

**Exploring The Factors That Influenced The Choices Made By University Students With
or Without A Disability And If Their Expectations As A Student Were Met. A Case Study
At One Higher Education Institute**

Baljeevan Kaur Deol

**A thesis submitted to the Institute of Education at University of Staffordshire in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in
Education**

May 2026

Declaration

I, Baljeevan Kaur Deol, hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis, entitled 'Exploring the factors that influenced the choices made by university students with or without a disability and whether their expectations as a student were met. A Case Study at One Higher Education Institute' is my original research and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other academic degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

All sources of information, data, and scholarly work by others have been acknowledged in the text and references. Where the work draws upon the contributions of others, these are indicated and duly credited.

This research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by BERA and regulations of University of Staffordshire. Ethical approval was obtained where required, and all procedures comply with the University of Staffordshire and legal standards.

I declare that my thesis consists of 76,871 words (excluding references and appendices).

Acknowledgments

I am sincerely grateful to everyone who supported me during my PhD journey. I would like to acknowledge the support and patience given by my principal supervisor, Dr. Lynn Machin, and your constant words of encouragement. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Jim Pugh, for your depth of knowledge and for organising my viva voce process. I am also grateful to my notetakers, who constantly went above and beyond to assist me in completing my PhD – a thank you to you both. I also acknowledge the support provided by the Vice Chancellors of the University of Staffordshire, Liz Barnes and Martin Jones; your trust in me will never be forgotten. I am eternally grateful to you and the University for my scholarship and bursary.

I am especially grateful to my family, especially my parents, sisters and extended family. I am so grateful to you for allowing me to pursue something I never thought was possible. You gave me the confidence when I really needed it. You have always supported me, and for that I will always be grateful to you. I would like to dedicate this PhD to Nandi Kaur Deol (1897 – 1982) – the matriarch of the Deol family, the woman who always wanted to be educated but wasn't given the opportunity.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the decision-making process, how participants chose a specific university, their influences, and whether their experience met their expectations among Students With Disclosed Disabilities (SWDDs) and Students With No Disclosed Disabilities (SWNDDs) within a single UK Higher Education Institution (HE). Situated within the broader policy landscape of marketisation and the Widening Participation (WP) agenda, the study addresses a significant gap in the literature by comparatively examining disabled and non-disabled students' decision-making processes, influencers, and whether their expectations were met.

Adopting a mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study design, the research draws on quantitative questionnaire data and qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted at a single institution i.e. UniA. The study is underpinned by an interpretivist-pragmatic paradigm and draws on a yin-yang philosophy; this informed the theoretical frameworks, including Bourdieusian concepts of habitus and capital, rational choice, social exchange, human capital theories, the identity development model, and aspirational capital. A novel conceptual contribution is offered through the development of 'the Hand' framework, which captures the interconnected and dynamic nature of factors shaping student choice and experience.

The findings reveal that, while some nuanced differences exist, there are more similarities than differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs in their reasons for attending university and selecting a specific institution. Key influencing factors across both groups include career prospects, course, and the location of UniA. However, distinct patterns emerged, including SWDDs, which place greater emphasis on accessibility and are more influenced by open days, whereas SWNDDs are more likely to be shaped by parental and peer influences. Notably, the age of the participant is identified as a more significant determinant of decision-making than disability status.

The study also highlights disparities between expectations and lived experiences, particularly in areas such as support services, accommodation, and accessibility. It challenges homogenised understandings of disabled students by emphasising the heterogeneity of experiences, including differences between visible and invisible disabilities and the impact of disclosure.

Overall, the research contributes to existing knowledge by integrating student choice and student experience literatures, extending theoretical applications to disability in HE, and offering practical insights for policy and institutional practice aimed at fostering more inclusive and responsive learning environments.

Table of contents

Declaration	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	iv
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Overview of the study	1
1.2 Statements of Aims and Objectives	2
1.2.1 Aims and Objectives	2
1.2.2 Research Questions	2
1.3 Contributions to Knowledge	3
1.4 How the thesis is structured	4
Chapter 2: Author Contextualisation	6
2.1 Origin of the research	6
2.2 Integration of this research into the broader academic discourse	7
2.3 Author's positionality	8
2.3.1 Intersectionality	9
2.4 Reflexivity	12
2.5 Author's personal lens	13
Chapter 3: Literature Review (Part 1)	14
3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 Changes in Higher Education since the 1960s in relation to expansion in participation	15
3.2.1 The 1960s and the repositioning of Higher Education	15
3.2.1.1 The Robbins Report (1963)	15
3.2.1.2 Introduction of the Binary System	16
3.2.2 1980 to mid-2000s – massification of Higher Education	17
3.2.2.1 What led up to the end of the binary system?	17

3.2.2.2	Changes following the end of the binary system	18
3.2.3	Disability Discrimination Act 1995.....	19
3.2.4	New Labour Years (1997-2010)	19
3.2.5	The Kennedy Report.....	19
3.2.6	The Dearing Report	20
3.2.7	The Fryer Report	21
3.2.8	The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain, and Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998.....	23
3.2.9	1999 and New Labour	24
3.2.10	Future of Higher Education White Paper (2003).....	24
3.2.11	HE Act 2004 – The Introduction of Tuition Fees.....	25
3.2.12	Equality Act 2010	26
3.2.13	Coalition years 2010-2015.....	26
3.2.14	Browne Report.....	27
3.2.15	Conservative Governments 2015-2024	28
3.2.16	Augar Review 2019	29
3.3	The Widening Participation Agenda	29
3.3.1	Rationale for Widening Participation.....	30
3.3.2	Who is WP for?	31
3.3.3	Government Statistical Analysis	31
3.3.4	Evaluation of Widening Participation	33
3.3.5	Widening Participation under New Labour	34
3.3.5.1	Milburn Report	34
3.3.6	Widening Participation through Contextualised Admissions.....	35
3.4	Students with disabilities, how they have tracked against policies of growth (3.2) and the Widening Participation Agenda (3.3).....	36
3.4.1	Disability	36
Chapter 4:	Literature Review (Part 2).....	39
4.1	Introduction	39
4.2	Concepts of student identity that influence their decision-making	39
4.2.1	Bourdieu	39
4.2.1.1	Habitus.....	40
4.2.1.2	Capitals	41
4.2.1.2.1	Cultural Capital	42

4.2.1.2.2	Social Capital	42
4.2.1.2.3	Economic Capital	42
4.2.1.3	Fields	43
4.2.1.3.1	How a field operates	43
4.2.1.3.2	Application of Bourdieusian field theory to the English Higher Education sector 44	
4.2.1.3.3	Fields of power.....	45
4.2.1.4	Critics of Bourdieu's Concepts.....	45
4.2.2	Rational Choice Theory	46
4.2.3	Identity Development Models	47
4.2.3.1	How is Identity Development defined?.....	48
4.2.3.2	Identity Development and Disability.....	48
4.2.3.3	Limitations of Identity Development Models	49
4.2.4	Social Exchange Theory.....	49
4.2.4.1	How Social Exchange theory is utilised	49
4.2.4.2	Limitations of Social Exchange Theory.....	51
4.2.5	Human Capital Theory.....	52
4.2.6	Aspirational Capital.....	53
4.3	Student Choice and what Influences it (including Marketing and Expectations)	54
4.3.1	Choice models regarding going to university and the choice of attending a specific university.....	54
4.3.2	Influencers and influencing factors on the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university	56
4.3.2.1	Introduction	56
4.3.2.2	Influencers on the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university 57	
4.3.2.2.1	Parents.....	58
4.3.2.2.2	Educational Professionals.....	58
4.3.2.2.2.1	Teachers	58
4.3.2.2.2.2	Career Advisors.....	58
4.3.2.3	Influencing factors on the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university	59
4.3.2.3.1	Students as consumers	59
4.3.2.3.2	Location	59
4.3.2.3.3	Course and Career	60
4.3.2.3.4	Other Influencing Factors.....	60

