material to encourage peers to engage in an international experience. Field notes (section 4.3) additionally confirm that for this small group of undergraduate participants who returned for longer ERASMUS sponsored traineeships/work-experience placements, would

not have done so, if they had not previously engaged with a short visit international experience. Participation in a short, University A organised visit would not require the same degree of planning and organisation as with a longer independent study or work-experience placement abroad. In a short experience, participants are passive travellers, having most of the organisation completed for them by University A staff. However, field notes (section 4.3) reveal that a short visit provides aspirational capital (discussed in section 5.2.2) for participants to wish to return for a more independent and longer work placement. This research demonstrates that for some participants in international experience short visits, aspirations develop through this participation, which sometimes include a desire to undertake a longer, more independent, international experience and the researcher for this research study agrees with UUKI (2021) noting positive aspects of short international experiences for students. Although this research study does not seek to research how participants choose to use cultural capital (discussed as an emerging theme in section 5.2.1) gained from participation in an international experience, a further area for continuing research, is how participants choose to use cultural capital and whether for others this is quickly lost.

5.8 Factors influencing a decision to participate

The single most important factor participants identify as influencing a decision to participate in an international experience, is evident from the questionnaire data (table 4.1.2) as the opportunity to challenge themselves and to get out of their comfort zone. Focus group participants (section 4.2) cite the promotional work and support undertaken by staff at University A, enables participants of this research study to realise an international experience. The importance of support for undergraduates at University A, to enable their participation in an international experience is earlier noted as an emerging theme from this research (section 5.2.5). A comfort zone is found in the family ties and networks in this socially deprived geographical area, where government data evidence that there is significantly less social mobility than in other parts of the UK. Therefore, the researcher for this research study argues that it is likely for many, if not all participants, travel to an international destination is significant. However, to be borne in mind is that the organisational and support element of a short visit by University A staff, puts boundaries and possibly limitations for participants to extend beyond their own comfort zones, because the visit (i.e. flight, accommodation and activities) is fully organised for the participant.

Therefore, there is little more a participant needs to do once they have booked a place on a short visit. The support for many participants is essential in encouraging participation in an international experience as participants overcome environmental influences (section 1.3) and habitus. The findings of this research show that the impact of outward student mobility has a positive impact on participants (table 4.1.4) in terms of inter-cultural awareness and employability skills (enhancement of employability as an emergent theme is discussed earlier in section 5.2.3). This positive impact extends to the development of aspirational and cultural capital (sections 5.5 and 5.6 and as an emergent theme in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) and is important, particularly in an area classified as a social mobility cold spot, as it helps to overcome the impact of the cold spot (section 1.3).

'Doing something different' and/or 'getting out of their comfort zone' in the minds of the participants (section 4.1, table 4.1.3), refers to a change from usual routines, including full-time study or employment, coupled with personal expectations of an international experience. Carlson *et al.* (1990) note that cultural interest in terms of student perception is the driving factor when students decide whether to participate in an international experience. Field note data (section 4.3) identifies that University A, participation in an international experience is consistently less than 1% of full-time undergraduates for the academic year 2019/20 and at least the two preceding academic years. This is well below the 19% level that Sweeney (2012) notes when commenting on a Council for Industry and Higher Education study, which identifies 19% of students consider that they are likely to participate in an international experience during their time at university. Sweeney (2012 p. 21) considers this participation rate "alarming", particularly given the high level of importance employers place on cultural awareness and continues to note that pre-1992 universities, appear to offer less opportunities and information about work, study or volunteering abroad to students, than Russell Group universities (section 4.3). Pre-1992 universities may offer less opportunities to their students when UK outgoing mobility rates by subject groupings are reviewed (Table 2.3.5.1), as this UUKI data evidence, just over one third of all UK outgoing student mobility are for language, medicine and dentistry students. These subjects are typically offered by Russell Group universities, whereas University A does not offer any programmes in these subject groupings. However, the International Higher Education Commission (2023, p. 24) agrees with Sweeney (2012) and the description of (alarming) participation, describing a "worrying" decline overall in the number of students undertaking an international experience and note a shift away from longer to shorter term experiences.

Meeting peers who have engaged in an international experience and feeling inspired to participate in an international experience is not a common occurrence at University A, given the previously mentioned <1% undergraduate participation rate. Previously noted, (section 5.5) providing an opportunity to participate in an international experience is one way in which University A exposes its undergraduates to potential development of aspirational and cultural capital. However, the focus group research evidences (section 4.2) that, for University A, it is only when University A staff promote and engage with undergraduates (section 5.4) that participants become aware of an opportunity to participate in an international experience and that, for most undergraduates participating in this research study, there is an opportunity to move from a localised comfort zone, perceiving this as an opportunity to do something different (table 4.1.3). It is evident that University A undergraduates do not usually enrol on a degree programme with the intention of undertaking an international experience as part of an undergraduate degree. However, it is important to acknowledge that when University A undergraduates choose to participate, starting points in terms of cultural capital are different and the development of aspirational capital, which Basit (2012) cites as important to educational achievement and career aspiration and Straubhaar (2013) implies, is important for a person's future ambition. A further research opportunity exists at this point, to investigate whether students considering participation in an international experience, as an opportunity to move out of a personal comfort zone, are from widening participation university entrants and to investigate whether the same students who engage in an international experience, can gain higher future wage levels in chosen careers.

5.9 Globalisation

Survey and focus group participants (sections 4.1 and 4.2) describe how University A promotes opportunities for international experience, which includes members of University A staff visiting teaching sessions and making short presentations; information provided as part of a 'welcome week' and discussions with peers. This can be perceived as reflecting Bosanquet's (2010) idea of universities developing global citizenship, this being an emergent theme (section 5.2.4) from the findings of this research study and the associated notions of employability and sustainability, which University A achieves, through the promotion of opportunities such as international experience, which many authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Cranston *et al.*, 2020; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Waters *et al.*, 2011)

acknowledge, promote inter-cultural awareness and cross-cultural competency. However, providing an inter-cultural experience alone may fall short of what Bosanquet (2010 p. 7) describes as the need for a broader aspect of internationalisation required for “global citizenship” in a HE context. Focus group participants (section 4.2) discuss how an international experience opens minds to a wider variety of potential career opportunities in international settings (section 4.2), which had not previously been considered. As Vaira (2004) discusses, undergraduates will be entering a globalised age where aspects of lives including culture, politics, the economy and social lives will be impacted by what Dagen *et al.* (2019 p. 643) describe as “unprecedented levels of global social interconnectedness”. It is therefore important for University A to provide its undergraduates with the means to be successful in this increasingly interconnected, globalised world, (Divir *et al.* 2019) and to support the development of transversal skills by its students, (section 1.4.3) By undertaking a university undergraduate degree, undergraduates at University A are investing in personal futures, therefore, it is important that University A provides opportunities for its undergraduates to develop skills, to build future career pathways, which may be in international fields.

For the participants in this research study, the ability to see their own career sectors and career possibilities in an international context, enables participants to consider future employment options in a global context (sections 4.1 and 4.2). Participants evolve views on future career possibilities from the local setting, in which daily study takes place, into a global context which the international experience provides, as the research findings for this research study evidence (table 4.1.4 and section 4.2). However, the benefits of globalisation are being re-considered, as Demena *et al.* (2021) state that “globalisation has been the subject of growing discontent and criticism”. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, some manufacturers were impacted by disruption as national borders close, and economic forecasts become “pessimistic during the early months of the pandemic”. As the participants of this research study are becoming aware of and opening their own minds to global career opportunities, created through businesses accessing new markets, participants do so at a time when there is heightened awareness, particularly by governments of some of the challenges connected with truly global businesses.

5.10 Provision of a range of support

A requirement for support for undergraduates at University A is an emergent theme from this research study (section 5.2.5). By supporting its undergraduates in a range of ways, discussed later in this chapter, to participate in an international experience, University A provides an opportunity for its undergraduates to develop their aspirational and cultural capital, as described earlier (section 5.6). University A will also support its own aims of cultural embeddedness and developing undergraduates who have skills of inter-cultural awareness and understanding, where its undergraduates can use these skills in their future lives as global citizens.

The participants' focus group comments suggest participants are enthused by the idea of an international experience (section 4.2), with some encouraged by the idea of travelling with peers as part of a larger group or by opting for a University A organised short visit, which would not require the preparation and commitment of a longer period of study or work exchange abroad (section 5.8) and would benefit from a higher level of organisational support, better suiting some participants as their own environment influences their habitus. For this participant group, personal habitus does not usually involve travelling abroad, particularly as part of an educational programme, away from friends and family. A short visit, with other undergraduates and University A staff may have been more appealing than an independent experience across a much longer timescale requiring more detailed planning and personal preparation. It is notable that when asking questions about what could be done to support greater participation by undergraduates in an international experience, participants only make suggestions for actions that University A could take. This research study adopts a view that in solely looking for the University A to undertake all actions relating to improving participation, this is indicative of the limited expectations and aspirations, participants have for a university experience. This is directly linked to a deficit in the cultural capital of the participants (sections 5.6 and 5.8) However, there is scope for University A to commence promotion of its international experiences prior to enrolment, by including promotion alongside its advertisements for courses. At a practical level University A can look to improve the quality of information on its web site, to include testimonials from undergraduates who have participated in an international experience, encouraging peers to participate and discussing the range of support available from University A staff. University A may also look to create a wider range of group summer school experiences, to accommodate larger numbers of its undergraduates who would like to take part in a group

visit with peers, particularly as this research study provides evidence that some participants of this research study who travel on a short visit as part of a group, later decide to progress to an individual study and/or work-experience abroad.

Petzold *et al.* (2018 p. 51) discuss conditions that make students more inclined to undertake an international experience, noting how students “make selections by criteria of actual feasibility at first”, which include financial considerations, potential language barriers and “supportive structures”. As the focus group discussions confirm, by providing a supportive structure for its participants (sections 1.2 and 1.3) University A encourages some undergraduates to participate in an international experience, where this would not have been the case without this support. Participants of the focus group confirm this (section 4.2), particularly given the profile intake and socio-economic setting of University A (sections 5.3, 5.6) in relation to the Social Mobility Index (2021) and profile of the local area participants are predominantly drawn from (section 1.3). Field notes reveal (section 4.3) that by undertaking an international experience supported by ERASMUS, all University A’s participants (who participate in this research study) are eligible for financial support through the ERASMUS scheme, which University A was a member of during the period covered by this research study. Acknowledging consideration for the importance of finance, Petzold *et al.* (2018 p. 51) state it is their belief that “broader financial support” may “increase the intent for studying abroad”. At the time of this research study, the UK has ceased its membership of the ERASMUS programme and has developed its own UK government scheme named the Turing Scheme (Section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4), which aims to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training worldwide. In the future UK students may have opportunities to receive funding towards travel to more culturally diverse and distant countries, as financial support will not be limited to undertaking an international experience in an ERASMUS member country. A key aim of the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) is the notion of supporting the UK Government agenda of levelling up (2022), by providing greater financial support for disadvantaged students and by making the scheme global, enabling travel to other English-speaking nations, so removing language as a barrier to participation. Participants in this research study responding to the questionnaire, identify finance and language as areas of the greatest concern (figure 4.1.4) when considering participation in an international experience. Therefore, the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) may help to better address finance and language concerns and as Professor Peter Francis (2023) notes, enable “mobility by addressing the barriers and challenges that our students face”, by providing potential for increasing the percentage of

undergraduates who are able to participate in an international experience at University A, in turn, better enabling University A to develop the cultural capital of its undergraduates.

5.11 Reflections on international experience

When participants are asked to reflect on an international experience the following emerged as of greater importance to them, professional enrichment; development of knowledge; better able to adapt to new people and situations; becoming more focussed on achieving a higher-grade degree level (table 4.1.4). This is a change from the priorities participants identify when first considering an international experience, which are, immersing themselves in a different culture and travelling to see the world (table 4.1.3). These new factors identify that participation in an international experience develops this group of participants' cultural and aspirational capitals both of which are emergent themes from this research study (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.3). This finding concurs with the work of Attrill *et al.* (2019) and Bagnasco *et al.* (2020) who cite development of ability, confidence, and professional enrichment as positive outcomes from undertaking an international experience. Discussed earlier in this chapter (section 5.3) are a range of other benefits to participants derived from participation in an international experience, including introducing participants to the concept of becoming a global citizen, global mindedness is identified as an emerging theme from this research (section 5.2.4), development of cultural capital and enhancement of skills related to employability, including the development of some transversal skills, for example, the development of interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills and global citizenship and skills of critical thinking and problem solving, as most in demand by employers, according to the World Economic Forum (2020). The findings of this research study align to the research of UUKI in a study analysing the impact of short-term mobility, as Baker (2021 p. 1) notes that "most (69 per cent) thought the trip had increased their confidence in their academic ability and broadened their understanding of their degree (66 per cent)".

As questionnaire findings evidence (table 4.1.4) there is a change in the perceived importance of factors after the international experience, than when participants first consider an international experience. Immersing oneself in a different culture and international travel, whilst they were the most important drivers for participants at the outset, become less important after completion of an international experience, replaced by factors relating to academic performance and employability, which evidence the

development of aspirational capital (section 2.7.2). Focus group discussions (section 4.2) further confirm this shift in the importance of factors, following travel. There is a strong link here to the concept of aspirational capital (section 2.7.2), which Basit (2012) associates with career aspiration, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Basit (2012) identifies young minority ethnic British Citizens as a disadvantaged group. Field notes for this research study (section 4.3) reveal that some research participants have this protected characteristic, therefore the research findings of Basit (2012) are relevant, to this group, which Basit (2012) classifies as disadvantaged in the context of educational achievement. This research study has links to the work of Basit (2012), with the identification of aspirational capital as a theme from this research study. Basit (2012 p. 134 - 139) discusses a belief that aspirational capital could be considered as a substitute for lack of cultural capital and how this is additionally a "motivator to improve life chances". Yosso (2005) notes how socially marginalised groups can go unrepresented, however, Yosso (2005) states a belief that this underrepresented group also bring from their cultural wealth, a degree of aspirational capital. Given the notion that people at all levels are capable of aspiring towards the future, Basit (2012) identifies that aspirational capital is transmitted to young people regardless of social class and that an important factor is a desire for upward social mobility. It is evident from the focus group comments (section 4.2) that participants are able to personally visualise their career settings and aspire to working within such settings, thereby increasing personal aspirational capital. However, participants had not considered their own careers in an international setting before participating in an international experience. This correlates with survey findings (table 4.1.4), where factors relating to employability become more important following participation in an international experience. Potential exists for further research in this area focussing on the enhancement of cultural capital for minority ethnic British Citizens, achieved through participation at undergraduate level in an international experience.

Given the social setting and student intake profile of University A (section 1.3), it is important to consider alongside these post-international experience findings, the earlier finding of challenging themselves and getting out of their own comfort zone (table 4.1.3) and as earlier discussed (section 5.8), in the context of the level of support University A provides for its participants undertaking an international experience and their own environmental influences and habitus. This research study indicates that following participation, participants highly rate their own ability to adapt to new people and situations (table 4.1.4 and section 5.14). This research study evidences for participants of University

A, international experience provides a benefit of improving their own ability to manage new people and situations and it is considered that participation in an international experience by University A undergraduates, supports counteracting the social mobility cold spot.

Aspirational capital of University A participants in an international experience, is enhanced through participation in a variety of ways, (section 5.3) with all participating in this research study significantly focussing on career related benefits. These include how for some participants the experience helps to inform choice of career pathway, also providing participants with practical experience as well as opportunities for meeting professional role models working in areas where there is a career interest.

The experience of participants in valuing the benefit an international experience on their own future career ambitions (table 4.4) can be found in various sources of existing literature. For example, the ERASMUS Higher Education Impact Study (2019) notes how ERASMUS students frequently change their own study plans after spending time abroad, as students develop a clearer idea of career goals. This research study investigates *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students* and identifies the growth of aspirational capital as an outcome of participation in an international experience for the participants of this research study. This research study identifies an enhanced focus on future careers and employability, (table 4.1.4 and section 4.2) and also in exposing participants to an opportunity to further develop their cultural capital because the experience provides participants with new, transversal skills (section 2.2.1). Cleak *et al.* (2016), Geraghty *et al.* (2020) and Sweeney (2012) acknowledge the benefits an international experience can have with the development of employability, concurring with this research study. Sweeney (2012) recommends that there is an area for further research into links between international experience and graduate employment.

5.12 Employability

Factors relating to employability (table 4.1.3 and section 4.2) are not the strongest influencers, or of the most importance when considering participation in an international experience, for participants of this research study. However, these factors are highly valued as a benefit of the experience by focus group participants after travel, (table 4.1.4), with the enhancement of employability as an emerging theme from this research study (section 5.2.3). This finding is significant for the participants of this research study because focus

group findings confirm participants arrive at University A without the intention of participating in an international experience. Field notes identify that at the time of this research study University A has concerns about its graduate employability data and is planning actions to increase the number of student placements (UK and international) as a method by which it considers student employability can be enhanced.

There are similarities here with the work of Fowlie *et al.* (2018) researching attitudes towards placements abroad and identifying that UK students tend to be more focussed on cultural experience as a driver for participation. For undergraduates at University A, with its socio-economic context (section 1.3), participation in an international experience delivers what Emmisson (2013 p. 211) describes as “an element of cultural omnivore” in that it enhances participants’ capacity to engage and consume cultural goods and services across the spectrum of cultural life and to start to move between cultural realms and to choose where they wish to position themselves within the cultural landscape. The researcher for this research study argues that without participation in an international experience, (section 5.5), this additional enhancement of cultural capital will not occur, although the researcher for this research study acknowledges that an undergraduate university experience alone, will also expose students to the potential for further development of cultural capital. UUKI (2017) notes the importance of skills development connected with outward student mobility and considers that outward mobility is important for both personal and professional success. As do The Skills and Education Group (2019), who cites the notion of transversal skills and note UNESCO identifies these factors, (section 2.2.1) Zobotkina (2013 p. 59-60) notes how internationalisation, of which mobility is integral, to “bridge the gap between education and employability” should be “part of the whole process of education”. The researcher for this research study argues that participants in this research study develop employability skills such as aspects of interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills and global citizenship, as defined by UNESCO (2019) and is evident earlier in this work (table 4.1.4). The enhancement of employability skills for the participants of this study is of benefit to employers, as Lopez *et al.* (2020) note how employers are seeking employees with transversal skills, as such employees are better able to manage technological change.

5.13 Promotion of international experience

Questionnaire responses (section 4.1) and focus group findings (section 4.2) concur that participants benefit from a University A organised international experience. Participants agree that University A should promote opportunities for undergraduates to engage in international experience, because participants benefit from such an experience. The participants of this research study acknowledge, (sections 5.10), if University A staff had not directly promoted the available range of international experiences, participants would not have known about or been able to participate in an international experience during time as an undergraduate student at University A. As earlier discussed, (section 5.4), it is through the promotional activity of University A that participants for this research study have been exposed to the potential to develop their own cultural capital, through an offer to participate in an international experience. Whilst participants are keen for University A to enhance its promotion of opportunities for undergraduates to participate in an international experience, suggestions exclusively relate to actions University A could take. This research study is of the opinion that participants are keen for University A to make international experience appealing for future undergraduates, because they do not arrive at University A at the point of enrolment with the intention of participating in an international experience and that by doing so, this demonstrates a lack of motivation from the participants to engage in their own development, further highlighting a perceived lack of social capital (sections 5.5 and 5.6). This research study offers an opinion that the more University A plans the international experience the greater the level of control over the experience University A has, thus reducing the value of the overall learning experience for participants. These findings also align with Baty (2009) and Gerhards *et al.* (2018) who both consider that international placements are significant to universities, given the importance of internationalisation to the HE sector. As previously discussed, (section 5.11) there is a careful balance for University A to achieve, in encouraging its undergraduates to participate in an international experience and diminishing the learning by fully organising the experience for the undergraduates.

5.14 Spending time in another culture

Kent-Wilson *et al.* (2015) note how students balance the financial cost of participation in an international experience, with the desire to spend time in another culture. The questionnaire research study (section 4.1, tables 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) demonstrates that spending time in another culture is highly valued by the participants of this research study and as Perry (2013) notes this also develops students' career awareness, as findings from this research study note (table 4.1.4) and is a driving force for the development of aspirational capital (section 5.6). The development of aspirational capital for participants of this research study is identified as an emergent theme from this research (section 5.2.1). Xu *et al.* (2012 p. 105 - 118) note how "educational inequalities are reproduced through parental background and its interaction with cultural capital". This is an important consideration for University A because of its socio-economic setting, (section 1.3) and its high percentage of locally recruited students from within a city where the population is significantly less well qualified than the national average. Li *et al.* (2008 p. 394) note how there is an association between "social position and access to social capital". It is for this reason that encouraging undergraduates to participate in an international experience, as a means of further developing aspirational and cultural capital, is an important aspect of the work of University A. Field notes (section 4.3) evidence that all participants of this research study undertaking work-experience abroad, received funding support from the ERASMUS scheme and that outward mobilities from University A participants are to Europe or Turkey (91.4%) with 2.86% to Asia and 5.71% identified as 'other location'. In comparison UUKI (2017) report (section 2.3.4) that nationally 50.8% of mobility is to another European country. During the time of this research study, Europe and Turkey are destinations funded by UK membership of the ERASMUS programme, with survey participants (section 4.2) noting the importance of external funding to enable participation in an international experience.

Several authors (Adams, 2020; Jones, 2020; Mersinoglu, 2020; Stone, 2020; Turner, 2021) discuss the potential impact to UK students outgoing mobility and indeed the ability to financially support undergraduate students to spend time in another country, should the UK Government exit the ERASMUS programme, with Mersinoglu (2020 p. 1) noting a statement by the UK Department for Education (2020) to "remaining in ERASMUS". However, the UK did cease its membership of ERASMUS following its withdrawal from the EU. The replacement UK Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4), with its focus on widening

access, requires providers to specifically state how a funded project will support widening participation, thereby encouraging greater participation in an international experience by disadvantaged groups. As the Turing Scheme develops and data is made available, it will be possible to see the scheme's impact on the UK Government objective of better supporting participation rates for disadvantaged students in an international experience. Steve Woodfield (2022), Head of Stakeholder Engagement (Education) at The British Council, speaking at a Next Steps for The Turing Scheme Conference on 24th March 2022 notes that the UK Government has allocated £100,000,000 of funding for the first year of the Turing Scheme. Woodfield (2022) continues to state that 39 HE projects were awarded in the first year of Turing Scheme funding, with most HE institutions receiving two thirds of the funding applied for. Woodfield (2022) further acknowledges that many outgoing student mobilities are delayed in the first year of Turing Scheme funding because of Covid-19 closing borders and creating travel restrictions. As noted in section 3.13.1, at the time this research was taking place many countries had closed or restricted their borders because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since gathering data for this research study, borders have now been re-opened and student international travel continues.

Support for undergraduates at University A is identified as an emergent theme developing from the research findings of this study. Authors identify a range of barriers to student participation, which are now discussed in relation to the research findings from this study.

5.15 Financial support

It is notable that questionnaire survey participants identify finance as the most significant barrier to participation, (figure 4.1.4). The participants of this research study, in many cases were eligible for funding support from the ERASMUS programme and some participants acknowledge receiving additional funding support from University A's Student Experience Fund to further subsidise an international experience. Some may argue the overall value of an international experience is diminished if there is no requirement for planning or financial input by the participant. Field notes (section 4.3) reveal that for international experiences that University A provides, participants contribute towards the cost of University A organised short visits and that in the case of ERASMUS funded study abroad or work-experience, funding from ERASMUS is not intended to cover the full cost of the experience to the participant. Previously noted, (section 5.14) a key objective of the Turing Scheme (section

2.6.5 and Appendix 4), is to provide enhanced funding to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Turing Scheme offers criteria for disadvantaged background, as a student from a household with an annual income of less than £25,000; having a care responsibility; from a care background; refugee; asylum seeker. The Local Area Health Profile (2019) (section 1.3) for the city where University A's main campus is based, states that one quarter of the city's children are classified as being in low-income families, compared to an English average of 17%. The researcher for this research study considers that the UK Government Turing Scheme may better support University A undergraduates in overcoming financial barriers to participation in an international experience, than its predecessor ERASMUS programme.

There is strong correlation with the literature where authors (Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Souto-Otero *et al.*, 2013; Sweeney, 2012) (section 2.6.5) recognise how financial barriers become more apparent when potential participants start to investigate participation in more detail. However, a very different picture emerges from the focus group (section 4.2) with participants stating that finance was not an issue for them. Focus group (section 4.2) participants are clear to discuss how "finance was not really a big problem for me" and "it [finance] wasn't too much of an issue". The researcher for this research study acknowledges that the focus group participants may have been reluctant to admit to and/or discuss personal financial concerns in a group setting. A further reason for this difference is because, as field notes confirm (section 4.3), some of the focus group participants had access to additional financial support from University A's Student Experience Fund. Focus group participants (section 4.2) make comments about a need for University A to ensure that all participants are aware of potential sources of finance available including ERASMUS funding (available at the time of this research study) and financial support from a University A Student Experience Fund. It is evident that some participants are not aware of the University A student support fund at the time of outward mobility and may have accessed this financial support if it was known about when planning their international experience. The implications of this are that financial costs for participants will have varied. For some participants finance may not have been an issue (e.g., they may have received financial support from parents, had access to their own savings or accessed the University A financial support fund). However, others may have needed to work and/or have struggled to pay for an international experience. The financial burden placed on individual undergraduates might have made a difference to whether they were able to participate and to the benefits gained from participation in an international experience. An opportunity for further research

exists in this area. Focus group participants (section 4.2) are critical that some participants knew about and accessed financial support and that others had no knowledge about sources of finance, that may have supported participation in an undergraduate international experience.

Naffziger *et al.* (2017) identify finance as a potential barrier to engagement, suggesting that this can be overcome by working with students on a one-to-one basis. This is the case at University A, with some participants able to access an additional financial support fund, thus possibly explaining why participants for the focus group discussion were less concerned, overall, about finance as a barrier, than those responding to the survey. Evidence that participants can access an additional financial support fund and successfully make use of this is important, because this additional funding, that is not repayable, supports removing financial barriers, particularly for those participants who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and might otherwise not be able to financially support participation in an international experience. Just over two thirds of survey participants had participated in a short visit/conference organised by University A (section 4.1) and it could be that such a visit is easier for participants to finance as a one-off cost from their savings, although this is not a factor explored by this research study. However, as Beltaji (2020) notes, a concern that in the future, travel restrictions because of coronavirus and the potential impact of Brexit, costs may increase and potentially make it increasingly difficult for financially less well-off students to travel abroad as part of their own studies. University A is in an area classified as being within the Index of Multiple Deprivation, within the lowest two deciles. Given these factors, financial considerations are considered an extremely important concern for University A's participants. Field notes (section 4.3) reveal that for the academic year 2018/19, 34% of University A participants in ERASMUS experiences qualified for disadvantage uplift funding. Given the social setting and intake profile of University A, (section 1.3), the researcher for this research study argues that a means of financially supporting international experience and international travel is of critical importance to allow undergraduates at University A, to benefit from a University A organised international experience and exposure to develop cultural and aspirational capital through the development of employability skills.

Of significance for University A and its undergraduates, is a core objective of the UK Turing Scheme - Widening Access (2021), which aims to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training worldwide, to widen participation and promote mobility across the UK, with the scheme targeting areas of notable disadvantage

across the UK (Widening Access 2021). The Turing Scheme (2021) website offers criticism of its predecessor, the ERASMUS programme, stating that “When looking solely at graduates of non-language subjects, 7.6% of students from more advantaged backgrounds were mobile, compared to 4.6% of students from less advantaged backgrounds”. It is too early, in its conception, to see if the new Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) manages to close this participation gap and given that at the time of this research study the Coronavirus pandemic is on-going, severely disrupting international travel, therefore, it will be some years before this comparison data is available. However, the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) has the potential to better address the financial concerns of University A’s undergraduates than the previous ERASMUS programmes and to support a greater number of University A’s undergraduates to participate in an international experience, across a wider range of countries. It is recommended that there is potential for further research in this area.

Where undergraduates choose not to participate because they cannot obtain finance, the opportunity which University A provides for undergraduates to participate in an international experience and the perceived benefits – enhancement of aspirational and cultural capital (sections 5.5 and 5.6), development of employability (section 5.6) and development of global mindedness (section 5.9), cease to be available through this avenue.

5.16 Language skills as a barrier

Language skills is the second highest ranking concern for questionnaire participants. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) (2014) discuss how language and cultural difficulties can exacerbate concerns students may have about undertaking an international experience, their views align with earlier ones made by Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) and Sweeney (2012). The focus group discussion (section 4.2) for this research study reveals that participants are aware of language as a barrier. Field notes reveal that although funding to support the learning of another language was available from the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) during the academic year 2022/23, this funding was specifically restricted by the rules of the Turing Scheme to only be available to schools and Further Education colleges. Therefore, University A was not able to access any of this specific language support funding. Findings from the focus-group (section 4.2) confirm that the comments of two participants are that they attempted to learn a few basic phrases in another language

ahead of an international experience. Given the social setting and context of University A (section 1.3) some participants may not have been independent travellers but are comfortable knowing that in cases where travel is part of a group university organised short visit and there are other academic staff travelling at the same time and hosting the international experience. The researcher for this research study considers that such participants have a desire to travel, but at the same time wish to remain within their own comfort zone (section 5.4) and may wish to travel with less personal effort. For some participants, this is because of a deficit of cultural capital (section 5.6) influenced by their family background and lack of social mobility reflective of the area in which the participants reside (section 1.3) and which may be within a social mobility cold spot. Several participants express surprise at the use of English language across the European academic community. This further suggests that some study participants are not always familiar with international travel, and certainly how career sectors operate in an international context. Some study participants did not take ownership of an international experience, preferring instead to rely on University A staff deciding arrangements and providing basic information and introductions for participants, as part of an organised short group visit.

Vogtle *et al.* (2016) note how common use of language is an important factor in facilitating student mobility. A downside to this is a reluctance by UK English speaking students to learn and engage another language. In turn, this may then present a concern and/or potential barrier, when UK students desire to engage in social and cultural activities outside a university setting. Focus group research evidences that none of the participants in this research study are fluent in the language of the country they were travelling to, with only a very small minority undertaking some basic language preparation prior to travel. Brady (2008) identifies that 40% of ERASMUS mobilities are for students studying a foreign language, where it is highly beneficial for them to spend time in another country to develop language skills. The UUKI report *Gone International: Rising Aspirations Report on the 2016-17 Cohort*, identifies that 81.9% of UK student mobilities, are for the areas of Languages (33.9%), Medicine and Dentistry (30.8%) and Veterinary Science (17.2%). However, as previously noted (section 2.3.5) none of these subject areas are offered by University A. Therefore, the researcher for this research study considers that the Turing Scheme (introduced in section 2.6.5 and discussed previously in section 5.15, also Appendix 4), along with its focus on widening participation and ensuring improved financial support for the least well off, is highly beneficial to undergraduates at University A.

The Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) positively promotes the fact that travel is now funded to other English-speaking nations such as the United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Turing Scheme (2021) actively promotes travel to other English-speaking nations, with the web site stating, "The global nature of the Turing Scheme will remove the language barrier for students who are not studying languages by vastly increasing the opportunities in English speaking countries". The advent of the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) provides a unique opportunity, as earlier described within this section, to minimise barriers to travel due to language acquisition. Removing language as a potential barrier to participation may support increasing the number of students able to participate and the potential to enhance personal aspirational and cultural capital (sections 5.5), develop employability (section 5.6) and development of global mindedness (section 5.9). However this much promoted aspect of the Turing Scheme is not a view universally held. Dorota Maciejowska (2022), Specialist, University Networks and Una Europa Alliance, Jagiellonian University; and Chair, Academic Exchange and Mobility Working Group, The Coimbra Group, speaking at a Westminster Higher Education Forum policy conference discussing the Turing Scheme on 24th March 2022, expresses an opinion that exchange for UK students to other English-speaking nations results in a loss of cultural development. However, the participants of this research study react positively when discovering English language as the lingua franca when visiting international universities, indeed this discovery opens future study and career opportunities for participants, with participant students returning for independent work experiences during the summer vacation period. Maciejowska (2022) also criticises the Turing Scheme for its perceived lack of focus on supporting incoming mobility for EU students and cites a need for a joint reciprocal agreement to be established between the UK Government and EU to better support the facilitation of mobility between ERASMUS member countries and the UK. It is important to note at this point that one of the reasons the UK Government cites for ending the UK's membership of the ERASMUS scheme, is the fact that the UK receives many more incoming mobilities than outgoing (17,000 British outgoing, 32,000 incoming) and that English is the leading language of international discourse.