4.3.2.4	University Marketing	61
4.3.2.4.1	Marketing	61
4.3.2.4.1.1	League Tables/Ranking	63
4.3.2.4.1.2	Social media.....	64
4.3.2.4.2	Influences on expectations	65
4.3.2.4.3	Branding.....	67
4.3.2.4.4	Open Days	68
4.3.2.5	COVID-19	69
4.3.2.6	Expectations	69
4.3.2.6.1.1	Students' Expectations.....	70
4.3.2.6.1.2	Expectations not met.....	71
4.4	Students with disabilities, how their identity and choice models track against the discussions in 4.2 and 4.3	72
4.4.1	The theoretical concepts of student identity that influence their decision-making	72
4.4.2	Student Choice and Its Influences on It.....	72
4.4.3	Addressing the gaps in literature	73
Chapter 5:	Conceptual Framework.....	74
5.1	Introduction.....	74
5.2	Development and evolution of a conceptual framework.....	75
5.3	The Hand and My Thesis.....	80
5.3.1	Interconnectedness and My Conceptual Framework	80
Chapter 6:	Methodology	81
6.1	Introduction.....	81
6.1.1	COVID-19	82
6.2	Philosophies and Paradigms	82
6.2.1	Introduction	82
6.2.2	Philosophies	83
6.2.2.1	Yin-Yang philosophy	83
6.2.3	Ontology	84
6.2.4	Epistemology	85
6.2.5	Axiology	85
6.2.6	Methodology	85

6.3	Research Questions	88
6.4	Approach – Case Study.....	88
6.4.1	Introduction	88
6.4.2	Why was Case Study Research utilised?	88
6.4.3	What constitutes CSR?.....	89
6.4.4	CSR Design	89
6.4.5	Types of CSR	90
6.4.6	Strengths and Limitations of Case Study Research	91
6.5	Mixed-Method Research.....	92
6.5.1	Introduction	92
6.5.2	Paradigms for Mixed Methods Research.....	93
6.5.3	Sequential Explanatory Design.....	97
6.6	Research Design	100
6.6.1	Sampling.....	100
6.6.2	Data Collection Instruments.....	102
6.6.2.1	Questionnaire.....	102
6.6.2.2	Interview Protocol Development	104
6.6.2.3	Interviews.....	104
6.7	Ethics	105
6.8	The Strengths and Limitations of this study.....	106
6.9	Conclusion	107
Chapter 7:	Findings	109
7.1	Section A	109
7.1.1	Introduction and research population	109
7.2	A. □.....	111
7.2.1	Demographic data	112
7.2.2	The decision-making process when going to university	115
7.2.3	Influences on the decision to go to university	120
7.2.3.1	Open days.....	124
7.2.3.2	The COVID-19 pandemic.....	129
7.3	A. □.....	130
7.3.1	Reaching a decision on attending UniA.....	130
7.3.2	Disability	131

7.4	Key findings from the quantitative data.....	132
7.5	A.□.....	134
7.5.1	Introduction	134
7.5.2	Disability	134
7.5.3	Reaching a decision on going to university	135
7.5.4	Choosing a specific university to attend	136
7.5.5	Influencers	137
7.5.5.1	Influencing factors.....	137
7.6	Section B	138
7.6.1	Introduction	138
7.6.2	General Information	139
7.6.2.1	Disability.....	140
7.6.3	Education.....	141
7.6.4	The decision-making process concerning going to university	142
7.6.4.1	Aspirations and Expectations.....	143
7.6.4.2	Progression Opportunities	143
7.6.4.3	The ‘Student Experience’	144
7.6.4.4	Course	144
7.6.4.5	Support Services.....	145
7.6.4.6	Accommodation	145
7.6.5	Influencing Factors	146
7.6.5.1	Schools/Colleges	146
7.6.5.1.1	Not encouraged to attend university	146
7.6.5.2	Career Prospects	147
7.6.5.3	Fiscal motivations	148
7.6.5.4	Marketing	148
7.6.5.4.1	Online presence	148
7.6.5.4.2	Website	148
7.6.5.4.3	Word of Mouth	149
7.6.5.4.4	Open Days	149
7.6.6	Influencers	150
7.6.6.1	Alumni.....	150
7.6.6.2	Educational Professionals.....	151
7.6.6.2.1	Career advisors.....	151
7.6.6.3	Family	152

7.6.6.3.1	Friends	154
7.6.7	Expectations and Experiences	154
7.6.7.1	General Experiences	155
7.6.7.1.1	Wellbeing	156
7.6.7.1.2	Finance Department	156
7.6.7.2	Course-Expectations.....	157
7.6.7.3	Course-Experience	158
7.6.7.4	Improved Career Prospects	161
7.6.8	Expectations Not Met.....	162
7.6.8.1	Course	162
7.6.8.2	Accommodation	163
7.6.8.3	Finance	163
7.6.8.4	Accessibility	164
7.6.8.5	Key findings from the qualitative data	165
7.7	Conclusion	165
Chapter 8:	Analysis and Discussion	167
8.1	Introduction	167
8.2	Influences on student choice on participation in HE	168
8.2.1	Introduction	168
8.2.2	Choice.....	169
8.2.3	Age Participation.....	170
8.2.4	What I have always expected to do	172
8.2.5	Disclosure of Disability.....	174
8.2.6	Influencing factors on participation	175
8.2.6.1	Career.....	176
8.2.6.2	Location of UniA.....	177
8.2.6.3	Open Days	178
8.2.6.4	Career and Course	179
8.2.7	Influencers on Participation	181
8.2.7.1	Parents.....	181
8.2.7.2	Siblings	183
8.2.7.3	Teachers.....	183
8.2.8	Conclusion	184
8.3	Expectations of students prior to entering HE	186

8.3.1	Introduction	186
8.3.2	General Expectations	187
8.3.3	General expectations of the course and career at university.....	189
8.3.3.1	Expectations of the course and career at UniA.....	190
8.3.4	General expectations of university accommodation	193
8.3.4.1	Expectations of UniA's accommodation.....	194
8.3.5	General expectations of university support services	195
8.3.5.1	Expectations of UniA's support services.....	197
8.3.6	General Expectations of the student experience	198
8.3.6.1	Expectations of the UniA student experience	200
8.4	Conclusion	201
Chapter 9:	Conclusion	206
9.1	Introduction	206
9.2	Contribution to Knowledge.....	209
9.2.1	Integration of student choice, expectations and experience.....	209
9.2.2	Comparative Insight into Disabled and Non-disabled students	210
9.2.3	Extension of Bourdieusian theory to disability in HE	211
9.2.4	Development of the 'Hand' Conceptual Framework	212
9.2.5	Identification of Age as a more significant factor than disability	213
9.3	Addressing the aims and objectives	214
9.4	Recommendations for future research	215
9.4.1	Longitudinal studies of student decision-making and experience.....	215
9.4.2	Expanding comparative research across multiple institutions	216
9.4.3	Intersectional approaches to student identity	217
9.4.4	The role of digital influences and social media	218
9.5	Evaluation of institutional support and policy effectiveness.....	219
9.6	Limitations and Reflections.....	219
9.6.1	Impact of COVID-19	220
9.6.2	Sample size and Representation.....	221
9.6.3	Reliance on Self-Reported Data	221
9.6.4	Cross-sectional research design	222
9.6.5	Scope and conceptual focus.....	223
9.6.6	Reflections	223
9.6.7	Concluding Remarks	224

Appendices.....	228
Appendix A: ‘the Hand’	228
Appendix B: FOI Approval.....	233
Appendix C: the Flyer.....	234
Appendix D: Bio of Interviewees	235
Appendix E: ‘Email invitation to interview’	238
Appendix F: Questionnaire.....	239
Appendix G: Ethics Approval Form	249
Appendix H: SPSS tables.....	250
References	266