5.17 Organisation of the experience

Petzold *et al.* (2018) suggest that students consider factors such as organisation and support in deciding whether to participate in an international experience. Most

questionnaire participants, (section 4.1, figures 4.1.4 and 4.1.5) and focus group participants (section 4.2), indicate that the organisation of an international experience is not a barrier to participation. It is apparent that focus group and survey participants in this research study are initially happy with the level of organisation that is offered by University A. Arguably, some participants are happy to participate because such participants are engaging in a short visit organised by University A and feel comfortable in the knowledge that University A organises travel arrangements and in some cases, academic staff are present, as part of a student group experience, with undergraduates travelling alongside peers. Other elements of organisation that University A provides include talks to student groups about the types of international experience opportunities available and individual support by a dedicated member of University A staff, for undergraduates planning a study abroad or work experience. It must be noted that the Turing Scheme (2021) (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) provides a funding stream for organisational support, to cover costs directly linked to the administration and implementation of a placement. However, this level of funding is not sufficient for an organisation to manage all aspects of every participant's mobility. On the other hand, if there is no organisation required on behalf of a participant, this devalues learning from the experience and diminishes the accumulation of capitals through travel, due to the passivity of participants.

5.18 Health and Safety issues

In respect of Health and Safety issues most questionnaire participants (70.9%) have no concerns (section 4.1, figure 4.1.4). Most survey participants 91.4% travelled within Europe and Turkey where health and safety is less of an immediate concern for travellers, than some other parts of the world and only one participant notes a concern about travelling alone. Some participants travelled as part of a University A arranged group experience, with academic staff and may have been aware that University A, as part of its duty of care conducts a risk assessment of the visit as well as managing travel and accommodation arrangements. However, lack of concern may also have been through a deficit of cultural capital, meaning that some participants had little foresight for their own health and safety arrangements whilst travelling abroad. Cleak *et al.* (2016, p. 393) also note differences with the management of health and safety across different countries, noting "Students' safety issues are a particular challenge in developing countries". Cleak *et al.* (2016) continue to state the importance of screening and pre-departure briefings as a method for

controlling the risk involved. Cleak *et al.* (2016) note pre-departure briefings are of significance, as focus group participants for this research study comment (section 4.2) about how they would have welcomed “more information about the area” and “information about the way of living abroad and how to stay safe”. Indeed, it is likely that without promotion or support by University A, participants would not have participated and developed personal cultural capital (section 5.5) and aspirational capital (section 5.6). This lack of social mobility provides a disadvantage and supports inequality as it prevents engagement in an international experience and the subsequent development of employability skills and aspirational capital.

5.19 Own well-being

Questionnaire participants are asked to review their own well-being whilst considering and undertaking an international experience with over half indicating that this had not been a concern for them (section 4.1, figure 4.1.4), with just one focus group participant concerned about travel at night whilst abroad. A further point noted by the focus group (section 4.2), was the ease in which they can keep in touch with friends and relatives whilst away using technology, thereby keeping a link with personal familiarities and noted previously, remaining in a personal comfort zone (section 5.4). As most participants (91.4% - section 4.1, figure 4.1) travelled to European destinations or Turkey, where the time difference is one to three hours ahead of the UK and telecommunications, including the availability of wi-fi are well developed, communication does not pose a significant difficulty for participants. Countering this view was one mature student- from the focus group who comments how “ I enjoyed being away from friends and relatives within the UK” whilst undertaking an international experience. This participant was specifically taking a view that it would not be as easy to be contacted whilst away from home and they could relinquish their usual adult responsibilities for a short while, whilst focussing on the international experience. As a mature student this participant has a different set of external pressures than most other younger undergraduate participants. These pressures could be caring for children or older relatives and financial, for example, payment of loans or a mortgage. It may well have been more difficult for this mature student to detach from their personal usual day-to-day responsibilities and at the same time participate in an international experience.

Fox (2017) writes extensively about the experience of distance and isolation, acknowledging how students experience "distance in a unique way" and identifies that geographical difference may cause feelings of homesickness, problems progressing in a placement and/or concerns about physical and emotional safety. Distance may have been of more concern for participants with less experience of travelling abroad, or as mentioned in the example above, may view it as an opportunity to escape from responsibilities for a short while and to experience something new. Sections 5.6 and 5.8 discuss how participants at University A may have a deficit of social capital because of the socio-economic area from which most participants are drawn, with low levels of social mobility (section 1.3). Reay (2004) suggests there is a link between social capital and the level of one's confidence. Given the profile of the student intake of University A, (section 1.3), this could be, as Sullivan (2001 p. 894) notes, an example of "serious disadvantage in the competition for educational credentials". Sullivan (2001 p. 894) continues to state how the education system, whilst it may be deemed to possess cultural capital, is not very efficient with "pedagogic transmission". The researcher for this research study accepts Sullivan's (2001) comments about poor pedagogic transmission and acknowledges the difficult task for University A to support development of cultural capital for its undergraduates, which in part involves incentivising undergraduates to consider uptake of an international experience (section 5.5). As previously recognised (section 5.10) there is scope for University A to commence promotion of international experience as an active part of recruitment to its programmes, rather than waiting until undergraduates enrol and start courses. University A can also develop case studies, both written and video, of its undergraduates who participate in an international experience, supporting peer promotion of international opportunities.

5.20 Friendship ties and travel arrangements

Cleak *et al.* (2016), Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) and Sweeney (2012) identify that friendship and relationship ties are a barrier to students' participation in an international experience. Just under a quarter of questionnaire participants (section 4.1, figure 4.1.4) agree that friendship and relationship ties are of some concern to them, however, most of the participants including those participating in the sessions with the focus groups, state that friendship ties are not a barrier to participation. This may be because some participants travel as part of a University A organised short visit abroad. For such participants, the University A organised short visits involve travel as part of a group, including academic staff,

which may provide a greater sense of security and for some, maintaining personal comfort zones, earlier discussed within this chapter (section 5.8). Fox (2017, p512) identify travel in terms of the impact of “distance” on a student, as a barrier to participation in an international experience and note how students can be anxious about what to expect. Fox (2017, p512) notes how “geographical distance” may impact on “the emotional experience of the student”. The focus group discussion (section 4.2) confirms the need for support with travel for some participants and verify the value of organised short visits that University A use, as a method for introducing participants to an international experience, who may not otherwise participate. Field notes reveal that some participants who had first participated in a University A short university organised visit, later returned for a longer period of independent study exchange or work-experience abroad. For this group of participants, the benefits of participation in an international experience are realised (sections 5.5, 5.6 and 5.9) because of the direct actions of University A staff including, promoting experiences, financial support available and organising short visits.

5.21 Accommodation

As regards accommodation, one focus group participant comments about not wanting to stay in “typical hostel style” accommodation, which is associated as being used by “school parties”. It is considered that this participant is seeking accommodation of a familiar quality standard. The researcher for this research study considers that such a standard of accommodation would enable this participant to remain more within a personal comfort zone, rather than widening the experience. A further consideration is the value of an international experience which can be questioned in cases where a participant is staying in accommodation that is superior to that which is the norm for local residents of the host country (and indeed may vary greatly depending on the location country for the international experience) with a participant essentially seeking an international experience within the same parameters as their own UK lifestyle. However, in the case of group international experience visits organised by University A, field notes evidence that educational travel agents used by University A will have selected accommodation which meets a set threshold for health and safety, as University A demands, as part of its supplier procurement process. Cleak *et al.* (2016) highlight, accommodation is a major consideration for students. The researcher for this research study considers that if accommodation is not typical of the host country, then whilst enabling a participant to stay within their own

comfort zone (section 5.4), it may not support broadening and enhancing cultural capital in the way that was intended by participation in an international experience. This research study acknowledges that accommodation alone is not the only method by which participants develop cultural awareness. The opportunity to travel abroad and immerse oneself in an international sensory experience, for example, navigating a town or city abroad, using local public transport and/or attending a university or work placement abroad, exposes participants to many other opportunities to develop cultural awareness and cultural capital. This research study evidences that participants highly value the opportunity for personal challenge and to be away from familiar comfort zones, immersing in a different culture, when considering participation in an international experience (section 4.1, table 4.1.2)

5.22 Support for international experience

Maginnis *et al.* (2017, p. 348) recommend that academic staff deliver pre-departure briefings with an emphasis on “the inclusion of cultural norms and beliefs” to support students with adapting to “culture shock”. This research study evidences that the provision of pre-departure briefings is particularly important for University A participants because some have a deficit in cultural capital, as earlier described in this chapter (sections 5.6 and 5.8) and many participants reside within an area identified by The Social Mobility Index as being an entrenched social mobility cold spot (section 5.3). Lough (2009, p. 473) also recommends the need for pre-departure briefings to “correctly frame students’ expectations” and to support later reflection and discussion meetings. Conroy *et al.* (2019) and Dunlap *et al.* (2017) both identify a lack of preparation guidance and support for students, recommending that available support is widened to cover different stages of the process of international experience, to include pre-departure; post-arrival; repatriation. As noted in section 5.22 of this chapter, University A does provide some support for its undergraduates, through provision of promotional talks by University A staff and access to a financial support fund and a requirement for supporting undergraduates at University A to enable their participation in an international experience is an emergent theme from this research study. Field notes (section 4.3) confirm that support from University A includes the provision of pre-departure briefings focussing on Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) country travel advice and major cultural differences. The provision of a pre-departure briefing for participants is an important element of preparation for travel, aiming to minimise culture shock (Maginnis *et al.*, 2017). The researcher for this research study

opines that enhanced support is necessary to open international experience opportunities to University A undergraduates and to remove barriers such as finance (section 5.15) and language (section 5.16) to participation. This research study agrees with the work of Crozier *et al.* (2009) who identify a need for universities to be more flexible with the support they provide to working class widening participation students, so that this group of students can better take advantage of university pedagogy and way of life. Crozier *et al.* (2009) cite a need for universities to make this change, rather than an expectation that the student will change. Reay (2012 p. 9) identifies a "persistence of social class inequalities within mass higher education" with this impacting on a "relative lack of support for students from working class backgrounds". Reay (2012) cites the need for this group of students to work during the summer period, which impacts on their reduced ability to participate in summer internships and volunteering abroad. This research study evidences that University A participants are better able to realise the benefits of an international experience (sections 5.5, 5.6 and 5.9) because of the direct actions of University A staff in promoting experiences and the financial support available. However, (sections 5.15 and 5.16), there is scope for improved delivery of messages to undergraduates considering participation in an international experience to be aware of the support, financial and other, available at University A.

University A states an aim of promoting participation in an international experience with a target of 20% undergraduate participation in such an experience (section 4.3). Noble *et al.* (2009 p. 591) note how "variations in cultural capital contribute to social class differences in levels of participation" and as earlier stated (sections 5.6 and 5.8) this research study considers that some undergraduate entrants at University A may have a deficit of cultural capital with international travel. University A takes direct action by enhancing support for its undergraduates, encouraging participation in an international experience. The impact of this could be, for a high percentage of participants responding to the questionnaire (section 4.1.), do not identify any lack of support from University A (section 4.1, figures 4.1.4 and 4.1.5). It is implied that University A identifies a need to continue this support once undergraduates are enrolled on its provision, at least to ensure that a proportion of its undergraduates have an opportunity to consider participation in an international experience. As previously noted, (sections 5.15 and 5.16), universities usually provide a range of opportunities for undergraduates to develop personal cultural capital. However, in the case of University A, support and encouragement for undergraduates to take part in an international experience facilitates further development of personal cultural capital (section

5.4) and aspirational capital (section 5.6). It is recognised that University A may provide other opportunities through which these personal developments can be achieved, for example career related activities and UK placements. However, such opportunities may not form part of every undergraduate student's programme of study.

5.23 Format of international experience and placement set-up

The HEA (2014) discusses how setting up international placements can present both a challenge and anxiety for students and this is exacerbated by language and cultural differences. When undergraduates travel as part of a university organised small group visit, undergraduates do not have the challenge of identifying and setting up a work-experience placement and/or a study abroad exchange. It is apparent from the findings of this research study that there is scope for University A to improve support for its undergraduates undertaking an international experience, and this is an emerging theme from this research study (section 5.2.5). 40% of participants express some concern (30%) or extremely concerned (10%) (figure 4.1.4) about organisation of an international experience. Support could include areas such as cultural awareness, as Campbell and Walta (2015) recommend; improvements to pre-departure classes as Conroy *et al.* (2019) and Dunlap *et al.* (2017) discuss; with field notes for this research study evidencing that University A only routinely provides pre-departure meetings for participants engaging in a short, organised group international visit. One participant for this research study, when directly asked about the extent to which University A offers preparation support for international experience, describes the process as "unorganised" and "not delivering as much as expected" (figure 4.1.4). However, overall, participants score University A 3.06 out of 4 when asked about the preparation received for an international experience. This research study evidences that whilst University A is providing some pre-departure support for participants undertaking an international experience, there is scope for more to be done, particularly undergraduates who are not participating in a short, organised group international experience (figure 4.1.5). University A should review its processes for organising all international experiences, as it is evident that the participants for this research study, identify concern in this area with 26.67% of participants citing a lack of support from University A as of some concern.

Given the contextual setting of University A (Section 1.3) consideration could be given to offering international experience of short durations, as noted by Waters (2023 p. 317) who

identifies that disadvantaged students are more attracted to mobility which is of a shorter duration and that shorter duration visits abroad, from one week upwards, are now part of many universities "study abroad" offerings. Waters (2023) notes how the new UK Government Turing Scheme, which has a strong focus on supporting disadvantaged students, offers financial support for shorter periods of mobility than its predecessor ERASMUS programme. Waters (2023 p. 316) opines that by reducing the minimum period required for funding of outbound mobility, the Turing Scheme aims to "widen participation" in international exchange. However, Waters (2023 p. 316) acknowledges that at this present point in time "no comparison [data] is available with outcomes for students who go abroad for a longer duration". Waters (2023 p. 319) moots that because "working class students" are less likely to "leave home to attend university" it "therefore follows that [they] are more likely to avoid study abroad". Waters (2023 p. 319) opines that this may be "avoidance of risk" or because of responsibilities such as caring for someone else or childcare. Waters (2023 p. 319) argues that this group of students may be more willing to consider shorter term periods of mobility.

University A uses a concept of "informal linkage", Fox *et al.* (2018 p. 7) describes this as "the most commonly used method for international field placements" with a student required to source a placement, followed by university agreement. Fox *et al.* (2018 p. 13) describe formalised exchange agreements between universities which are typically "enshrined in a memorandum of understanding or other legal documentation" and "can be reciprocal with students exchanging their study programme regularly, between the two universities". In the case of University A, field notes (section 4.3) identify formal inter-institutional agreements exist with other ERASMUS member institutions, facilitating study exchanges. Study participants in a formal study exchange, undertaking an international experience through the ERASMUS programme, benefit from these formalised agreements which ensure alignment of study modules and allow for ease of transfer of study credits between institutions. However, at the time of this research study the UK is ending its membership of the European ERASMUS programme. UK universities now need to investigate setting up their own independent agreements with other international universities, to facilitate student international study mobility in the future. Field notes (section 4.3) confirm that University A is now undertaking this work. Of importance when considering formalised exchange agreements, as Fox *et al.* (2018) describe, is the alignment of academic processes and procedures to support student mobility, for example the transfer of credits when a student undertakes a period of study exchange abroad. The Bologna Declaration (section 2.3.1)

supports globalisation and internationalisation of HE, making mobility for staff and students across Europe a much easier process. This is not necessarily the case globally and as the UK moves towards launching the Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) as its global student mobility vehicle, there could be future issues for universities on a local basis with the alignment of programme dates and credit transfer to enable student study exchanges. University A participants in this research study benefit from the formal structure of inter-institutional agreements, as this research study evidences in field notes (section 4.3) and earlier described in this section. The research findings evidence that promotion and support by University A staff (figure 4.1.5 and section 4.2) promote a range of international experiences for the participants of this research study. Without this formalised approach, by University A staff, the range of international experiences and financial support may not have been possible.