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Intersectionality Hand.....	9
Figure 4.1 Examples of a model of social exchange Source: Adapted from Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels and Hall (2017)	51
Figure 4.2 Influencers on university choice. Adapted from Gibbs and Knapp (2002, p110) ...	57
Figure 4.3 factors required to form a marketing strategy. Adapted from Mogaji and Yoon (2019, p1573)	63
Figure 5.1 Mind map for the conceptual framework	75
Figure 5.2 The original hand	76
Figure 5.3 Hand with increased detail showing theory and concepts	77
Figure 5.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks (Separated Hands)	78
Figure 5.5 The Conceptual Framework (Final Iteration).....	79
Figure 6.1 The taijitu symbol (illustrates the Chinese concept of yin and yang)	83
Figure 6.2 Linking positivism and interpretivism for Mixed Methods. Adapted from Gorman and MacIntosh (2014, p61) published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited.....	87
Figure 6.3 Process of CSR design Adapted from Thomas (2011, p27)	90
Figure 6.4 Two types of Mixed Methods. Adapted from Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009, p269).	96
Figure 6.5 Concept map relating research design to MMR.....	100
Figure 7.1 Pie chart showing the importance given to 'Other' for SWDDs and SWNDDs'	119
Figure 7.2 Image of the interface used in Q25	121
Figure 7.3 SPSS MWU bar graphs for the option of 'Parents' in Q25.....	121
Figure 7.4 Pie charts for Q25 – 'Parents'	123
Figure 7.5 Pie charts comparing attendance at an Open Day at UniA.....	124
Figure 7.6 Pie charts comparing the influence of attending an Open Day at UniA to attend this university	126
Figure 7.7 Image of the interface used in Q25 for the option 'Open days'	127
Figure 7.8 Graphical representation created within SPSS for the 'Open Day' option in Q45.	127
Figure 7.9 Pie-charts representing the influence COVID-19 had on the decision of SWDDs and SWNDDs to attend UniA	129
Figure 7.10 Comparison of SWDDs and SWNDDs reasons for choosing to attend UniA. ...	131
Figure 7.11 Q19 the types of disabilities SWDD respondents identified as having.....	132

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Summarises the principal areas of similarities and differences across the three reports.	23
Table 4.1 People who influence institution choice by prospective university students	57
Table 6.1 Elements of world views and implications for practice. Adapted from Creswell (2014).	86
Table 6.2 Comparison of research design approaches/methods. Adapted from Creswell 2014 p47	87
Table 6.3 Paradigms suitable for MMR. Adapted from Molina-Azorin and Fetter (2020 p7-8)	94
Table 6.4 Types of MMR Design (Adapted from Creswell 2003)	97
Table 6.5 Comparing two of the main classifications of interview strategy. Source: Adapted from Zohrabi (2013, p256	104
Table 7.1 A comparison of percentages for student demographics at UniA against the national average figures sourced from HESA (2022) (Available from: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/)	110
Table 7.2 National average figures for student demographics within the HE sector. Available from: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he	110
Table 7.3 Comparison of this study with selected demographic data obtained from UniA.	111
Table 7.4 SPSS Chi-square output for Q7	113
Table 7.5 SPSS Chi-squared output for Q10	114
Table 7.6 Why did you decide to come to university?	115
Table 7.7 Why did you decide to come to university? (All).....	115
Table 7.8 Why did you decide to come to university? (SWNDDs)	116
Table 7.9 SPSS output for Q23 Advice from school	117
Table 7.10 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q23' Advice from parents'	118
Table 7.11 SPSS outputs for Q23 'Other'	120
Table 7.12 SPSS MWU outputs for Q25 – Parents.....	122
Table 7.13 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q25 – 'Parents'	123
Table 7.14 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q42	125
Table 7.15 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q43	126

Table 7.16 SPSS outputs for Q45 – ‘Open day’	128
Table 7.17 SPSS Chi-squared outputs for Q48	129
Table 7.18 Coding categories with associated percentages for Q21	134
Table 7.19 Coding categories with associated percentages for Q22	135
Table 7.20 coding categories with associated percentages for Q24	136
Table 7.21 codes with associated percentages for Q28	136
Table 7.22 Groupings for relationships given in answer to Q38 based on responses from Q37.....	137
Table 7.23 coding categories with associated percentages for Q40	138
Table 7.24 Dates of Interviews	139
Table 7.25 Breakdown of interviewee demographic	140

List of Abbreviations

CF	Conceptual Framework
CSR	Case Study Research
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HCT	Human Capital Theory
IDM	Identity Development Model
MMR	Mixed Method Research
OfS	Office for Students
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PM	Prime Minister
RC	Rational Choice
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
RQ	Research Questions
SED	Sequential Explanatory Design
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SWDDs	Students with Disclosed Disabilities
SWNDDs	Students with No Disclosed Disabilities
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
WP	Widening Participation

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Higher Education (HE) sector in the United Kingdom (UK) experienced substantial reform between 1963 and 1997, a period widely recognised for the emergence of neoliberal ideology as a dominant force in public policy (Abbot, Rathebone, and Whitehead, 2013). One of the most significant developments during this era was the marketisation of HE, which encouraged students to view themselves as consumers (Harris, 2017). Although neoliberalism entered UK political discourse in the 1980s, its systematic application to HE did not fully materialise until the advent of the New Labour government in 1997 (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). A key milestone in this trajectory was the abolition of the binary divide between universities and polytechnics under John Major's Conservative government. Spearheaded by Kenneth Clarke, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 established a unitary system, aiming to reduce elitism and promote social justice in the sector (Brennan, Brodnick and Pinckley, 2008; Maringe and Fuller, 2007). This was intended not only to increase access but also to reframe the purpose of HE in response to economic demands.

Within this context, the Widening Participation (WP) agenda emerged as a central policy initiative. It aimed to increase access for underrepresented groups, including disabled students, and helped achieve New Labour's target of 50% participation among 18-30-year-olds. This goal was based on the belief that a knowledge-based economy requires a greater number of graduates. As universities increasingly operate in a competitive, market-driven environment, it is imperative that they provide inclusive and accessible learning spaces to attract and retain a diverse student body. Although there is a growing body of literature on marketisation, neoliberalism, and WP, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how these forces intersect at the institutional sampling. This study, therefore, set out to address this gap by undertaking a single case study at UniA.

1.1 Overview of the study

This research examines the similarities and differences between Students With Disclosed Disabilities (SWDDs) and Students With No Disclosed Disabilities (SWNDDs) in their decision-making processes for attending university and for choosing a specific university, referred to as UniA. It further examines the influences and expectations that inform their decisions to pursue HE and why they chose to enrol at UniA. This study also explores differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs in the influencers and influencing factors shaping the decision-making process and the choice of specific university. It aims to discover the expectations held by SWDDs and SWNDDs prior to enrolment and to assess if these expectations were met by their experience at UniA.

This study is held alongside literature regarding student choice, as this is an increasingly important area for universities to understand due to the competitive nature of the HE sector, including the driving forces that influence the reasons why SWDDs and SWNDDs made these decisions.

1.2 Statements of Aims and Objectives

1.2.1 Aims and Objectives

The aims of this thesis are:

1. To discover why disabled and non-disabled students decided to go to university, and if there was a difference.
2. To advance the knowledge regarding why disabled and non-disabled students chose to attend a specific university, i.e. UniA, and whether this reason was different.
3. To establish a comprehensive understanding concerning whether a difference occurred between disabled and non-disabled students in their influencers and influencing factors regarding attending university, and, in particular, UniA.
4. To discover whether the expectations held by disabled and non-disabled students were met prior to attending UniA and if these expectations differed.

The objective of this thesis are:

1. To investigate the reasons why students, decide to go to university and whether there is a difference between disabled and non-disabled students.
2. To understand why students, attend UniA and whether this differs for disabled and non-disabled students.
3. To investigate who, what, or anything influences students' choice process and whether these differ for disabled and non-disabled students.
4. To assess how the expectations between disabled and non-disabled students differ and if they are met by their experience at UniA.

1.2.2 Research Questions

This research sought to address a gap in the literature (section 9.2) by examining the differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs in their reasons for going to university, how they chose a specific university, who or what influenced their decision, and whether their

expectations were met at UniA. The aims and objectives of the research were used in formulating the questions for respondents and interviewees.

In relation to the aim and objectives, the following Research Questions (RQs)

1. How do SWDDs and SWNDDs reach their final decision about attending university?
2. How do SWDDs and SWNDDs reach their final decision on a specific university?
3. Who or what, if anything, influenced their decision to attend university?
4. If the two subsets of students have similar or different expectations of their experience, and if they were met by UniA?
5. Is there a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs in their decision-making process, influence(r)s and expectations?

1.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis makes clear contributions to knowledge in several areas, with a primary contribution of this research filling a gap in the existing literature.

Authors such as Briggs (2006) discuss the decision-making process for all students regarding attending university. Most of the disability literature discusses disabled students' experiences of HE (Brown and Leigh, 2020; Brewer, Urwin, and Witham, 2023), barriers to entry, and their experiences upon arriving at university. This thesis examines the factors that influence both disabled and non-disabled students in their decision to attend university, their choice of institution, and the extent to which their experience at UniA aligned with their expectations. Therefore, this research clearly contributes to the existing literature by distinguishing between disabled and non-disabled students.

The broader contribution is brought together in the Findings (Chapter 7), Discussion and Analysis (Chapter 8), and the Conclusion (Chapter 9) at the end of the thesis. In brief, this study found that there are more similarities than differences regarding why SWDDs and SWNDDs go to university, attend a specific university, and what influences these decisions. In Chapter 8, it is posited that this might be because SWDDs and SWNDDs are students going to university irrespective of the individual SWDD's disability status.

The data revealed that age appeared to be more influential than disability status in shaping university choice, but also highlighted unique considerations for SWDDs, such as a higher likelihood of attending open days and a greater influence of these visits on their final choice of a specific university. Conversely, for SWNDDs, parental advice and sibling influence are often cited more frequently in their decision-making processes.

Importantly, the study also brings attention to nuanced realities of disability, recognising that students with visible and invisible disabilities cited differences in the influencing factors that impacted their decision. Also, when the individual was diagnosed with their type of disability, it impacted the level of support received from UniA because they had not disclosed their disability to UniA, which consequently led to varied experiences and influenced university choices differently. This challenges monolithic interpretations of 'disabled students' as a homogenous group and underscores the need for more tailored support and inclusive policy design.

A further significant contribution to knowledge concerns the conceptual framework (Chapter 5), which reviews multiple-choice models, including Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Ellwood and Kane (2000). The Hand (figure 5.5) was created because these models did not address the research problem.

1.4 How the thesis is structured

Chapter 1 sets out a brief overview of the research topic and its contribution to knowledge. It provides a statement of aims and objectives, along with five RQs.

Chapter 2 focuses on positionality, the lens in which the Chapter is viewed and reflexivity.

Chapter 3 critically reviews the relevant Government policies and Acts regarding HE policy. It goes on to stipulate these policy reforms and theoretical perspectives on policymaking. This Chapter also highlights the relationship between these policies and the title of this study.

Chapter 4 explores key theories and concepts related to student decision-making, including a variety of choice models, as well as literature on influencers, marketing, expectations, and the impact of COVID-19. The Chapter concludes by focusing on students with disabilities, analysing how their identities and choices relate to broader literature. The Chapter amalgamates existing research to identify gaps that the study aims to fill.

Chapter 5 presents the theoretical and conceptual lens through which this study was approached. The main concept model and theory that underpin this study are expounded. The Hand provides background on how the data were interpreted and aligned with both the research questions and the literature review.

Chapter 6 details the philosophical approach adopted in this research: i.e. yin-yang a mixed-methods (MM) approach with a sequential explanatory design. It outlined the sampling method

and the data collection tools, which included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. It goes on to explain how the findings were analysed and the ethical considerations used.

Chapter 7 presents the findings of the study in two sections, reflecting the sequential explanatory MM design. Section A reports the quantitative results from the questionnaire and is organised into three subsections (A.α, A.β, and A.Γ), focusing on respondents' demographics, decision-making processes, and the factors influencing the choice to attend UniA. It identifies key trends and statistically significant relationships, supported by insights from open-text responses. Section B presents the qualitative findings from two rounds of semi-structured interviews, offering a detailed exploration of interviewees' decision-making processes, influencers, influencing factors, and expectations. It also examines whether these expectations were met, with particular attention given to areas such as support services, accommodation, accessibility, and the overall student experience, thereby addressing the research aims and RQs (sections 1.2.1; 1.2.2).

Chapter 8 provides a critical analysis and discussion of the findings, drawing together key themes from the literature, and empirical data. It focuses on influences on student participation and choice in HE, with a particular focus on WP and massification as well as students' expectations and experiences. The chapter examines similarities and differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs, highlighting more similarities than differences, and identifies distinct patterns, such as the importance of accessibility and open days for SWDDs. It evaluates how the findings support or challenge existing literature, including those related to student choice and identity, and considers the broader context of WP and the massification of HE. The chapter concludes by discussing implications for theory, policy, and institutional practice.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by synthesising the key findings and reflecting on their overall significance. It revisits the research aims and questions, clearly outlining the study's contributions to knowledge, including its comparative approach to disabled and non-disabled students and the development of 'the Hand' conceptual framework. The chapter also considers the implications for policy and practice, particularly regarding inclusivity and student support. It acknowledges the study's limitations, such as its single institution focus and reliance on self-reported data, and offers recommendations for future research, including longitudinal and multi-institutional studies. The chapter closes by reaffirming the study's contribution to understanding student decision-making and experiences in HE.

Chapter 2: Author Contextualisation

This Chapter provides a personal and professional contextualisation of the research. It explains how the author's unique perspectives as a female researcher from Asian heritage and with disabilities, have enhanced the approach and interpretation of findings throughout this study.

2.1 Origin of the research

The motivation for selecting this research topic stems from my intrinsic interest in understanding human behaviour and decision-making processes. As a people-oriented individual, I am deeply intrigued by the factors that influence why distinct groups make choices about university. My academic and professional trajectory has been rooted in the HE sector for over 15 years, encompassing experiences as a student, volunteer, and professional. This prolonged engagement has fostered a profound passion for exploring nuanced issues within the HE landscape. My specific interest in the topic area emerged during a casual yet revealing conversation in my Halls of Residence kitchen. I posed a simple question to nine of my flatmates:

“Why did you go to university, and why did you choose [UniA]?”

What ensued was an unexpectedly spirited discussion that highlighted notable disparities in decision-making rationales between students with disabilities and students with no disability. The disabled students reported that their university decisions were influenced by a need to assess accessibility and available services, often through open-day visits, and that parental influence was predominantly cited.

In contrast, the non-disabled students stated that peer influence and student experience were influencing factors. Generally, they chose their courses before selecting a specific university, often without attending any open days. This discussion highlighted a clear difference in the factors that informed the university's choices of students with and without disabilities. Interestingly, as someone with two non-disabled siblings, I found myself able to relate to and understand the rationale presented by both groups. The insights from this informal conversation served as the genesis of my research inquiry, e.g., is the conversation in the kitchen representative of the student population at UniA?

The kitchen discussion served as a formative experience, shaping the initial assumptions underpinning my research and compelling me to adopt a more critical and reflexive approach as the thesis evolved. This moment of peer exchange highlighted a potential gap in the literature concerning the intersectionality of disability and university choice. As the study progressed, my methodological approach matured, moving beyond preliminary observations to

a more analytically rigorous engagement with the subject matter. The process of data collection and analysis prompted deeper reflection on the influencer and influencing factors that inform educational decision-making, particularly for students with disabilities.

In summary, what began as a casual conversation among peers ultimately became the foundation for a research inquiry with the potential to yield meaningful insights into the academic literature on inclusivity, access, and student choice in HE.

2.2 Integration of this research into the broader academic discourse

The decision-making process behind perspective student' university choices has been widely explored across different demographic groups. For instance, Kimura (2014) examined the motivations of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students in accessing HE, revealing how cultural expectations, community influences, and institutional perceptions shape decision-making. Similarly, Charlesworth and Banaji (2019) highlighted gendered perceptions and structural barriers that deter women from entering STEM fields, emphasising how societal and internalised biases impact subject and institutional choices.

However, the literature remains sparse when it comes to understanding the university decision-making process of disabled students and how their experiences compare to those of their non-disabled peers. While some studies have acknowledged the challenges disabled students face once enrolled, such as accessibility issues, social integration, and support provision (Madriaga et al., 2010), they have directly investigated what factors influence disabled students' decisions to attend university in the first place, or whether their expectations are met once enrolled.

Existing research on disability in HE tends to focus on institutional barriers and accommodations (Fuller et al., 2004) rather than on the initial decision-making process. Moreover, while Government and institutional policies emphasise WP (Office for Students, 2022a), there is a lack of empirical data comparing the university choices, influencers, and influencing factors, as well as the expectations and university experiences, of disabled and non-disabled students. This gap is especially significant given that disabled students are still underrepresented in HE and often face lower satisfaction rates and poorer outcomes (WONKHE, 2023).