5.24 Supervision of international experience placements

Supervision of placement by University A is a matter of some concern for one quarter of survey participants of this research study (section 4.1 table 4.1.3). Cranston *et al.* (2020), Crossman *et al.* (2010) and Jones *et al.* (2018) cite the importance of supervision with international placements and pre departure support. The provision of support across a wide variety of areas for undergraduate students at University A, to enable their participation in an international experience is identified as an emergent theme from this research study (section 5.2.5). Cleak *et al.* (2016) identify inadequate supervision as a barrier to participation in an international experience (section 2.18). As earlier noted, (section 5.23) participants score University A 3.06 out of 4 when asked about the preparation received for an international experience. However, 4.34% of participants state some concern (36.67%) or extreme concern (6.67%) about problems setting up a placement or work experience. A system of informal linkage (Fox *et al.*, 2018) where a student sources and sets up their own placement, is the practice University A employs (section 5.23) and may be the reason for this level of concern by the research participants of this research study. One of the participants in this research study had undertaken a work placement independently sourced and set up in South Africa, through contact with a charitable organisation offering volunteering placements for undergraduates. University A did make additional Health and Safety checks for this placement, which included contact with the placement provider before travel, asking questions about the location of the experience and travel from the airport to

the camp provider. Field notes (section 4.3) confirm that University A wanted to ensure that FCDO country travel advice was adhered to. In addition, a specific country orientated pre-departure briefing was provided with several telephone-based checks made with the participant during their time abroad, to check on personal well-being. However, for other participants who organised self-sourced placements within Europe and Turkey, there was not always direct contact with the placement provider, or checks made with participants whilst abroad (although necessary ERASMUS paperwork was completed before and after the outward mobility). There is scope for University A to improve the quality of supervision for participants undertaking an international experience, for example, increasing the frequency of supervision contact with participants. Chipchase *et al.* (2012) and Mayer (2002 p. 120) consider international placement supervision important. More frequent supervision of participants, together with a de-briefing evaluation of an international experience, by University A staff, following return to the UK would meet the expectations that Mayer (2002) identifies including opportunities for the consolidation of learning. As previously discussed earlier (section 2.6.5 and section 5.10) the recently launched UK Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) provides specific organisational financial support which could be used by University A to enhance contact with its participants whilst they are abroad.

5.25 Preparation for international experience

Several authors discuss requirements for HEIs to prepare students for international experience. This provision of support is an emergent theme from the findings of this research study (section 5.2.5). Razack (2002) cites a requirement for the formalising of arrangements, Campbell and Walta (2015), Dunlap *et al.* (2017) and Lough (2009), discuss the need for universities to deliver pre-departure support for students travelling internationally (section 2.6.2). Bai *et al.* (2022) note, correctly setting student expectations and avoiding a mismatch of expectations, can also help to reduce incidence of culture shock for students travelling internationally. University A provides pre-departure briefings to participants ahead of planned travel, (section 5.22). Overall, survey participants score University A very highly (section 4.1 figure 4.1.5) for preparing them for an international experience. Focus group participants were asked what more University A could have done to prepare them for an international experience (section 4.2), with some participants suggesting further meetings to develop a knowledge of the area in which the international experience takes place. For some queries about a local area, participants could have found

out this information for themselves, particularly given the level of learning as undergraduates. Providing all information for participants and leaving very little preparation, or even nothing to do before travel, other than pack belongings, participants become merely passive travellers, diminishing learning from the experience. One participant suggests that University A could provide support with the delivery of some basic foreign language teaching, to assist whilst abroad (language as a barrier to participation is discussed earlier in section 5.16). The UK Government Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) recognises the need for linguistic support, however, financial support for the development of linguistic skills is only available to schools and Further Education colleges. Although field notes (section 4.3) confirm University A provides pre-departure briefings for participants, the arrangements for the supervision of participants whilst undertaking an international experience is not known, as this does not form part of this research study. However, this research study recognises, that supervision of the actual international experience is a potential area for further research. Also, it is unknown whether participants received a debriefing after returning from an international experience, which is another area that could be explored through further research. Supervision of placements abroad is important both for checking on the well-being of participants and ascertaining personal ability to adapt to any necessary cultural adjustment, for example navigating a new town or city, holding conversations with local people and purchasing groceries. For some participants adapting to a new culture may mean moving out of a personal comfort zone, which questionnaire participants indicate (section 4.1, tables 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) is a reason for them considering participation, which in turn may increase personal cultural capital and develop transversal skills, as Lopez *et al.* (2020 p. 16), note, to prepare them for the workplace.

5.26 Encouraging greater participation in an international experience

Focus group participants offer a range of suggestions for actions University A can take to improve take-up of international experience (section 4.1). These suggestions are made by participants who are undergraduates, through their eyes and without working experience of a HEI. Sweeney (2012) notes in a publication for the Council for Industry and Higher Education, that often students do not see an international experience as having a future career connection. This is very much the case for all the participants in this research study, who identify cultural benefits, rather than employability benefits when considering participation in an international experience (section 4.1, table 4.1.3). However, this

research study demonstrates that following participation, a range of employability benefits identify as a benefit of participation (section 5.6 and 5.2.3). The findings of this research study strongly agree with, Cleak *et al.* (2016) who identify that an international experience enhances students' employability, with the enhancement of employability as an emergent theme from the findings of this research study (section 5.2.3). The study by Cleak *et al.* (2016) notes that international placements help students to embark on an international career, with broader connections to international experience developing students' flexibility, adaptability and ability to embrace challenge. This research study evidences that the widespread use of English Language at international universities and work-placements is a source of surprise for University A participants (section 4.2). With this discovery, participants' aspirations start to rise as minds open, to the potential of a future career or period of study-exchange abroad.

There is a strong correlation with findings from this research study and the development of factors relating to employability (section 4.1, table 4.1.4 and section 5.2.3), and the work of Izunwa (2021) and the ERASMUS Higher Education Impact Study (2019). Farrugia (2017) notes a link between an international experience and career progression and promotion. Focus group participants for this research study make a strong connection between an international experience and development of personal career intentions (section 4.1, table 4.1.4). A key benefit of participation in this research study is the development of career pathways, along with similar themes of enhancing future employment prospects and meeting other professionals (section 4.1, table 4.1.4). There is a strong connection between improving future career prospects and the desire for universities to promote global citizenship with students, as Torres (2015) notes, and connects the concept of Global Citizenship with an ability to equip people with the skills they need, to take advantage of free trade conditions. As Bosanquet (2010, p. 1) notes, the idea of global citizenship itself connects with terms including "intercultural awareness, cross-cultural competency, globalisation and community engagement". This research study argues, for participants at University A, participation in an international experience enhances employability (section 4.1, table 4.1.4) with participants drawn to an international experience because of a desire to develop personal inter-cultural awareness (section 4.1, table 4.1.2). This, in turn improves both aspirational and cultural capital (section 2.7.2, 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

An important factor in encouraging greater student participation in an international experience, is the desire of HEIs to develop internationally (Parker *et al.*, 2015). In the case of University A, it has a new strategic vision, which incorporates a strand for

internationalisation (launched May 2022 and noted within section 4.3). A new appointment of a Deputy Vice Chancellor, with strategic leadership on internationalisation and global connectivity, now oversees this new internationalisation strategy. As Uzhegova *et al.* (2020) discuss (section 1.4.2) internationalisation is significant to universities and as Zabolotkina (2013) states, students are expected to develop personal employability as part of university level study and be able to apply these skills at an international level. University A, as part of a previously mentioned strategic vision for internationalisation, has a desire to develop internationally and a key part of the internationalisation strategy is to encourage greater numbers of undergraduates to participate in outward study and work-experience abroad. University A has an internal target of 20% participation by its full-time undergraduates (section 4.3) in an international experience, this target pre-dates the launch of a new strategic vision, earlier mentioned in this section.

At the time this research study is completed, the worldwide Covid 19 pandemic (section 2.3.9) continues and impacts on the way in which HEIs manage international study exchanges and placements. Authors (Beltaji, 2020; Fazackerley, 2020; Isherwood, 2020; Kennedy, 2020) describe the curtailment of placements and exchanges abroad for students, with Pelly (2020) citing use of virtual technology for internships (section 1.3) in place of travel abroad. It is not yet clear how HEIs will recover the volume of international experiences, following the Covid 19 pandemic and if there will be any long-term impact on students' international travel plans. This is a potential area for further research.

5.27 Participation rates for international experience

According to Sweeney (2012), only 19% of survey participants consider that they are likely to be involved in any international experience whilst at university. Whereas field notes (section 4.3) reveal that the percentage of undergraduates participating in an international experience at University A, during the academic years 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 was consistently less than 1% of the undergraduate full-time student population. In the case of University A, participation in an international experience is well below the level Sweeney (2012) identifies. Actual participation in international mobility is recorded by Ryan (2021), for UUKI, who state that in 2018-19 international mobility for UK higher education students was 2.1% of the total student population, a small increase from 2.06% during 2017-18 and 1.8% in 2016-17. 2018-19 is noted as the last year of up-to-date available data, as from

2019-20 student mobility is severely disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with many institutions curtailing or cancelling outward student mobility programmes, because of uncertainty around international travel and the pandemic. Ryan (2021) presents data showing that actual mobility is well below the 19% figure as Sweeney (2012) quotes. Whilst it is evident from the Council for Industry and Higher Education report, that many students have the intention of participation, it is apparent that these good intentions do not always convert into actual participation. Sections 5.15, 5.16, 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20 and 5.21 of this chapter discuss perceived barriers to participation faced by students and it is implied that lack of support to overcome these barriers leads to a far greater reduced actual participation rate in an international experience.

Low participation in international experience by University A undergraduates could be because of the socio-economic setting of University A, (section 1.3) and because University A does not advertise many courses with an embedded international year and/or international placement year. As a relatively small number of undergraduates participate in an international experience during their time at University A, the number discussing and promoting this experience to their peers is small. Participants of this research study, according to the findings from the focus group (section 4.2) are dependent on University A to introduce an opportunity for an international experience and to offer support with the necessary organisation of this experience. However, (sections 5.8), the greatest number of UK outward mobilities are for students studying a particular range of subjects, (languages; medicine and dentistry; veterinary science) according to UUKI (2017) (Table 2.3.5.1). Given the very high percentage of outward mobilities that are undertaken in subject areas not on offer by University A, it is not surprising that the percentage of active mobilities at University A is much lower than the average figure Sweeney (2012) quotes. Indeed, as previously noted (section 4.3) actual participation at University A is consistently <1% of the undergraduate student population in the three years preceding this research study. However, even given promotion of international experience by University A, it is evident that the number of undergraduates participating in an international experience remains low and below the 19% participation rate Sweeney (2012) identifies.

5.28 Frivolous travel

Nigel Topping, UK High-Level Climate Action Champion, addressed the British Council Going Global 2021 conference plenary session, describing the origins of the global 'Race to Zero' campaign and informed universities how, in practical terms, they can mobilise and accelerate actions on climate change, beyond the Conference of Parties (COP) 26. (COP26 is the annual United Nations climate conference). Conference delegates were informed that Race to Zero, has been signed by 624 higher and further education institutions, representing 8 million students. Signatories commit a three-point plan; mobilising more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation; a pledge to reach net-zero by 2030 or 2050 at the very latest; increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curriculum, campus and community outreach programmes. During a period of discussion following Nigel Topping's formal presentation, the concept of "frivolous travel" was introduced, where a question was asked as to how we should balance a desire to travel with the need to be more sustainable? Nigel Topping suggests that "we have to commit to an end to frivolous travel. We have to really ask the question whether the reason for a one-week field trip to the other side of the world is justified in terms of learning outcomes or is it just a glorified holiday?". However, Nigel Topping acknowledges "we cannot deny the unbelievable educational benefit of travelling and of meeting people from different cultures". In the context of this research study, participants identify a range of personal benefits, including improving confidence; developing knowledge and skills; personal and professional enrichment; developing a clearer idea of a future career goal (discussed earlier in sections 5.3, 5.4 and 5.6 of this chapter). McCollum (2023) discusses how universities have been keen advocates of actions to address climate change and that they often have their own high level institutional sustainability agendas. However, at the same time McCollum notes how HE is dependent on the recruitment of international students, with over 600,000 in the UK. Mc Collum (2023), agreeing with Nigel Topping, questions the environmental consequences of international activity in the UK HE sector, in particular how the use of air travel generates carbon.

As previously discussed within this chapter, without support and encouragement from staff at University A, many of the participants in this research study would not have participated in an international experience. It is strongly implied that participation in an international experience provides this group of participants with an opportunity to develop both aspirational and cultural capital (section 5.5), through improvement of social mobility, which

in turn, enables the advancement of personal employability skills and supports the development of global citizenship. McGladdery *et al.* (2017) argues that travel is essential to allow students to develop global mindedness. For the participants of this research study, travel is much needed and anything but “frivolous” and as Nigel Topping earlier in this section acknowledges, the international experiences provide educational benefit for the research study participants, notably improving inter-cultural awareness (section 4.1, table 4.1.2) and in enhancing aspects of employability (section 4.1, table 4.1.4). A virtual experience provides an insight, but it is not able to deliver a sensory experience that physical travel allows, rather, participants need to imagine themselves at the travel destination. Whilst a virtual experience may be unique for an individual, such an experience will lack natural authenticity, will not be able to provide interaction with surroundings and will inhibit wider natural discovery, that is so much part of physical travel. Only through physical travel is it possible to both see new things and benefit from sensory experience.

However, it may be argued by some, that placements for undergraduates can be undertaken in different UK regions, rather than needing to travel abroad. Whilst undergraduates may gain skills and knowledge relevant to an employment sector from UK based placements, the rich opportunity, present in an international experience, developing intercultural understanding and skills; developing as a global citizen; gaining an understanding of an employment sector from an international perspective, is not available in a UK based experience. As earlier noted within section 2.4.4 several key authors including Attrill *et al.* (2019) and Martel (2020) cite a key benefit of international experience as sharing inter-cultural knowledge and practice and improving understanding of different groups of people and how they live and work. This international experience provides for specific enhancement of cultural capital in the areas of inter-cultural awareness and potential for development of a career internationally.

A key objective of the Turing Scheme (2021) (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) is to support a Global Britain by providing an opportunity for students to undertake work-experience placements and study abroad globally. It is the case that the current government agenda is supporting a greater number of international experiences, in contrast to the agenda of Nigel Topping as UK High-Level Climate Action Champion. In the week prior to the COP 26 conference (December 2021) the UK government confirmed allocation of budget to support the Turing Scheme for the next three years in its Spending Review 2021, increasing funding allocation by 10% for the Turing Scheme’s second year of operation. Data released by the Turing Scheme during November 2021 shows that students from over 370 funded

organisations from across the UK will travel to take part in more than 41,000 placements in over 150 destinations during the 2021 – 2022 academic year (the first academic year of the Turing Scheme). Nigel Evans MP speaking at a UK – Viet Nam Education Collaboration Forum held in London during June 2022 reminds delegates that the UK Government Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) is part of the UK government Global Britain strategy. Nigel Evans MP comments that during Brexit the UK has been “outwardly looking around the world”, but now that the UK is in a post-Covid era the “UK can get on with it”. Such a commitment suggests that the UK government is committing to facilitating international experience for students, as a key part of its Global Britain and levelling up strategies.