By adopting a comparative approach, this study contributes to filling this gap. It examines whether students with and without a disclosed disabilities are influenced by the same factors when deciding to attend university, and whether their expectations align with their actual experiences. This dual focus links the student choice and student experience literatures, which are typically studied in isolation. Furthermore, the case study approach at one Higher Education

Institution (HEI) enables the collection of rich qualitative insights that can inform the development of inclusive policies and practices.

2.3 Author's positionality

As a disabled woman with both visible and invisible disabilities, my personal, academic, and professional trajectories have been shaped by complex intersections of identity, culture, and lived experience. I was raised in a bicultural household that honoured both Western and Punjabi traditions equally; each offering distinct worldviews, values, and epistemologies that inform my orientation toward knowledge, inclusion, and justice. These dual cultural influences not only enriched my understanding of social diversity but also compelled me to interrogate dominant Western paradigms within academic inquiry, particularly those that marginalise or homogenise non-Western perspectives.

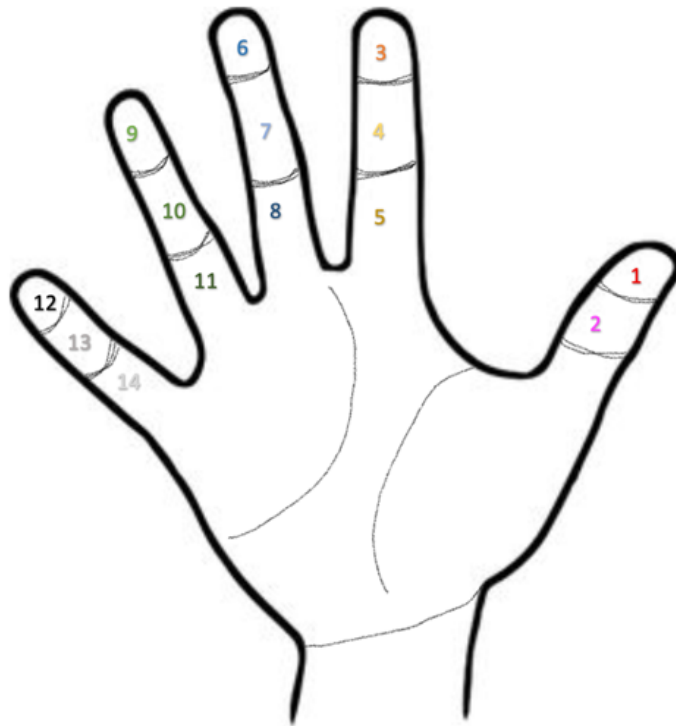
Although I have a visible disability, within the context of my immediate and extended family, I was primarily treated with similar expectations, affection, and responsibilities as my non-disabled sisters and cousins. This familial normalisation and participation sharply contrasted with my experiences in broader society, particularly in educational settings, where I encountered subtle and overt forms of exclusion. From an early age, I became conscious of my 'difference' through structural and social mechanisms, the need to use a wheelchair to navigate long distances, recurrent medical appointments that interrupted my schooling, and the way my body and capabilities were perceived in contrast to my peers. These early experiences of ableism, both systemic and attitudinal, have cultivated in me a critical lens toward institutions.

My research is situated within this experiential framework. I approach academic inquiry from a standpoint that values reflexivity, embodied knowledge, and the nature of lived experience. Rather than seeking 'objectivity' in the positivist sense, I align with the Asian concept of Yin-Yang (section 6.2.2.1) and critical traditions that foreground the social construction of knowledge and recognise the researcher's presence as both inevitable and meaningful. My positionality as an Indian disabled woman with intersecting cultural affiliations places me both within and outside dominant academic discourses, which, while challenging, allows for a nuanced, intersectional perspective that is both profoundly personal and analytically rich.

In claiming this positionality, I reject any notion of neutrality in research. Instead, I acknowledge that my insights, concerns, and methodological choices are informed by a commitment to inclusion, access, and the reimagining of educational and social systems that too often marginalise disabled and culturally diverse voices. This positional lens does not constrain the

rigor of the study; instead, it deepens it, enabling me to ask questions and pursue lines of inquiry that may otherwise remain unexamined.

2.3.1 Intersectionality



KEYS	
1. Unconventional Thinker	8. Culture
2. Care Receiver	9. Education
3. Visible Disability	10. Institution Affiliation
4. Invisible Disability	11. Intellectual Independence
5. Mobility	12. Age
6. Race and Religion	13. Gender
7. Ethnicity	14. Class

Figure 2.1 Intersectionality Hand

My research is deeply rooted in my lived experience as an individual with both visible and invisible disabilities, experiences that have profoundly shaped my intellectual trajectory and methodological choices. I naturally gravitate toward conceptual frameworks that transform abstract ideas into tangible forms (Figure 2.1). It is this inclination that inspired the creation of the Hand concept (Chapter 5), a metaphorical and visual framework through which I interpret layered, intersecting identities. This mode of representation allowed me to reimagine traditional

analytical frameworks into something that reflects both my learning style and the complexity of my own narrative.

As an unconventional thinker, I enjoy deconstructing established concepts and reconstructing them in ways that resonate more authentically with who I am, thereby offering new dimensions to the understanding of disability, identity, and how prospective students choose a university. I find clarity not in convention, but in synthesis, drawing from different disciplines and vocabularies and turning conceptual rigidity into something more expansive and inclusive. This research provided an outlet for creative expression within a rigorous academic framework, allowing me to centre marginalised voices, including my own, through the use of a methodology grounded in empathy, intersectionality, and lived knowledge.

My positionality as a British Indian, Sikh woman of Punjabi ethnicity, is integral to the framing and conduct of this research; this bicultural identity, a dynamic blend of English and Punjabi cultural traditions, has shaped my worldview and provided me with a multidimensional lens through which I interpret the student choice process in HE. These intersecting cultural frameworks enhance my sensitivity to nuance, particularly when considering how cultural identity influences the disclosure of disability, sense of belonging, and academic participation among students with disabilities.

Sikhism, as a religion grounded in principles of equality, selfless service (*seva*), and justice, provided an ethical compass for this research. The belief that all individuals possess inherent dignity and should be treated with respect directly informs my commitment to inclusivity in the HE sector. This moral foundation heightened my awareness of how structural and attitudinal barriers can impede full participation for disabled students, particularly those from minoritised backgrounds. The legacy of educational aspirations runs deep in my family. My grandfather, a strong advocate for HE, instilled in me the importance of academic achievement and social mobility. Coming from a working-class background where both parents had access to university education, I inherited a powerful sense of responsibility not just to succeed individually, but to contribute to the transformation of educational spaces so that they become genuinely inclusive. These personal imperatives fuel my desire to ensure that the HE sector reflects, supports, and elevates students of all backgrounds.

My intellectual relationship with UniA spans over fifteen years, encompassing undergraduate, master's, and doctoral study, as well as employment and voluntary engagement. UniA has not only shaped my academic development, but it has also served as a site of critical transformation, where I encountered barriers, yet also developed the resilience and intellectual independence to challenge and critique systems of exclusion. My initial years were marked by a sense of deference to academic authority; however, through my doctoral journey, I cultivated

the capacity to critically analyse and reject sources that lacked rigor or inclusivity. Intellectual independence became a transformative achievement, one that redefined my relationship to knowledge, power, and truth within UniA.

I began my academic journey at 18 years old, full of enthusiasm and curiosity, unaware of how deeply personal and intersectional the journey would become. The evolving nature of my disabilities, shifting from physical to include sensory and mental health impairments, compelled me to reconsider the meaning of access, both literally and metaphorically. My mobility impairment, in particular, shaped the comparative structure of my research, enabling me to contextualise my own experience as an ambulatory student and then subsequent permanent wheelchair user within the broader university environment. Mobility was not simply a functional concern, but a lens through which I examined the stratified nature of access and inclusion within the student body. As an Asian disabled woman, my identity has intersected with societal and institutional norms in complex ways. I have encountered attitudinal shifts, gendered expectations, and cultural assumptions that distinguish my experience from that of other students, disabled or otherwise. Navigating HE as a multiply marginalised individual sharpened my awareness of intersectional oppression and attuned me to the possibilities of solidarity and reform.

This research is not only a scholarly contribution but a lived expression of my intersecting identities as an unconventional thinker, a Sikh British Indian woman, and a disabled scholar. Positioned within an interpretivist paradigm, I employed a MM approach grounded in qualitative inquiry and critical disability studies to explore the nuanced reasons why students with disabilities, in contrast to their peers, attend university, why they chose UniA, and the influence(s) on their decision. I also examined whether the experience at UniA met their expectations. The methodology was shaped by my commitment to participatory and empathetic research, recognising as Goodley (2017) and Kattari (2020) have argued, that the lived experiences of disabled individuals must be central to research that seeks to transform educational policy and structures.

Drawing from questionnaire data and two rounds of interviews, I remained reflexively aware of how my own identity and insider perspective introduced subjective influence throughout the research process. Rather than viewing this as a limitation, I embraced positional reflexivity as a methodological strength, in keeping with Mohler and Rudman's (2022) work on navigating insider researcher positionality within qualitative disability studies. They emphasise that critical reflexivity enables researchers to examine and deconstruct their assumptions critically, fostering intersubjective dialogue and co-constructed meaning rather than assuming neutrality. By acknowledging my standpoint, I could ask tailored, experience-informed questions and build rapport grounded in mutual understanding. Yet I remained vigilant against interpretive

overidentification and deliberately ensured participants' voices remained at the forefront of the analysis, rather than being overshadowed by my interpretive lens.

2.4 Reflexivity

Growing up as the only visible disabled woman in my family was a complex and formative experience. While my parents treated me similarly to my non-disabled sisters, expecting me to complete chores and participate equally in family life, I was always aware, on a subconscious level, of my difference. They intended to foster equality and resilience, and while I appreciate this, it also meant that aspects of my disability were not openly acknowledged or discussed. This led to a sense of internal dissonance, where I felt both included and othered.

Both of my parents are university graduates and have been employed full-time throughout my upbringing. Consequently, a significant proportion of my formative years was spent in the care of my maternal and paternal grandparents. My maternal grandfather, in particular, was a strong advocate of tertiary education, promoting academic achievement as a pathway to stable and respectable employment. This ethos was deeply embedded in my early socialisation and, I would argue, contributed to my implicit assumption that progression to HE was an inevitable and normative life course. Within my immediate and extended family, university attendance was not perceived as exceptional, but rather as a cultural and intergenerational expectation.

Currently, I live with multiple disabilities: mental health, physical, and sensory, which require me to take a pragmatic approach in both my personal and professional life. This pragmatism is not a matter of preference but of necessity. Navigating the built and social environment involves careful planning, such as locating accessible routes, arranging transportation, and ensuring I have support when entering unfamiliar spaces; these considerations, drawn from daily life, have shaped how I engage with the world.

Undertaking a PhD has been a transformative experience. It has played a pivotal role in reshaping how I relate to my disability. Despite once distancing myself from it, feeling the need to hide or minimise its presence. I have come to embrace it as an integral part of my identity. This acceptance has extended beyond myself to others; I no longer see disabled individuals who are open about their impairments as fundamentally different from me. Instead, I recognise the heterogeneity of the disabled student experience and the strength that comes with visibility and self-advocacy.

The process of doctoral research has also profoundly changed how I engage with information and authority. Previously, I would often accept information unquestioningly, particularly if it came from someone in a position of seniority. Now, I examine sources more rigorously,

evaluating their credibility and validity. This critical stance has enabled me to engage more deeply with literature and debate, refining my analytical skills.

My epistemological stance has shifted during this journey; I no longer see the world in binary terms of right and wrong. Initially, I was reluctant to frame myself as a disabled writer focused solely on disability related topics. I feared that such positioning would narrow the perception of my work. However, I have since come to appreciate the importance of other disabled students' perspectives that do not necessarily align with mine. I did not want to be defined as a disabled researcher who wrote about disabled people; instead, I wish to be described as a disabled researcher writing about student choice and expectations in HE.

2.5 Author's personal lens

In my final undergraduate year, I successfully ran for president of the Students' Union. This role, along with my position on the Board of Governors, gave me insight into institutional decision-making and reshaped my views on the HE sector. During this period, I applied to various master's programmes and ultimately chose to remain at UniA. Encouraged by my lecturers, I explored the possibility of pursuing a PhD, which was something I had not previously considered. I developed four detailed proposals and presented them to my prospective supervisors, demonstrating a pragmatic and thorough approach to decision-making. I selected a topic area based on the students' choices, their influencers, and whether their expectations were met.

My identity as a student and employee of UniA offers both an insider's understanding and shared lived experience, particularly with SWDDs. I bring both empathy and objectivity to this study, ensuring that all participants are treated equally and confidentially. My pragmatic stance avoids prematurely dismissing possibilities. I selected the most relevant theories, tools, and literature based on their alignment with my research questions, discarding those that were less applicable. I reviewed UK Government HE policy from the Robbins Report (1963) (section 3.2.1.1) onward, identifying this period as the most impactful on my study due to the key legislative developments (Chapter 3).

The research is supported through a yin-yang worldview (section 6.2.2.1) which emphasises the dynamic interplay of complementary opposites. Aligned with a pragmatic epistemology, this perspective supports methodological flexibility and a best-fit approach to data collection and analysis. Rather than favouring a single paradigm, I adopt mixed methods to integrate qualitative and quantitative insights, enabling a more holistic understanding of complex phenomena.

Chapter 3: Literature Review (Part 1)

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter examines the evolution of participation and access to HE in the UK since the 1960s, contextualised through government policy reforms and official reports. It analyses both the intentions behind these interventions and, where possible, their tangible impacts.

Over the past six decades, a paradigmatic shift has occurred in how successive UK governments conceptualise HE, its students, and its institutions (Abbott, Rathbone, and Whitehead 2013; Radice 2013; Rainford 2019). This transformation reflects broader global changes in HE governance, characterised by marketisation and the adoption of business-oriented models (Jongbloed, 2003). By the late 1990s, HE increasingly positioned itself as a service sector grounded in corporate logics (Moore, 2021), accompanied by intensified scrutiny and accountability (Abbott, Rathbone, and Whitehead, 2013). Radice (2013) identifies this period as marking the systematic transformation of HE, prompting critics such as Jary and Parker (1998) and Robinson and Tormey (2003) to describe universities as exemplars of neoliberal restructuring. By the second decade of the Twenty-First Century, Radice (2013) contends that UK universities had effectively become private enterprises governed by an academic-business elite.

The political agenda has impacted the HE sector profoundly since the 1960s by transforming the sector from elitist to universal (Trow, 1974). The expansion of HE was framed by the government in post-war Britain as a public good and a way of fostering social mobility. However, from the 1980s onwards, the rise of neoliberal political rationalities reframed education as a private investment and a driver of economic competitiveness.

Ultimately, early HE policy, initially designed to enhance national economic performance, has inadvertently facilitated broader participation, gradually expanding access beyond traditional elites and reshaping the social composition of the student body.

The three overarching themes laid out in this Chapter are:

3.2 – Changes in Higher Education since the 1960s in relation to expansion in participation

3.3 – The Widening Participation (WP) Agenda

3.4 – Students with disabilities, how they have tracked against policies of growth (3.2) and the Widening Participation Agenda (3.3)

3.2 Changes in Higher Education since the 1960s in relation to expansion in participation

3.2.1 The 1960s and the repositioning of Higher Education

University participation in England, until the mid-1960s, centered on the elite and privileged; there were relatively few universities, drenched in prestige and tradition. During the 1950s, it became apparent to the government and the University Grants Committee that an expansion of HE would be necessary to meet the growing demand for university places from school leavers, driven by the baby boom in post-war Britain (Collini, 2020).

3.2.1.1 The Robbins Report (1963)

The Report of the Committee on Higher Education, commonly referred to as The Robbins Report (1963), chaired by economist Lord Robbins, then Professor at the London School of Economics and a key figure in post-war economic policy, was commissioned to

“...review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and, in light of national needs and resources, advise Her Majesty’s Government on the principles for its long-term development” (Robbins, 1963: S1).