It is difficult to put a numerical value on the benefits of an international experience. The researcher for this research study argues, that if as Nigel Topping notes within this section, there are no gains other than just the travel experience alone, then the experience is rather frivolous. However, as this research study argues and notes earlier within this section, the experience provides aspirations and connections to international employment (section 5.2.3); increases social capital through new connections and enhances cultural capital, (section 5.2.1) develops new skills and experiences, from spending time abroad; provides for the development of aspirational capital (section 5.2.2); develops global mindedness (section 5.2.4), then it has a much higher value than Nigel Topping advocates. Professor Peter Francis (2023) shares this view and advocates student mobility, stating that “mobility is critical for lived experiences”. The researcher for this research study argues that it is only by travelling that the participants of this research study can realise the benefits of an international experience (as evidenced in section 4.1, table 4.1.4 and discussed in sections 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 of this chapter). There is potential for further research discovering how an international experience benefits or fails to benefit University A participants in the early years of the participants’ careers.

This chapter presents the emergent themes of this research study, which are, development of cultural and aspirational capital; enhancement of employability; development of global mindedness; support for undergraduates participating in an international experience and critically reflects and synthesises findings with relevant literature, drawing out significance implications from the research data.

Support for undergraduate participation in an international experience at University A is central to all themes, as without this support, participation and the subsequent realisation of benefits would not be possible. Support and promotional activity by University A staff

makes the international experience happen (section 5.2.5). Through undertaking an international experience, undergraduate students at University A develop personal cultural capital (section 5.2.1); employability skills (section 5.2.3) and through seeing a career sector in an international context, can develop aspirational capital (section 5.2.2). Each of these emergent themes, cultural capital; employability; aspirational capital contributes to the development of a student as a global citizen (section 5.2.4).

6. Conclusions

This chapter uses the advice of Rudestam and Newton (2001) as a guide and includes their suggestions, that a conclusions chapter should contain sections covering an overview of significant findings, consideration of research findings within the theoretical context of the literature and limitations of the study. However, this chapter will also include other sections which the researcher believes are pertinent to this research study. Therefore, this chapter commences with an overview of the significant findings, and also views them from an alternative lens. A review of the results within the theoretical context of the literature is made, before moving on with a section pertaining to the contribution to knowledge. Then there is an acknowledgement of stakeholder interests in this research study and an overview of dissemination of research findings to date. Following on is the conclusion for methodology and acceptance of limitations in the research design. Finally, this section will conclude with the significance of results and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Overview of significant findings of the study

This research study provides an insight into important aspects of the role and function of an international experience in enhancing the development of undergraduates at University A. The research study examines factors influencing undergraduates' decisions to participate in an international experience and questions if there are barriers to participation for undergraduate students at University A. Is there is a requirement to offer support to undergraduate students at University A, in order to facilitate their participation in an international experience? Data collected for this research study, (sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) uses both quantitative (section 3.7.2) and qualitative (section 3.7.3) research methods and identifies several related benefits to undergraduates at University A, following participation in an international experience. This data identifies that the challenges, understandings and opinions of undergraduates at University A need to be considered to re-examine the benefits of international experience for undergraduates and the pedagogical culture that supports such experiences (discussed in section 2.4.4). It shows that University A, as a post 1992 UK HEI, by introducing its undergraduates to the idea and potential benefits of an international experience, is actively innovating, as Carvalho *et al.* (2020) advocates, to better prepare its students for future employment. The findings of this research study identify that it is the

opportunity to travel and 'get out of their comfort zone' that is the driving force for participation in an international experience for undergraduate students at University A.

Whilst universities expose undergraduates to opportunities to enhance cultural capital, through interaction with activities, personalities and cultures that they have to offer, some undergraduates will be able to achieve more than others. For some groups of undergraduates who may arrive at University A with a deficit of cultural capital (discussed in section 5.5), such undergraduates will require a greater level of support to encourage participation in additional activities commensurate with a higher education environment. Such additional activities may not be credit bearing and form part of a personal formal programme of study. This research study evidences how participation in an international experience, although not considered before commencing an undergraduate degree, impacts positively on the development of cultural capital (section 5.5), the development of employability and aspirational capital (section 5.6) for study participants, all of which are emerging themes from this research study. The research findings evidence that following participation in an international experience, University A students value factors related to employability, such as seeing their career sector in an international context, as a beneficial outcome of their participation.

Through listening to the voices of participants in this research study it is possible to have an understanding of their journey and to identify key transformational benefits associated with an international experience. University A provides opportunities for its undergraduates to enhance their social capital, by introducing the potential of an international experience as part of their time studying in higher education. Some study participants are not aware of the possibility to participate in a University A organised international experience, without the promotional work undertaken by University A staff. University A is working to increase access to cultural capital through promotion and provision of University A organised international experience. This research study identifies how some University A participants may have a deficit in respect of cultural capital with regards to international travel (section 5.5). University A's promotional activities for international experience enable their undergraduates to become aware of and consider participation in such an experience.

This research study confirms that participants perceive enhancement of employability as a beneficial outcome of participation in an international experience. This research finds that for participants of the research study, the experience of participation in an international experience impacts positively in terms of developing minds and thinking about their future

career and employability goals (section 5.6), thereby enhancing personal aspirational capital (section 5.6). The findings from this research study align with those of Brooks *et al.* (2016), Cleak *et al.* (2016) and Crossman *et al.* (2010) who all discuss the advancement of employability skills and professional practice as an outcome of international experience.

It is evident that participants do experience challenges from the outset (section 4.1 figure 4.1.4 and section 4.2), for example 75% of participants cite a concern with finance and 43.3% a concern with setting up a placement or work-experience abroad. Challenges are exacerbated often by a lack of underlying support to help overcome obstacles, preventing access to an international experience. The concerns that study participants list are wide ranging and include finance (section 5.15); language (section 5.16); own well-being (section 5.19); setting up a placement abroad (section 5.23); organisation of the experience (section 5.17); travel arrangements (section 5.20); accommodation (section 5.21); health and safety (section 5.18); friendship and relationship ties (section 5.21). A requirement to support undergraduates undertaking a period of international experience, particularly pre-departure, is a strong feature of both the literature and research findings for this research study (as earlier discussed in section 5.25).

This research study by focussing on the outcomes of an international experience for undergraduates, provides a different perspective on the internationalisation of higher education, with “demonstrable evidence of impact”, for involving higher education students in international activity (Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023 p.17). This research study reconceptualises the meaning and purpose of international experience for undergraduates at University A. As Mittelmeier *et al.* (2023) note research pertaining to “internationalisation with students as partners is limited” and this study adds to that body of knowledge, within the context of University A, developing a case for ensuring that all higher education undergraduates, regardless of the type of institution they attend should have equal access to a wide variety of international experiences, to support development of their cultural and aspirational capital; employability skills; global citizenship. It is the responsibility of universities, not only to ensure that such opportunities are available for undergraduates, but to put in place the support that students require to access these opportunities.

The themes that have emerged from this research study are, development of cultural and aspirational capital; enhancing employability and career goals; the need for University A to provide support, particularly pre-departure support for its undergraduates; a desire to promote and develop global mindedness.

6.2 Findings viewed from an alternative lens

As noted in section 5.1, this research study views findings through the lens of cultural and aspirational capital (sections 5.5 and 5.6). As part of reflexivity, an awareness of alternative views has been considered and is acknowledged within this section. This section will present findings viewed through an alternative lens.

A positive shift in the significance of employability following a period of international experience is an unexpected outcome from this research study. Prior to the study commencing, it was not anticipated that statements relating to employability (adding value to a CV; distinguishing self from peers who will graduate with the same qualification) to rate lower than other statements when participants are asked about the extent to which a variety of factors are important when considering participating in an international experience. However, there are a wide variety of other barriers to student participation, (section 2.6.5), including as Sweeney (2012) notes, student diffidence (e.g. levels of confidence); lack of confidence in language skills; friendships, relationships and language concerns; financial considerations; housing considerations; the need for information to be provided early enough for students to consider and act upon, which may have prevented the participation of undergraduates from this group. It is recommended there is a further opportunity for research to investigate barriers to participation in an international experience.

The statements 'to immerse myself in a different culture' and 'to challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone' are the highest scoring influencers in participants' decisions to participate in an international experience. Several authors (Brooks, 2011; Campbell and Walta, 2015; Kauffmann *et al.*, 1992; Ozek, 2009; Sweeney, 2012) discuss culture and challenging oneself as important outcomes of participation in an international experience. However, participants do not discuss these factors as influencers of a decision to participate. As most of the participants' travel in this research study, is to Europe and Turkey (91.4%) and not to inter-continental destinations, it is unusual that factors including culture and challenge rate highly as influencers of a decision to participate.

Participants score University A 3.06 out of 4 (76.5%) for the support for an international experience, when asked this question on its own. This could be considered a good rating with no further action required. However, when participants are provided with a list of identified barriers to participation, drawn from the literature (section 4.1, figure 4.1.4) a different picture emerges and it is evident that this overall figure masks variance across a

range of factors including finance (75% some concern or extremely concerned), language skills (50% some concern or extremely concerned), problems with setting up a placement or work-experience (43.3% some concern or extremely concerned), own well-being (41.9% some concern or extremely concerned) and organisation of the experience (40% some concern or extremely concerned). Areas of least concern are friendships and relationships whilst away (77.4%), lack of support from University A (73.3%), health and safety (70.9%), distance from home and isolation (67.7%) and accommodation (67.7). When viewing these findings from an alternative lens it is evident that at top level, there is a good degree of participants' satisfaction, with little need for additional support. Drilling down beneath this figure exposes a very different picture, which suggests a great need for support in some areas. Viewing from an alternative lens it could be considered that as higher education undergraduates, this group of participants should be able to work independently and creatively to overcome challenges and undertake an international experience. From an alternative lens it may further be viewed that in providing solutions to every problem this devalues the experience and associated learning.

6.3 Research results within the theoretical context of literature

This research study compares well with existing literature. Bourdieu (1973:1977) introduces the development of cultural capital with his work remaining relevant today, influencing analysis of cultural capital and as Vryonides (2007), discusses and notes, a connection between social capital and cultural capital as a method of extending knowledge of how the education system works and thereby increases choice. Gripsrud *et al.* (2011), discuss cultural gaps and the passing down of educational knowledge by parents. Brown (1995) notes a change in the demographics of work with a decline in traditional manual work and an increase in demand for job roles requiring scientific and technical knowledge. Authors (Bennett *et al.*, 2004; Levitas, 2004; Prieur *et al.*, 2013; Sullivan, 2001) agree that there is a link between skills acquisition and the education system which has an impact depending on the social status a person perceives. This research study suggests that there is a link with the participants of this research study, to the development of personal cultural capital. As Sullivan (2001) notes, agreeing with the work of Bourdieu (1973:1977), lack of cultural capital can make it more difficult for those from lower-class backgrounds to succeed in the education system, therefore, encouraging undergraduates to participate in an international experience, as a means of further developing personal cultural capital, can be an important

aspect of University A's work. The work of Bourdieu (1973:1977), is still relevant to participants in this research study, who without support and encouragement from University A staff, were not aware of opportunities to participate in an international experience and indeed, then choosing to participate in such an experience. The implication of this, is that this group of participants would lose out on an opportunity for personal development and cultural capital. As previously mentioned, (section 5.8), Sweeney (2012) notes how non-Russell Group universities offer students less opportunities and information about work, study or volunteering abroad than Russell Group universities. If University A did not offer its undergraduates support, this divide would be widened yet further.

This research study demonstrates that following participation in an international experience, a range of employability benefits including developing a clearer idea of career goals and development of career ambition, are more strongly identified as a benefit of participation. Crossman *et al.* (2010) express a view that the responsibility for the development of graduate employability skills rests solely with students. Several authors cite the development of employability following a period of international experience including Brooks *et al.* (2016), Cleak *et al.* (2016), Teichler (2001), Crossman *et al.* (2010), Yashima (2010) and Pence *et al.* (2008). In particular, the findings of this research study concur with the work of Cleak *et al.* (2016) who identify international placement experience as improving employability. The findings from this research confirm a link to the importance of employability skills with the development of participants' aspirational capital (section 2.7.2). Aspirational capital (section 2.7.2) is developed in the form of career ambition as participants, following their travel, formulate future career opportunities within their future employment sector.

This research evidences that almost half of the research study participants agree that University A can do more to support its undergraduates to participate in an international experience. A range of authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Chinnappan *et al.*, 2009; Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009; Maginnis *et al.*, 2017; Spooner-Lane *et al.*, 2013) discuss the importance of adequately preparing students for an international experience and in particular, the use of pre-departure briefings to enhance participants' cultural awareness and adaptability. This research study identifies a need for University A to enhance the support it provides for participants engaging in an international experience across a number of areas, including finance (section 5.15); foreign language skills (section 5.16); own well-being (section 5.19); setting up a placement (section 5.23); organisation of the experience (section 5.17); travel arrangements (section 5.20); accommodation (section

5.21); physical and emotional safety (section 5.21); health and safety (section 5.18); managing friendships and relationships whilst abroad (section 5.21). Conroy *et al.* (2019) recommend that HEIs must provide support across all stages in the international experience process, pre-departure, post-arrival and repatriation. Suggestions for the way in which University A enhances pre-departure support for its participants in an international experience are made earlier (section 6.1).

Several authors (O'Rourke *et al.*, 2004; Reich, 1998; Spring, 2008; Svensson *et al.*, 2010) note a lack of agreed definition for the term globalisation. Participants in this research study describe how they are made aware of opportunities to participate in an international experience because of promotional work from University A staff. Mayo *et al.* (2018) discuss how there is a responsibility for educators to encourage students to explore cross cultural business practices. Eluwole *et al.* (2020) and McGladdery *et al.* (2017) introduce a concept of international edu-tourism, describing this as developing global learning and cultural awareness. Ciu (2016) and McGladdery *et al.* (2017) consider that to develop global mindedness, students must travel abroad and move out of a personal comfort zone. The findings from this research study indicate that by participating in an international experience, the participants of this research study understand that they are moving out of a personal comfort zone (section 4.1, table 4.1.3, 94% somewhat agree or strongly agree).

The participants of this research study (section 4.2) express positive surprise when discovering the widespread use of English Language in the higher education institutions abroad. Vogtel *et al.* (2016) cites use of a common language, as a benefit of the Bologna Declaration because it makes student mobility easier to facilitate across borders and nations, where different languages prevail. The participants of this research study become aware of the possibility of a semester-exchange or work experience abroad that is possible by the recognition of academic study and reforms to higher education systems that the Bologna Process encourages.

6.4 Contribution to knowledge

This research study seeks to investigate *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?* The research study findings demonstrate the potential of University A to promote and support international experience to develop the cultural and aspirational capital of its undergraduates. This research study introduces a

theme of aspirational capital outside its traditional context (Basit, 2012; Straubhaar, 2013; Yosso, 2005), introducing this concept into the arena of undergraduate international experience at University A. This research study confirms connections between international experience at University A and the development of employability, noted by several authors (Akkari, 2019; Ciu, 2016; McGladdery *et al.*, 2017; Perry, 2013; Rhodas, 2011) and with the development of global mindedness, cited by (Akkari, 2019; Ciu, 2016; McGladdery *et al.*, 2017; Perry, 2013; Rhodas, 2011). Findings from this research study further evidence a requirement for University A to support its undergraduates through a range of methods to enable them to access benefits from participation in an international experience. This research study consolidates and fills a gap within the existing available literature, noted in the sub-section below and introduces early discussion of the UK Government Turing Scheme.

Literature

Firstly, the available literature (Chapter 2) provides a foundation and grounding for this research study, building on available published work since the 1990s and providing a comprehensive resource considering the context of UK outward student mobility, drawing out some of the key implications for HE providers, academics and other professionals supporting engagement of students in an international experience. This research study confirms previous research and extends on the knowledge already available, for example, identification of a range of perceived barriers to student participation in an international experience. This research study fills a gap in the existing literature by discussing international experience in the context of an English post 1992 higher education institution. Research findings from this research study align with the work of Souto-Otero *et al.* (2013) in finding that when students consider participating in an international experience, students frequently cite finance as a significant factor. This research study agrees with the range of personal barriers to participation that Sweeney (2012) provides, including a lack of confidence in language skills (section 5.16); friendships and relationships (section 5.21); financial considerations (section 5.15); housing considerations (section 5.21). An outcome of this research study identifies for University A to provide a range of support measures for its undergraduates to enable a greater number to access an international experience. Fox *et al.* (2018), Naffziger *et al.* (2017), and Pretzold *et al.* (2018), acknowledge a need for support to allow higher education students to overcome barriers and access the benefits of

an international experience. This research study agrees with the thinking of Dunlap *et al.* (2017) that University A would benefit from introducing structured pre-departure briefing sessions for its participants in an international experience as a method by which to enhance and provide greater guidance and support for its undergraduates, which in turn will increase personal confidence and the outcomes of the experience abroad.

UK Government Turing Scheme

Adding further to the existing literature, this research study introduces, through discussion, the new UK government Turing Scheme (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4), contributing to early literature discussing the Turing Scheme and its potential impact (noted in section 2.4.4), where there is an existing literature gap, as this area is only just starting to be explored. This research study provides information about how the scheme operates and assesses how the scheme may benefit students undertaking an international experience, in the context of University A (section 1.3). At the time that this research study is taking place the Turing Scheme is new and existing authors are only just starting to discuss this area. As earlier noted, (section 2.6.5) the UK Government pledges to “level up” opportunity across Britain, as the Social Mobility Index (2021 p. 4) cites. The Turing Scheme has a key feature, which is the provision of additional funding for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (for example a household income of less than £25,000, from a care background, an asylum seeker or refugee) and is global in its nature, without the former ERASMUS limiting country membership boundaries. This research study considers that this new scheme may prove to be more beneficial for undergraduates at University A, with its focus on supporting disadvantaged students and enabling financially supported travel to other English-speaking nations. Whilst monitoring the impact of the Turing Scheme, on participation rates for international experience at University A is outside the remit for this research study, it does provide a valuable opportunity for further research.

Addition to existing theoretical base – developing a theme of aspirational capital

Secondly, this research study makes a specific original contribution to knowledge and adds to the existing theoretical basis already available by introducing a theme of the development of aspirational capital for University A participants, as an outcome of participation in an

international experience. The researcher for this research study agrees with Basit (2012 p. 140) who states that “aspirational capital is a fluid concept that we can work with and allows us to explain support and aspirations”. Existing authors discussing aspirational capital (Basit, 2012; Straubhaar, 2013; Yosso, 2005) do so in the context of ethnically diverse groups within compulsory education systems. This research study extends the discussion of aspirational capital by introducing this concept into the context of international experience for undergraduates at University A.

This research study is different from others because it focuses on undergraduates studying in a post 1992 university and therefore adds to the body of knowledge within this particular area, where there is currently little existing published literature. This research study argues that the offer of an international experience by University A, to its undergraduates is one method by which participants may choose to develop personal cultural capital during time at University A. The researcher for this research study aligns with Basit (2012 p. 139), who opines that aspirational capital “is a substitute for cultural and social capital in families where this does not exist”. As previously discussed, (sections 5.5 and 5.6) it is the view of the researcher for this research study that because of the socio-economic context of University A and its high percentage of widening participation undergraduates (section 1.3), some undergraduates arrive at University A with a deficit of cultural capital. This research study identifies that participation in an international experience also develops aspirational capital, which Yosso (2005) notes overlaps with cultural capital. As previously stated, (section 6.4) the concept of the development of aspirational capital within the context of a higher education setting, relating to participation in an international experience, offers a new perspective when comparing to the available existing literature, developing understanding of what aspirational capital is and how it may be applicable to other educational settings.

Aspirational capital

Figure 6.4.1 demonstrating the development of aspirational capital in the context of an international experience, for the participants of this study is shown on the next page.

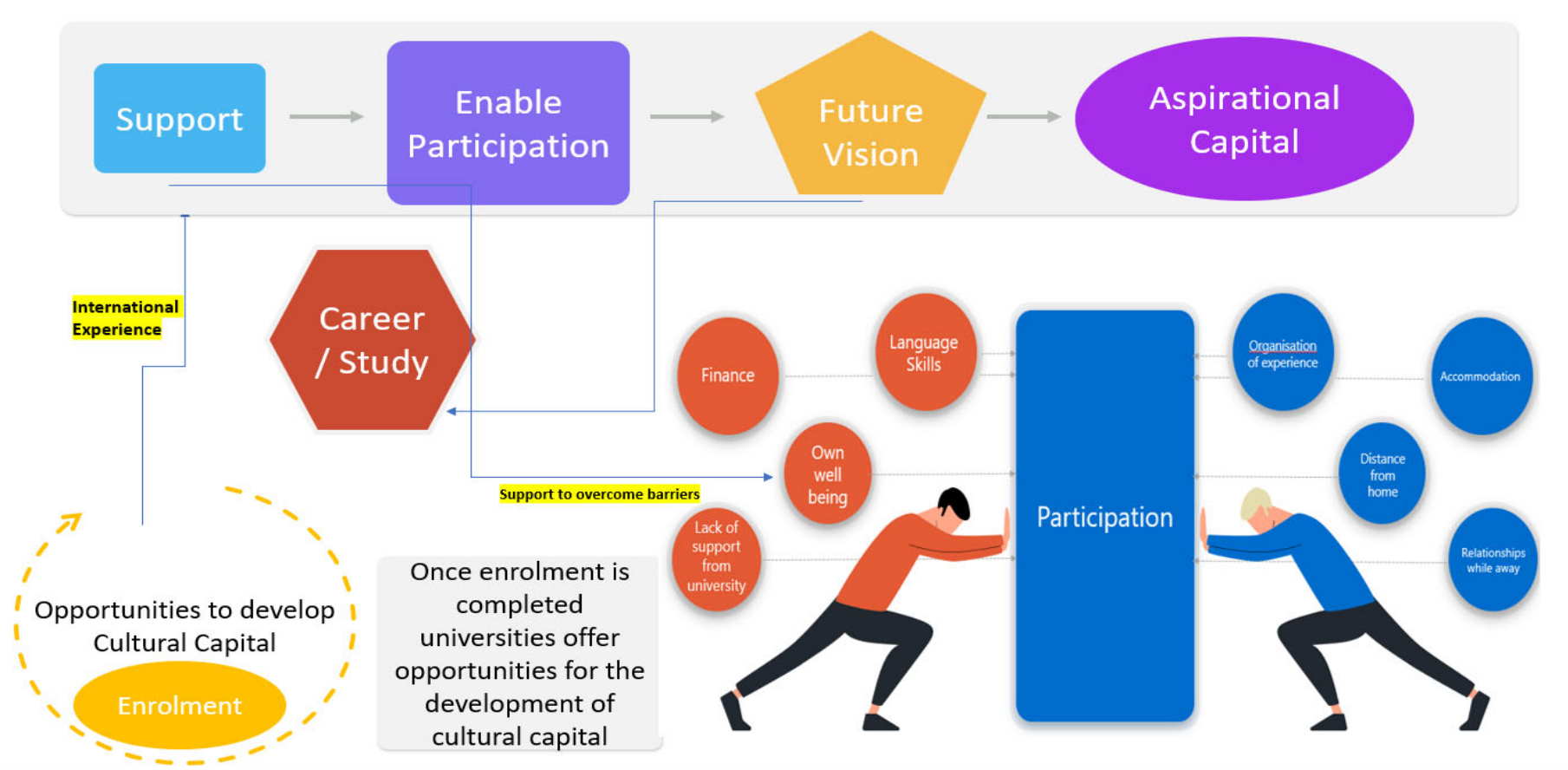


Figure 6.4.1 The development of aspirational capital through participation in an international experience for undergraduate students at University A

Figure 6.4.1 demonstrates the process by which aspirational capital is created through participation in an international experience by undergraduates at University A. By enrolment onto an undergraduate degree at University A, there is a provision of opportunities for participants to develop cultural capital. Participation in an international experience is one such strand by which undergraduates at University A may choose to develop cultural capital. Support is vital to overcome a wide range of barriers and enable student participation in an international experience. Provision of support enables participation, which in turn allows participants from University A to experience and visualise future careers in an international context, which then enables development of aspirational capital and “hopes and dreams for the future” (Yosso, 2005 p. 78; Straubhaar, 2013 p. 99).

There may be generalisable implications from this research study connected to the development of aspirational capital which are transferrable to other educational settings. This is a potential area for further research (section 6.12).

Student support

Thirdly, a significant contribution to knowledge is that this research study demonstrates undergraduates at University A, with lower levels of social capital, will require, from University A staff, a greater level of support and encouragement to consider and ultimately participate in an international experience. Without the involvement and support from University A staff, participants in this research study would be unaware of opportunities to participate in an international experience. This research study demonstrates that undergraduates at University A do not commence study at University A with the intention of participating in an international experience. The nurturing and fostering of support for undergraduates to participate in an international experience at University A is not something that would happen by itself, rather it takes the direct actions of members of staff at University A to bring this to fruition, as the research findings demonstrate (sections 4.1 and 4.2). If this promotion and pre-departure support is not available, these undergraduates may miss out on an international experience and the potential benefits (development of cultural and aspirational capital; enhancement of employability; development of global mindedness) earlier described in this chapter. Necessary support from University A is wide-ranging and may take a variety of different forms including finance; organisation of the experience/placement; travel arrangements; accommodation; language; management of

health and safety; support with own well-being; support with management of friendships and relationships whilst away. However, once this support is in place and undergraduates participate, distance travelled in terms of the benefits they gain from participation are significant and may include improvement of confidence; personal and professional enrichment; development of knowledge and skills; a clearer idea of a future career goal; improvement of inter-cultural awareness.

This research study demonstrates that the value and range of support for undergraduates at University A should not be underestimated. Research findings evidence (sections 5.4 and 5.10) that participants for this research study would not have participated in an international experience without the promotion and pre-departure support that University A provides. The importance of wide-ranging pre-departure preparation, as a finding of this research, aligns with existing authors (Campbell and Walta, 2015; Conroy *et al.* 2019; Dunlap *et al.*, 2017; Lough, 2009).

Enhancement of employability

Fourthly, this research study concurs with the work of authors discussing employability benefits from participation in an international experience (Basit, 2012; Brooks *et al.*, 2016; Cleak *et al.*, 2016; Ozek, 2009; Straubhaar, 2013; Teichler *et al.*, 2001). The findings of this research study (sections 4.1 and 4.2) confirm a connection between the support that University A provides for its undergraduates to participate in an international experience (discussed in the previous section) and an impact on personal career ambition (section 4.2), following travel. For University A participants, engagement in an international experience impacts positively by developing thoughts about future career goals and employability. This research study finds that participation in an international experience for University A participants, also supports development of transversal skills, particularly the development of inter-personal and intra-personal skills, which are highly valued by employers (Skills Education Group, 2019).

Fifthly, this research study confirms a connection between participation in an international experience and the development of global mindedness, discussed by several authors (Akkari, 2019; Ciu, 2016; McGladdery *et al.*, 2017; Perry, 2013; Rhodas, 2011). The development of global mindedness is most evident from focus group discussion (section 4.2) where participants discuss how they have become aware of opportunities available to them outside the UK. University A participants are clear that they had not previously considered future career or study opportunities abroad before participation in an international experience. For University A participants', immersion in an international experience has opened minds to future career and study opportunities in a global context (section 4.1, table 4.1 also discussed in section 5.6 and 5.12).

In summary, this research study contributes to knowledge by bringing together literature from across a range of existing sources to support the research question. This research study supports a gap in the existing literature and introduces discussion of the UK Government Turing Scheme. Discussion of aspirational capital (Basit, 2012; Straubhaar, 2013; Yosso, 2005) is taken from its existing context and introduced as a beneficial outcome for University A undergraduates participating in an international experience. A key requirement for University A is to provide support across a range of areas to enable participation in an international experience. Following participation in an international experience by University A participants, this research study concurs with existing literature citing links from participation in an international experience to employability and the development of global mindedness.

It is recognised that there may be a number of generalisable findings from this research study which could be transferable to other higher education settings including the development of aspirational capital; a requirement to support participants undertaking an international experience; development of employability skills; development of global mindedness. Opportunities for further research exist across these areas to investigate further the generalisability of findings for these areas (section 6.12).

6.5 Stakeholder analysis

There are several stakeholders who are expected to be interested in the findings and contribution to knowledge from this research study. This section identifies and recognises research project stakeholders and determines what interest each stakeholder may have in the outcomes of this research study. The pivotal stakeholder in this research is the researcher for this research study, as the outcome, management and navigation of challenges associated with it, is entirely dependent on the researcher. A further significant stakeholder is the host institution (University A), who provide the resources and opportunities which contribute to the success of this research study. As this research study focuses on undergraduates from University A and *how beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students*, University A may choose to use the research findings to influence its future policies concerning the participation of its undergraduates in an international experience.

When considering the dissemination of findings to stakeholder groups, it is important to acknowledge the diverse nature of the research stakeholder audience. The findings from this research will be shared at conferences (Appendix 3), through publications and additionally by using blogs and social media. Using a range of different media will enable the research findings to better reach the stakeholder groups. Dissemination of findings that has already taken place is noted in section 6.6.

Figure 6.5.1 below provides a summary of stakeholder groups relevant to this research study.

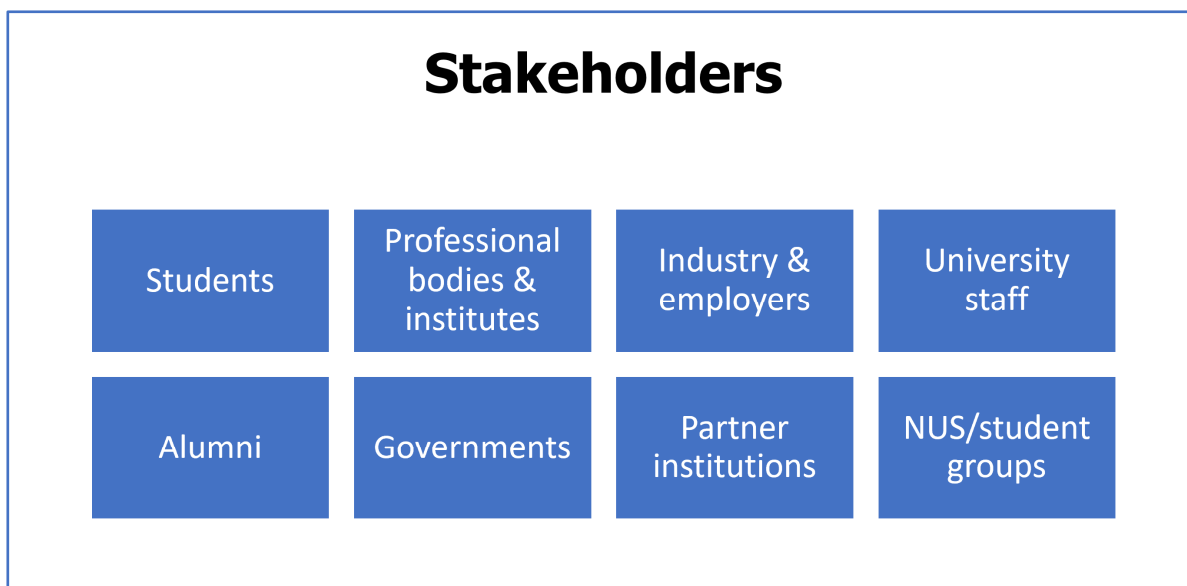


Figure 6.5.1 Identified stakeholder groups

There are several parties that may have a vested interest in the findings from this research study. Students and university staff are directly involved in education and are expected to have an interest in the outcomes of this research study. University staff may be interested in an awareness of the benefits of an international experience when suggesting participation to student groups, as a method for enhancing student experience and learning outcomes. Students are expected to have an interest in the outcome of this study, as they may be considering investment of time and financial resources in an international experience and wish to know about potential personal benefits and the support available to them for participation. NUS and student groups are active participants in education and as such may wish to know if participation in an international experience contributes to the success of the institution and its students who have participated. Together students, NUS and student groups and university staff, as stakeholders in this research may choose to use the findings of this research to better inform future undergraduate students about possibilities, support and benefits of participation in an international experience during their time at university. Alumni who participate in an international experience may also benefit through use of their international experience with future job applications, for example, knowledge of global perspectives and the development of transversal skills. Universities may also wish to access alumni who have participated in an international experience as a source of promotional support for encouraging participation in an international experience for current undergraduates.