The report emerged amid concerns that post-war Britain lagged behind other European nations in HE participation, posing risks to economic growth (Barr and Glennerster, 2014). Grounded in human capital theory, the report argued that investment in HE would enhance national productivity through a better-qualified workforce.

Robbins asserted that any individual with the requisite academic ability should have access to a university place, supported by adequate public funding and simplified admissions processes (Willetts, 2014). He proposed that the state should bear the primary responsibility for financing HE, benefiting both public and private sectors (Calhoun, 2014). However, the report did not specify funding mechanisms (Barr and Glennerster, 2014). Layard (2014) contended that this approach justified the view that, at a time when HE remained inaccessible to much of the population, it was necessary. Consistent with these principles, successive governments maintained tuition subsidies and means-tested grants (Hillman, 2023a). The Conservative Government under Alec Douglas-Home (1963-1964) accepted the Robbins recommendations in full, triggering a paradigmatic expansion of HE. Although often credited as the catalyst for mass HE, several developments, such as the establishment of new universities, were already underway (Hillman, 2023b). Motivated by the industrial demand for a skilled workforce (Calhoun, 2014). Hillman (2023b) states the committee looked at statistical data available to them, including the post-war baby boom, which meant that there would be an increase in the supply of perspective student who were staying in school until after the age of 15; therefore,

inferring that they were academically adept enough to apply to university. Hillman (2015) goes on to say the report advocated a unary HE system. However, the subsequent Labour Government under Harold Wilson (1964-1970) introduced a binary system for the HE sector, thus separating universities and polytechnics (section 3.2.1.2).

To accommodate projected growth, the report also recommended expanding purpose-built student housing at the time, when only 32% of full-time students lived in university accommodation, and creating new institutions. This policy led to the foundation of the so-called plate-glass universities (East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Sussex, Warwick, and York) during the 1960s (Collini, 2020). Overall, the Robbins Report sought not to WP in a social sense but to massify HE, aligning educational expansion with national, economic and industrial imperatives.

3.2.1.2 Introduction of the Binary System

The binary system of HE, as defined by Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002), delineated a structural division between institutions offering predominantly academic courses (universities) and those focused on vocational or technical education (polytechnics and colleges). Introduced under Harold Wilson's Labour Government in 1965 and formally established in 1966, the system persisted until 1992. During this period, Polytechnics operated under local authority control, while universities remained autonomous institutions (Saunders, 2002). The primary objective of the binary system was to create a publicly accountable sector in which central government, rather than local authorities, assumed responsibility for HE policy and governance (Ratcliffe, 2017). This restructuring sought to expand access and diversify provision while maintaining clear distinctions between academic and vocational education.

The binary divide was later articulated and reinforced by Anthony Crosland, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, in his 1965 Woolwich Speech at Woolwich Polytechnic. Although the address became a defining statement of Labour's HE policy during this timeframe, Crosland subsequently expressed regret, acknowledging that the speech reflected party orthodoxy rather than his own convictions (Ratcliffe, 2017). Retrospective analyses suggest that the two-tier system in 1992 was a misstep, as many scholars argue that the binary framework preserved diversity of purpose and institutional identity within the HE sector (Scott, 2012).

3.2.2 1980 to mid-2000s – massification of Higher Education

Between the 1980s and the mid-2000s, the UK experienced unprecedented growth in HE participation, a transformation widely characterised by scholars as the massification of HE. This section examines the key policies and reports underpinning this structural and cultural shift within the sector.

The concept of massification has been interpreted variably across the literature; however, Trow (1974) seminal framework remains foundational. Trow outlined three stages of HE development based on participation rates among 18-24-year-olds: elite systems, with enrolment below 15%; mass systems, where participation exceeds 15%; and universal systems, in which over 50% of the age cohort engages in HE. His typology provided both governments and institutions with an analytical tool to conceptualise transitions in access, equity, and institutional purpose as HE expanded beyond its traditional elite base.

3.2.2.1 What led up to the end of the binary system?

Throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s, successive Conservative Governments dominated UK politics (Gov.uk, no date b), embedding neoliberalism within the national policy framework. Although early reforms prioritised economic liberalisation, education policy became a central focus following the 1987 General Election (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). The Education Reform Act 1988 introduced market mechanisms into HE, marking a decisive shift toward competition and accountability.

The White Paper Higher Education: A New Framework (1991) identified the binary divide between universities (academic) and Polytechnics (vocational) as a structural impediment to progress (Gillard, 2019). Together with Education and Training for the 21st Century (1991), it informed the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, which abolished the binary divide and created a unitary HE sector. The Act sought to dismantle perceived elitism within universities, reflecting the increasing overlap between academic and vocational provision.

The expansion of HE during this period was driven by a rise in full-time education participation beyond compulsory schooling, record university applications (gov.uk, no date) and economic pressures from the early 1990s recession. Heightened global competition further incentivised employers to seek a more highly skilled workforce, ensuring the UK remained internationally competitive (Giannakis and Bullivant, 2016).

Scholarly responses to these reforms remain divided. Pratt (2008) highlighted concerns that post-1992 universities, formerly vocational polytechnics, would compete with pre-1992 institutions for research funding, as distinctions in institutional purpose diminished. (McCaig (2010, cited in Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011) argued that the 1992 Act entrenched

marketisation and intensified competition for high-performing students. Ratcliffe (2017) contended that polytechnics had historically produced more ‘work-ready’ graduates, while Baroness Warnock cited in Midgley (1996) criticised the dissolution of the binary system for eroding vocational education’s distinct value and diminishing the prestige of university degrees. Conversely, Wilson (2022) argued that post-1992 universities played a pivotal role in diversifying the student population, thus advancing WP and contributing to the broader massification of HE (Rainford, 2019).

3.2.2.2 Changes following the end of the binary system

Palumbo (2017) notes that the Further and HE Act (1992), produced by Kenneth Clarke in 1992, transferred control of sixth-form colleges and Further Education (FE) institutions from local authorities to newly established Further Education Funding Councils (across the four UK nations). The Act also granted Polytechnics full university status and the authority to award degrees (Brown, 2008; Cranfield and Taylor, 2008). According to McCaig (2010) intensified institutional competition as the number of universities and available student places increased, expanding student choice (section 4.3) and accelerating the massification of HE and subsequently over the past three decades, WP has been a key driver of massifying the sector (Rainford, 2021), contributing to greater competition and course diversification (Knight, 2018; section 3.2.2.2).

The rapid increase in student enrolment placed pressure on public finances, leading to a significant decline in per capita funding for HE between 1989 and 1997 (Clark, Conlon and Galinda-Rueda, 2005 in Machin and Vignoles, 2006). This was compounded by the early 1990s economic recession, during which rising unemployment reduced tax revenues and increased government welfare expenditure (Mandizha, 2016).

Together, the Education Reforms Act (1988), the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), and a renewed political commitment to HE expansion (Boliver, 2011) produced an unprecedented rise in participation from 15% to 32% between 1991 and 1997 (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). Brown (2011) identifies two significant waves of university expansion following the 1992 Act: the first increased the number of universities from 48 in 1984 to 90 by 1994, comprising 30 former polytechnics in England and Wales, five Scottish Central Institutions reclassified as universities, and seven newly established institutions. The number of universities further increased to 106 across England, Wales, and Scotland between 2004 and 2007, following the Higher Education Act (2004).

3.2.3 Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 defined disability as

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities” (legislation.gov.uk, no date)

The Conservative Government that enacted the DDA (1995) also commissioned the National Committee of Inquiry into HE, whose Dearing Report (1997) recommended that universities produce disability statements but stopped short of making this a statutory requirement (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012). Subsequently, the New Labour Government amended the Act through the DDA (2005), following recommendations from the Disability Rights Task Force. The 2005 amendment introduced the Disability Equality Duty, obliging public bodies, including universities, to actively promote equality and eliminate discrimination (Shaw, 2024).

The expectations held by disabled students should be equal to those held of non-disabled students (Office for students, 2025), meaning that equality of opportunity was put into practice for all university students, including those with disabilities.