Governments, as a stakeholder group, may have provided financial support for undergraduate students to participate in an international experience. The interest of this stakeholder group may be focussed on the outcomes of participation, or to consider finance as a barrier to participation and ascertain what level of financial support, if any, may be provided by central governments. For example, the outcomes of this study may be considered when assessing the impact and future funding for student participation in an international experience (e.g. UK Government, Department for Education Turing Scheme).

Industries and employers and professional bodies and institutes, as stakeholders in this research, may be interested in the development of employability skills as an outcome of this research, particularly transversal soft skills which can be used across a wide range of employment roles. This knowledge may be useful when recruiting graduates. Finally, partner institutions as external stakeholders and likely competitors, may choose to use the findings from this research when developing their own student international experiences, in particular, a requirement for promotion and support for participation and capturing learning and enhancement from student participation in an international experience.

6.6 Dissemination of findings

This research has been disseminated at the British Council Going Global 2021 Conference by way of a poster booth/gallery which operated across the three days of the conference 15th – 17th June 2021 and a speech made during the closing plenary session which took place on 17th June 2021. The conference welcomed 600 delegates from across 73 countries, to discuss the current trends and issues in international education (Appendix 3). This research has also been presented to an educational based research group at University A during April of the 2020/2021 academic year and shared as part of a conference focussing on Inclusive Mobility held by Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, Ghent, Belgium during March 2022. Future plans to disseminate this research include a poster presentation at the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education 2024 conference held during March 2024 in Perth, Western Australia.

6.7 Methodology conclusion and limitations in the research design

6.7.1 Methodology conclusion

The researcher for this research study has explored different methodological approaches, to make an informed choice of which research method is best suited for this research study. The underpinning philosophical thoughts for the research, recognise the study of social phenomena where relationships are complex, as discussed in the philosophical positioning statement (section 3.2). Therefore, as recommended by McChesney (2020) an over-arching interpretivist paradigm is used for this research, to support development of a holistic understanding of the research findings. It is important to use the most appropriate methodological approach which reflects the researcher for this research study's view and cognitive style, having considered a variety of paradigms, whilst at the same time ensuring that the methodological approach taken for this research study, can meet the goal of the research. It is the view of the researcher for this research study, that because this research study involves research with a single group of participants, who have all experienced the phenomenon examined by this research at University A, the choice of an interpretivist paradigm is more appropriate, as it will support understanding of the unique participants' experiences. By allowing for triangulation and extended reflection as recommended by Babones (2015) it has been possible to examine the underlying meaning for responses to each of the quantitative questions.

6.7.2 Shortcomings in research design

This research study does not examine the socio-economic status of the study participants due to required access to highly sensitive data, which did not form part of the initial ethical approval (Appendix 8) for this research study. Future research is recommended to include an analysis of the socio-economic status of participants in greater depth. Additional research is also recommended to investigate the benefits of supervision arrangements for participants of an international experience, including, pre-departure briefing; supervision whilst undertaking an international placement; de-briefing following return from an international experience.

A practical difficulty was experienced with the research study concerning a proportion of the identified target research group who had finished their studies and left University A.

Although contact details were available for this group, they proved less willing to engage in both the survey and the focus group. This could be because in the case of former undergraduates at University A, contact details had become out of date or because this group had moved on with own personal lives and no longer felt as closely connected to University A, therefore less willing to participate in research projects connected with University A. Participation in this research study was voluntary and it could be that those who had left University A and are now working full-time, had too many time constraints, so becoming involved in this research would have become an extra burden.

6.8 Limitations of the study

A limitation of this research study is acknowledged by the researcher, that the findings from this research study may not be the same if the research study is repeated in the context of other UK universities, where the student demographic is significantly different. However, the methodological approach is generalisable, as a similar approach could be adapted and used to repeat the study at other UK higher education institutions, which could provide comparisons against the results found for this research study.

The results of this research study are impacted by limitations. Firstly, the implications of the results of this research study are limited only to the research population which is based at University A and its context (section 1.3), with a potential impact of individual variables, for example, participants own cultural backgrounds. It is acknowledged by the researcher for this research study that the results may change over time. There is potential for further studies to be conducted both at University A, to examine changes over time; to investigate differences between demographics of the identified research population at University A and repeat studies at other UK Higher Education Institutions.

6.9 Significance of results for future research

The initially stated overarching objective of this research study is to investigate *how beneficial university organised international experience is for full-time undergraduate students?* This research study has identified a range of benefits linked to undergraduate participation in an international experience, including a requirement for support pre-

departure, supervision during the experience and post-departure debriefing; development of cultural and aspirational capital; enhancement of employability and career focus; development of global mindedness. Whilst these findings are unique to University A, they have the potential to be used again within a comparison study with another university.

In terms of the initial objectives, this research study adopts a mixed methods approach, employing quantitative research in the form of an electronic questionnaire (Appendix 6) and qualitative research by way of a focus group discussion using semi-structured open-ended questions (Appendix 7). A target group formed from University A undergraduates who have participated in an international experience was identified, with the electronic survey receiving a 38% response rate. A further 10 participants from the identified research target group volunteered to participate in a focus group discussion using semi-structured open-ended questions, with 9 participants attending the discussion. The focus group discussion developed more fully than was expected at times, with a decision made to let the discussion continue, rather than interrupt, allowing for the collection of rich data.

This research study is focussed on a post 1992 university based in a large city, with a particular social context (section 1.3). Such information should prove valuable to similar universities planning development of their own international experience activities and/or evaluating whether it would be feasible to refine or add to arrangements for promoting and managing undergraduate international experiences.

6.10 Recommendations for further research

The rich data gathered from participants in this study has yielded opportunities for further research, for example, links between international experience and employability (section 2.5.8 and 5.11), by surveying participants who completed an international experience as part of their undergraduate experience, at a point in time after their graduation and entry into employment. An opportunity exists to conduct a comparative study for undergraduates who have opted not to participate in an international experience as part of their undergraduate degree programme and to analyse the socio-economic status of participants in greater depth. Further research could include an analysis of demographic factors for participants at University A, as the ethical approval (Appendix 8) provided for this research study did not allow the collection of individual participant personal characteristics as part of the quantitative survey data collection (section 3.11). Potential for further comparative

studies exist by way of a repeated study at University A at a different point in time and/or at another institution.

There are several gaps in knowledge around the socio-economic status of the research study participants, contributing to this research and the impact of support and supervision arrangements at varying points of the international experience participants' journey. Ethical consideration was not requested to reveal data that would enable the identification of each participant's socio-economic grouping. The socio-economic status of participants would benefit from further research, as it may be the case that different socio-economic groups benefit in different ways from participation in an international experience. For example, research could investigate whether undergraduates considering participation in an international experience, as an opportunity to move out of a comfort zone, are participants from widening participation university entrants (section 5.8).

This research study acknowledges the importance of financial support for undergraduates to encourage participation in an international experience and identifies a need for further research examining how financial burdens impact on participation in an international experience (section 5.15 and 5.2.5). At the time that this research study is completed the UK's membership of the European ERASMUS programme is ceasing, with a new UK government Turing Scheme (2021) (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4) coming into existence. The Turing Scheme has a specific remit of widening access, as a key priority, to encourage students from less advantaged backgrounds to spend part of an undergraduate degree overseas. Recommendations for further research are to firstly, investigate whether the UK Government's Turing Scheme better addresses the financial concerns of undergraduates at University A, than its predecessor ERASMUS programme (section 5.15). Secondly, to identify if the Turing Scheme enables a greater proportion of University A undergraduates to undertake an international experience in a wider range of countries (section 5.15). Thirdly, to examine the extent to which the Turing Scheme improves access to international experience for those from disadvantaged backgrounds by removing language barriers, through making the scheme global and targeting financial support to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (section 5.16).

As discussed earlier, (section 6.7) future research is recommended to investigate the benefits of supervision arrangements for undergraduates undertaking international experience (section 5.25). These are to include the use of pre-departure briefings, supervision while undertaking an international placement and the use of de-briefing to

consolidate learning following return to the UK. Potential for future research exists, focussing reasons for non-participation in an international experience.

There may be generalisable implications from this research study connected to the development of aspirational capital; a requirement to support undergraduates undertaking an international experience; development of employability skills; development of global mindedness, which are transferrable to other higher educational settings. There are potential opportunities for further research in these areas.

A further area for potential research is how participants choose to use knowledge gained from participation in an international experience, to support future employability and careers (section 5.5) and to investigate if an international experience benefits University A participants during the early stages of chosen careers. This research could be extended to investigate if those who qualify for the Turing Scheme disadvantaged uplift funding (section 2.6.5 and Appendix 4), are later able to gain higher than sector average salaries in their future careers. It is recommended that University A supports its participants returning from a period of international experience, to develop and strengthen the realisation of aspirations, gained from participation. University A may wish to provide structures such as International Experience Student Ambassadors, staffed by participants of an international experience, to support peer to peer promotion of opportunities for further undergraduates to consider participation in an international experience. University A may wish to consider ways to integrate its participants of an international experience through the development of communities of practice across the wider university, thereby allowing other undergraduates to have access to knowledge and expertise that otherwise would not have been possible. Such initiatives would allow University A to further build the confidence of participants in an international experience, enhancing participants' quality of work, promoting further personal development, and making work even more meaningful.

As noted in section 2.3.9, authors (Beltaji, 2020; Fazackerley, 2020; Isherwood, 2020; Kennedy, 2020; Pelly, 2020) recognise how the Covid-19 pandemic has made it necessary for higher education institutions to curtail placements and study exchange abroad and adapt courses. A research opportunity exists to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, on both institutional approaches and undergraduate experience, in particular, examining any potential changes with reluctance to travel and/or change of destination.

There is a further on-going opportunity for University A to engage with and capture its student voice. University A may continue to use a simplified version of the electronic survey

forming part of this research study, to further improve practices supporting participants engaging in an international experience.

Finally, this research study evidences the value of University A participants' feedback from engagement in an international experience, providing a different perspective on the internationalisation of higher education. It reconceptualises what international experience for undergraduates is and develops a case for ensuring that all higher education undergraduates, regardless of the type of institution they attend, should have equal access to a wide variety of international experiences. The major benefits identified from participation in an international experience are development of cultural capital (section 5.2.1) and aspirational capital (section 5.2.2), gaining greater employability skills (section 5.2.3) and increasing an awareness of global mindedness (section 5.2.4). Other benefits include development of own ability (section 5.11) and confidence with improved transversal skills (section 5.2.3), making the participants of this research study well rounded citizens of the future.

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Appendix 1 – Focus group participant information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS (Focus group)

Title of study

How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?

Invitation Paragraph

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my PhD research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

As a PhD student at University A, my aim is to undertake research evaluating the experiences of undergraduate students who choose to participate in an international experience and those who decline to do so. The study will investigate whether there is an impact on study motivation and final achievement?

This project develops research previously completed by other authors and is designed to allow comparisons with their findings.

Why have I been invited to take part?

As a student who has participated in a university organised international experience and/or been informed about a university organised international experience relevant to your area of study, your input will be extremely valuable. Taking part in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, without consequence up until the point where your data is processed (when it will be anonymised with that of other participants).

What will happen if I take part?

Participation will involve contributing to a semi-structured group discussion about an international experience undertaken by you, or which you have been informed about, as part of your course of study. The discussion is expected to take 30 – 40 minutes and will be held in a university classroom (XXXX campus) or on-line through Microsoft Teams. The group size is expected to be 4 – 8 students, with the researcher present. You will be asked what you remember being told about the international experiences offered as part of your course and your decision to join or decline these experiences. If you declined the experience, you will be asked why and if there is anything that could have been done to change your mind?

All results will be analysed by the researcher. When any results and findings of the research project are presented or reported to others inside or outside of the university, your personal data will be anonymised. Reference to specific people, who you may mention, will also be removed from any quotations that are used.

If you decide to take part in the study I will get in touch with you by e-mail or telephone. If you do not wish to take part, there is nothing further that you need to do.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You should only take part if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway. Once you have read the information sheet, please contact me if you have any questions that will help you make a decision about taking part. If you decide to take part we will ask you to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no perceived risks involved in this research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will have an opportunity to look back on your international experience or the reasons for not taking part in an experience. The study will be used to improve the promotion and uptake of international experiences by undergraduate students. Results will be shared with participants to inform them of the research findings, with individual anonymity maintained.

Data handling and confidentiality

All information gathered as part of this research project will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or presentations. All data collected will be stored securely including interview notes (where applicable) and completion of an online questionnaire. Secure storage includes the use of passwords and other relevant security processes.

The data collected will only be shared by the research team. In line with university policy all data collected as part of this research project will be securely destroyed after 10 years.

Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR).

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be University A. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under the data protection law is a 'task in the public interest' You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this research study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University A Data Protection Officer. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You are free to withdraw at any point of the study, without having to give a reason. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way. You are able to withdraw your data from the study up until the point when the data is processed, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible due to the data having been processed and anonymised with that provided by other participants.

If you choose to withdraw from the study we will not retain any information that you have provided as a part of this research study.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Results from this research study will be disseminated as part of a PhD thesis authored by the researcher.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this research study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Jonathan Disley, PhD student, XXXX, University A email: XXXX Telephone XXXX

Thank you in advance for agreeing to take part in this research.

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

If this research study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact the study supervisor or the Chair of the University A Ethics Committee for further advice and information:

Supervisors

XXXX e-mail XXXX

Telephone XXXX

XXXX e-mail XXXX

Telephone XXXX

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

Appendix 2 – Online survey participant information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS (On-line survey group)

Title of study

How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?

Invitation Paragraph

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my PhD research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

As a PhD student at University A, my aim is to undertake research evaluating the experiences of undergraduate students who choose to participate in an international experience and those who decline to do so. The study will investigate whether there is an impact on study motivation and final achievement?

This project develops research previously completed by other authors and is designed to allow comparisons with their findings.

Why have I been invited to take part?

As a student who has participated in a university organised international experience and/or been informed about a university organised international experience relevant to your area of study, your input will be extremely valuable. Taking part in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, without consequence up until the point where your data is processed (when it will be anonymised with that of other participants).

What will happen if I take part?

Participation will involve answering an anonymous online survey, which will take about 15 minutes of your time, about an international experience undertaken by you.

You will be asked what you remember being told about the international experiences, your time participating in the experience (the activities you were involved in) and whether this has influenced you to focus more on your final qualification grade.

Data collected from the on-line questionnaire will be processed quantitatively and used anonymously within the PhD thesis and possible publications relating to this.

All results will be analysed by the researcher. When any results and findings of the research project are presented or reported to others inside or outside of the university, your personal data will be anonymised. Reference to specific people, who you may mention, will also be removed from any quotations that are used.

If you decide to take part in the study I will get in touch with you by e-mail or telephone. If you do not wish to take part, there is nothing further that you need to do.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You should only take part if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway. Once you have read the information sheet, please contact me if you have any questions that will help you make a decision about taking part. If you decide to take part, we will ask you to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no perceived risks involved in this research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will have an opportunity to look back on your international experience or the reasons for not taking part in an experience. The study will be used to improve the promotion and uptake of international experiences by undergraduate students. Results will be shared with participants to inform them of the research findings, with individual anonymity maintained.

Data handling and confidentiality

All information gathered as part of this research project will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or presentations. All data collected will be stored securely including interview notes (where applicable) and completion of an online questionnaire. Secure storage includes the use of passwords and other relevant security processes.

The data collected will only be shared by the research team. In line with university policy all data collected as part of this research project will be securely destroyed after 10 years.

Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR).

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be University A. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under the data protection law is a 'task in the public interest' You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this research study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University A Data Protection Officer. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You are free to withdraw at any point of the study, without having to give a reason. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way. You are able to withdraw your data from the study up until the point when the data is processed, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible due to the data having been processed and anonymised with that provided by other participants.

If you choose to withdraw from the study we will not retain any information that you have provided as a part of this research study.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Results from this research study will be disseminated as part of a PhD thesis authored by the researcher.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this research study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Jonathan Disley, PhD student, XXXX, University A email: XXXX Telephone XXXX

Thank you in advance for agreeing to take part in this research.

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

If this research study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact the study supervisor or the Chair of the University A Ethics Committee for further advice and information:

Supervisors

XXXX e-mail XXXX

Telephone XXXX

XXXX e-mail XXXX

Telephone XXXX

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

Appendix 3 – Dissemination of findings to date

15 th – 17 th June 2021	British Council	Going Global 2021 (Conference) Poster booth/gallery presentation
Disley, J. (2021 , 15 – 17 June) <i>Going Global 2021 – British Council</i> [Poster session] Going Global 2021 – online		
17 th June 2021	British Council	Going Global 2021 (Conference) Plenary presentation
Disley, J. (2021 , 15 – 17 June) <i>Going Global 2021 – British Council</i> [Plenary presentation] Going Global 2021 – online		
15 th – 18 th March 2022	Artevelde University of Applied Sciences Ghent, Belgium	Conference: Inclusive Mobility
Disley, J. (2022 , 15 – 18 March) <i>Inclusive Mobility (ERASMUS)</i> [Poster session] Inclusive mobility conference – Ghent, Belgium		
13 th June 2022	British Ambassadors Residence Hanoi Vietnam	Speech at evening reception, outlining benefits of student mobility for University A students, in the presence of Mr Gareth Ward, British Ambassador to Vietnam
5 th – 7 th March 2024	Asia Pacific Conference Perth, WA	Academic poster presentation across three days of regional conference
Disley, J. (2024 , 5 – 7 March) <i>Asia Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) Conference 2024</i> [Poster session] – APAIE Conference 2024, Perth, Western Australia		

One minute guide

Turing Scheme

No. 1 September 2022

About Turing Scheme

The Turing Scheme is the UK government's programme to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world. Turing Scheme supports Global Britain by providing an opportunity for UK higher education organisations to offer their students life-changing experiences to study or work abroad.

The Turing Scheme is a competitive grant funding scheme. It provides grants to successful organisations to fund individuals undertaking education and training in the UK, to go on study or work placements across the world. Turing Scheme affords the opportunity for UK organisations to offer life changing experiences abroad for their students.

Project delivery timescale

Our project has a start date of **1 September 2022** and an end date of **31 August 2023**. Funding can only be used for activity within these dates.

Unless the participant is a recent graduate, all mobilities should be part of the participant's programme of study for the 2022 to 2023 academic year.

Grant rates and funding

Successful applicants will receive funding to help cover travel expenses and costs of living. Participants will only receive funding for the duration of their placement that meets the minimum and maximum durations specified: -

Minimum – 4 weeks (28 calendar days)

Maximum – twelve months

Turing Scheme funding paid may not cover all of a participants' living costs

A funding uplift is available for students who meet **disadvantaged** criteria, which includes a **travel allowance** and **£110 per month** added to their cost of living grant: -

Turing Scheme - Disadvantaged Criteria

- Students with an annual household income of £25,000 or less
- Students receiving Universal Credit or income related benefits because they are financially supporting themselves or a dependent
- Care leavers and students who are care experienced or, who have caring responsibilities
- Estranged students
- Refugees and asylum seekers

Cost of living in overseas placements

The amount of funding provided towards the cost of living for each participant will vary depending on the sector and destination country/territory. There are three categories: -

- Group 1 high cost of living
- Group 2 medium cost of living
- Group 3 lower cost of living

The full list of country categories can be found at <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/cost-of-living-groups/>

From 4 to 8 weeks (excluding disadvantaged uplift): -

Group 1 £545 per month (equal to £136.25 per week)

Group 2 & 3 £480 per month (equal to £120 per week)

Students with a total duration of nine weeks to twelve months will receive (excluding disadvantaged uplift): -

Group 1 £380 per month (equal to £95 per week)

Group 2 & 3 £335 per month (equal to £83.75 per week)

*Note that placements lasting nine weeks to twelve months will receive the rates identified for this category for the full duration of their mobility and **not** the higher rates for the initial period of 8 weeks.*

Travel allowance – disadvantaged only

10 to 99km	£20
100 to 499km	£165
500 to 1999km	£250
2,000 to 2,999km	£325
3,000 to 3,999km	£480
4,000 to 7,999km	£745
8,000 to 12,000km	£905
12,000km+	£1,360

Destinations

There are no restrictions on the country or territory in which mobilities can take place. However, FCDO travel advice must be adhered to and it is the responsibility of the Grant Recipient (i.e. the university) to assure adherence.

Further information

Jonathan Disley
Telephone

jonathan.disley@XXXXXXXX.XX.XX
(XXXXXX) XXXXXX

Appendix 5 – Coding

Each step for analysing qualitative research, gathered from the focus group interviews, has been carefully considered. The data gathered captures in-depth information from the 9 focus group participants who volunteered to be interviewed, following completion of the questionnaire.

A flexible inductive coding process, to cover different topics and insights, was used to draw out categories that were similar and allow new categories to emerge. Each sentence and word of the raw data transcripts has been scrutinised to explore relationships and draw out words that were similar to each other, allowing general categories to emerge of groups of words with a similar meaning. Words were coded across categories. For example, as shown in the table below: -

Category: Learning (learnt)	Category: Barrier	Category: Experience	Category: Work
Code words: brilliant, connections	Code words: language, nervous	Code words: amazing, cultural	Code words: career, eye-opening

The process of reading the transcripts and coding words was repeated to identify similarities in participants' narratives. From this analysis 11 broad categories emerged containing 62 codes. Links were manually made between categories having the same and/or similar codes, with this process identifying three broad themes.

Theme: Offer to participate	Theme: Barriers to participation	Theme: Learning from participation
Category: Opportunity	Category: Finance	Category: Experience

Themes, categories and codes following the analytical coding process

Codes ↓ Categories →		Themes										
		Offer to participate				Barriers				Learning from Participation		
		Worldwide	Information	Trips	Opportunity	Languages	Finance	Barrier	Concerned	Learning (Learnt)	Work	Experience
Abroad	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓		✓	✓
Accommodation							✓	✓				
Advice		✓										
Affordable						✓		✓				
Alone							✓	✓				
Amazing												✓
Appealing		✓	✓									
Available	✓	✓	✓									
Beneficial	✓											
Brilliant									✓			
Career										✓	✓	✓
Chance			✓									
Choose			✓									
Commitments							✓			✓		
Confidence												✓
Connections									✓			
Cultural	✓				✓							✓
Deadlines							✓					
Decide		✓	✓									
Difficult		✓					✓					
Disappointed												✓
Dutch						✓						✓
e-mails		✓										
Embarrassed					✓		✓					
Encourage			✓									
English					✓							✓
Enjoyable									✓			✓
Erasmus				✓		✓						
Exciting/excited				✓					✓			✓
Expensive						✓		✓				
Experience (length of)		✓		✓	✓				✓			✓
Exposure			✓									
Eye opening									✓	✓		✓
Funding						✓	✓	✓				
Go abroad				✓						✓		✓
Inconvenient							✓					
Informative		✓										
Insight									✓			✓
Interest		✓	✓	✓								
Jobs										✓		✓
Language							✓	✓				
Links			✓	✓						✓		
Missed out							✓					
Money						✓		✓				
Nervous							✓	✓				
Participate			✓	✓					✓			✓
Pay						✓	✓	✓				
Placement				✓								✓
Professional												✓
Rushed												✓
Sharing							✓	✓				
Silly								✓				
Spanish					✓	✓						✓
Student experience fund				✓		✓		✓				
Subsidised						✓		✓				
Talk	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Timing							✓	✓				
Told		✓		✓								
Turkey					✓							✓
UK	✓			✓		✓						✓
Visits		✓		✓			✓					
Welcome week		✓		✓								

International Experience - Survey

Q1 As a student who has participated in a university organised international experience and/or been informed about a university organised international experience relevant to your area of study, your input will be extremely valuable. Taking part in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, without consequence up until the point where your data is processed (when it will be anonymised with that of other participants).

Data collected from the on-line questionnaire will be processed quantitatively and used anonymously within the research report.

I understand the above statement and am happy to complete this questionnaire (1)

Q2 Which best describes the type of international experience you participated in? (Tick all that apply)

- Study abroad (spending time as a student for a semester or longer in an overseas university) (1)
 - Short visit (a visit organised by the university to an overseas university - you travelled with other students and staff) (2)
 - Work experience abroad (Erasmus 'Traineeship' or organised independently) (3)
 - Attending a conference abroad (4)
 - Volunteering abroad (5)
 - Other (6) _____
-

Q3 To what extent do you believe each of the following are **important** to you?

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
To add value to my CV (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To distinguish myself from peers who will graduate with the same qualification (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To travel and 'see the world' (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To network with future employers (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To immerse myself in a different culture (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4 To what extent do you believe each of the following have **influenced** your decision to participate in an international experience?

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
To add value to my CV (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To distinguish myself from peers who will graduate with the same qualification (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To travel and 'see the world' (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To network with future employers (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To challenge myself and get out of my comfort zone (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To immerse myself in a different culture (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5 Where did your international experience take place?

- Africa (1)
 - Asia (2)
 - The Caribbean (3)
 - Central America (4)
 - Europe (inc. Turkey) (5)
 - North America (6)
 - Oceania (Australia & New Zealand) (7)
 - South America (8)
 - Middle East (9)
 - Other location (10) _____
-



Q6 Reflecting on your international experience would you say that?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
The experience has improved my overall confidence (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The experience has developed my knowledge (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This experience has developed my skills (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This experience has developed my competence (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the experience personally enriching (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the experience professionally enriching (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am better able to adapt to new people and situations (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experience has helped me to better develop a clearer idea of my future career goal (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My experience has helped me to better focus on what I need to do to achieve with my undergraduate degree (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am now more focused on achieving a high grade with my undergraduate degree (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My intercultural awareness has improved (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found my experience of being abroad disorientating (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My future study plans have changed as a result of completing my international experience (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend an international experience to other undergraduate students (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Reflecting on your international experience, to what extent are the following important to you? (**Scale** 0 = not important at all & 10 = extremely important)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Developing my career internationally ()	
My interest in international affairs ()	

Q8 Should the university promote opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in university organised international experience?

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

Q9 Is there anything the university could do to support undergraduate students to participate in an international experience?

- Definitely yes (1)
- Probably yes (2)
- Probably not (3)
- Definitely not (4)

Q10 What could the university do to support undergraduate students to participate in an international experience?.

Q11 Below are a list of concerns that some students have stated may have stopped them from participating in an international experience. Please rate to what extent each was a concern for you - you can add other concerns if you want to. You will need to drag and drop items into the relevant boxes.

Not something I was concerned about	I had some concern	I was extremely concerned	Items in this box were not applicable for my international experience
_____ Language skills (1)	_____ Language skills (1)	_____ Language skills (1)	_____ Language skills (1)
_____ Finance (2)	_____ Finance (2)	_____ Finance (2)	_____ Finance (2)
_____ Organisation of the experience (3)	_____ Organisation of the experience (3)	_____ Organisation of the experience (3)	_____ Organisation of the experience (3)
_____ Health and safety (4)	_____ Health and safety (4)	_____ Health and safety (4)	_____ Health and safety (4)
_____ Travel arrangements (5)	_____ Travel arrangements (5)	_____ Travel arrangements (5)	_____ Travel arrangements (5)
_____ My own well-being (6)	_____ My own well-being (6)	_____ My own well-being (6)	_____ My own well-being (6)
_____ Accommodation (7)	_____ Accommodation (7)	_____ Accommodation (7)	_____ Accommodation (7)
_____ Friendships/relationships whilst away (8)	_____ Friendships/relationships whilst away (8)	_____ Friendships/relationships whilst away (8)	_____ Friendships/relationships whilst away (8)
_____ Distance from home and isolation (9)	_____ Distance from home and isolation (9)	_____ Distance from home and isolation (9)	_____ Distance from home and isolation (9)
_____ Lack of support from the university (10)	_____ Lack of support from the university (10)	_____ Lack of support from the university (10)	_____ Lack of support from the university (10)

_____ Problems with setting up a placement/work experience (11)	_____ Problems with setting up a placement/work experience (11)	_____ Problems with setting up a placement/work experience (11)	_____ Problems with setting up a placement/work experience (11)
_____ Supervision of my placement by the university (12)	_____ Supervision of my placement by the university (12)	_____ Supervision of my placement by the university (12)	_____ Supervision of my placement by the university (12)
_____ Click to write Item 13 (13)	_____ Click to write Item 13 (13)	_____ Click to write Item 13 (13)	_____ Click to write Item 13 (13)
_____ Click to write Item 14 (14)	_____ Click to write Item 14 (14)	_____ Click to write Item 14 (14)	_____ Click to write Item 14 (14)
_____ Click to write Item 15 (15)	_____ Click to write Item 15 (15)	_____ Click to write Item 15 (15)	_____ Click to write Item 15 (15)

Q12 To what extent did the university prepare you for your international experience?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
The university prepared me well for my international experience (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q13 Are there any other comments you would like to make about your international experience?

Q14 What more (if anything) could the university have done to prepare you for your international experience?

Appendix 7 – Qualitative research questions

Reminder notices (for researcher)

As a PhD student at Staffordshire University, I am undertaking a study to investigate 'What is the impact of international experience on undergraduate students' achievement and success'.

Confidentiality

All results will be analysed by the researcher. When any results and findings of the research project are presented or reported to others inside or outside of the university, your anonymity is guaranteed. Reference to specific people, who you may mention, will also be removed from any quotations that are used.

Data protection and security

All information gathered as part of this research project will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or presentations. All data collected will be stored securely including interview notes (where applicable) and completion of an online questionnaire. Secure storage includes the use of passwords and other relevant security processes.

The data collected will only be used by the researcher. In line with university policy all data collected as part of this research project will be securely destroyed after 10 years.

Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR).

Discussion points

- Q1 Do you recall being advised about any opportunities to participate in an international experience as part of your study?
- What do you remember?
 - What were the format of experiences offered and for which subject areas?

Prompt for researcher - What was the initial response of participants? Were they interested?

- Q2 Did you undertake any planning/further investigation of your potential participation?

(e.g. development of language/inter-cultural/communication skills. Increased confidence / adding value to CV / 'seeing the world' / network with future employers / challenging yourself)

Q3 If you chose not to participate, did you perceive any benefits to participation?

Prompt for researcher - Offer the following prompts of 'barriers to participation' with discussion as to the extent of which each may have impacted on a decision not to participate and for which 'type' of international experience?

Q4 Did any of the following influence your decision on whether to participate in an international experience and for what type of experience?

- Language skills
- Finance
- Organisation of the experience
- Health and safety
- Travel arrangements
- Own well-being
- Accommodation
- Friendships/relationships whilst away
- Distance from home and feelings of isolation
- Lack of support from the university
- Problems with setting up a placement by the university
- Supervision of a work placement abroad by the university
- Other factors suggested by participants

Q5 What do you think could be done to overcome perceived 'barriers to participation'?

Q6 Is there anything the university could do to further encourage you or other undergraduate students to participate in an international experience?

Q7 Should the university encourage you or other undergraduate students to participate in an international experience?

Appendix 8 – Ethical approval provided by University A

ETHICAL APPROVAL FEEDBACK

Researcher name:	Jonathan Disley
Title of Study:	How beneficial is university organised international experience for full-time undergraduate students?
Status of approval:	Approved

Thank you for addressing the committee's comments. Your research proposal has now been approved by the Ethics Panel and you may commence the implementation phase of your study. You should note that any divergence from the approved procedures and research method will invalidate any insurance and liability cover from the University. You should, therefore, notify the Panel of any significant divergence from this approved proposal.

You should arrange to meet with your supervisor for support during the process of completing your study and writing your dissertation.

When your study is complete, please send the ethics committee an end of study report. A template can be found on the ethics BlackBoard site.



Signed: Prof. Roozbeh Naemi

Ethics Coordinator
School of Life Sciences and Education

Date: 29.01.2021