3.2.4 New Labour Years (1997-2010)

The Conservative Government called a general election in 1997, resulting in a decisive victory for New Labour, led by Tony Blair as Prime Minister (PM) and Gordon Brown as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Blair and Brown rebranded the party as New Labour, modernising its platform by abandoning traditional ideological positions that critics argued had rendered it unelectable in previous decades (Bevir, 2000). Ahead of the 1997 general election, PM John Major commissioned two committees to review post-16 education, chaired by Kennedy and Dearing, respectively, while New Labour established a third committee under Fryer in 1997 (Tight, 1998).

3.2.5 The Kennedy Report

Helena Kennedy QC’s Learning Works: WP in Further Education (Kennedy, 1997) sought to identify individuals who did not continue in post-16 education and to propose strategies for increasing their participation in FE. Kennedy (1997) argued that the HE student population did not reflect the broader demographics of society and that students from non-traditional backgrounds must be encouraged to enter HE. Tight (1998) notes that Fryer identified twelve underrepresented groups within HE (section 3.2.6).

Kennedy (1997) presented three key justifications for WP in FE: first, Britain’s economic decline and the rapid pace of technological advancement necessitated workforce upskilling through

education; second, the principle of equity required that all individuals be afforded equal opportunities to succeed; and third, education policy needed to shift to support WP which was in contrast to Blair's ideology of massification (section 3.2.4) Kennedy maintained that post-16 education required widening, not merely increasing, participation.

Tight (1998) observes that Lifelong Learning was central to Kennedy's report, which presented 93 recommendations and an 'eighteen-point agenda for change'. This agenda included reforms to student finance and stronger partnerships between universities and industry through the creation of learning centres. Kennedy (1997) emphasised the need for a national 'skills revolution' warning that Britain risked becoming a low-skilled, low-paid economy by 2000 if action was not taken. To avert this, she urged universities and FE colleges to adopt business-like efficiency while maintaining their educational mission. Kennedy cautioned that target-driven approaches could obscure the intrinsic purpose of learning, asserting that knowledge should serve 'as a weapon against poverty' (Kennedy, 1997, p.4) and that

"Education must be at the heart of any inspired project for regeneration in Britain"
(Kennedy, 1997, p.8)

The committee concluded that FE has a distinct and essential role in achieving WP within post-16 education. This, they argued, can only be realised through recognising education as cyclical and by diversifying the sector to engage individuals who might not otherwise have considered HE.

3.2.6 The Dearing Report

Sir Ron Dearing chaired the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), established to recommend how the;

"Purposes, shape, structure, size, and funding of HE, including support for students, should develop to meet the needs of the UK over the next 20 years."

The committee's report titled *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (1997) positioned Lifelong Learning at the centre of the national policy agenda.

Dearing examined HE primarily through the lenses of economic growth and competitiveness, arguing that a skilled workforce was essential to the UK's recovery following the 1991-1992 recession. The report linked the expansion of HE to the emergence of a broader culture of learning and called for a societal commitment to Lifelong Learning to sustain national competitiveness. Central to this vision was the recommendation to increase university participation, particularly among non-traditional and underrepresented groups (Dearing, 1997).

Dearing also emphasised the need for universities to operate in a more market-oriented manner, with funding tied to student recruitment and institutional attractiveness. This marketisation required universities to enhance student choice and strategically promote themselves to secure enrollments and income. As Maringe and Fuller (2006) later argued, effective WP necessitates collaboration across schools, colleges, and universities.

Among Dearing's key recommendations was the introduction of foundation degrees, designed to attract students from low SES backgrounds and first-generation entrants to HE. These measures laid the foundation for a more diversified and marketised HE sector, aimed at massifying the sector while aligning educational provision with national economic priorities (Callender and Dougherty, 2018) (section 3.2.8).

3.2.7 The Fryer Report

Professor Bob Fryer chaired the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL), which produced *Learning for the Twenty-First Century* (1997). Commissioned by the newly elected Labour Government in June and published in November of that year, the report was intended to inform the forthcoming White Paper on Lifelong Learning (section 3.2.10) (Ranson, Rikowski and Strain, 2001). NAGCELL asserted that learning should be recognised as a lifelong process that occurs across diverse contexts, rather than being limited to formal educational settings. The report proposed a ten-point agenda for developing a national learning culture and reaffirmed a commitment to WP. It identified twelve groups, including people with disabilities, who particularly benefit from enhanced access to learning opportunities. Among its practical recommendations were strategies to enhance educational institutions technological capacities to support communication, teaching, and workforce development (Tight, 1998).

Collectively, the Kennedy (1997), Dearing (1997), and Fryer (1997) reports advocated Lifelong Learning as essential to social and economic progress. Whereas Kennedy and Dearing spoke of a learning society, Fryer argued for cultivating a learning culture (table 3.1). The Fryer Report built upon Kennedy's work, offering a more holistic and culturally grounded vision of Lifelong Learning.

“wide-ranging changes to be addressed in families, communities, relationships, and in people's aspirations and very identities.” (Fryer, 1997, p.3).

Fryer and Dearing also placed greater emphasis on the economy than Kennedy, analysing how Lifelong Learning could sustain productivity and economic growth

(table 3.1). The groups who would benefit from targeted advocacy for Lifelong Learning, according to the 1997 reports, are detailed below.

Kennedy	Dearing	Fryer
• People without qualifications • Unemployed people • Low-income and lone-parent families • Low-income white men • Some ethnic minority groups, including refugees • People over the age of 50 • People with learning difficulties/disabilities from minority ethnic groups • People with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties • People with profound/multiple learning difficulties/disabilities • Adult with mental illness • Young people with emotional/behavioural difficulties • Ex-offenders • Part-time and temporary workers • Unskilled manual workers	• Socio-economic groups IV and V, particularly men • Bangladeshi women and Afro-Caribbean men • People with disabilities	• People without qualifications • Unemployed people • Lone parents and low-income women • Some ethnic and linguistic minority groups • Older adults • People with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • People with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties • Disaffected young adults, particularly men • Ex-offenders

	• People from non-affluent neighborhoods • Women in engineering and technology.	• Part-time and temporary worker • Unskilled manual workers • Those living in remote or isolated locations

Table 3.1 Summarises the principal areas of similarities and differences across the three reports.

3.2.8 The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain, and Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998

The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 emerged as a legislative consolidation of the most politically viable recommendations advanced by the Kennedy, Dearing, and Fryer Reports (all published in 1997), and the subsequent Green Paper *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE, 1998). The Green Paper echoed the tone and rationale of these reports, reinforcing the position that Lifelong Learning could and should co-exist with compulsory education. Notably, the Green Paper was both consultative and programmatic, uncharacteristically embedding specific policy initiatives and government responses to the reports' recommendations (Blunkett, 2000 cited in Callender and Dougherty, 2018). This coherence across policy documents facilitated the translation of recommendations into statutory provisions within the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998, thereby institutionalising the principles of Lifelong Learning within national policy.

The Act's remit was extensive, establishing the General Teaching Councils for England and Wales, reforming HE's funding mechanisms, and restructuring student support (Gillard, 2019). Crucially, it abolished student maintenance grants and introduced means-tested tuition fees, marking a paradigmatic shift in the financing of HE (Heath, et al., 2013). Additionally, provisions within the Act enabled employees engaged in lawful work to take time off for study or training, further embedding the government's commitment to Lifelong Learning (Morgan, 2021).

3.2.9 1999 and New Labour

At the 1999 Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth, PM Tony Blair reflected on his government's achievements since the 1997 General Election and outlined his policy objectives for the remainder of the parliamentary term and beyond. Central to his address was the reaffirmation of education as the cornerstone of New Labour's agenda, encapsulated in his earlier declaration:

“Ask me for my three main priorities for government, and I tell you: education, education, and education.” (Curtis, 2003)

This statement became emblematic of New Labour's modernising ethos. During the 1999 speech, Blair introduced, for the first time, a numerical target of 50% participation in HE among 18-30-year-olds and removed the cap on university places (Coughlan, 2019). According to the Department for Education (2019b), this target was achieved in the 2017-18 academic year. The rationale for expansion was derived partly from the 1997 Kennedy, Dearing, and Fryer Reports, which highlighted the widening skills deficit within the UK labour market. At that time, the HE participation rate stood at 39% (Trow, 1974), situating the UK within what Trow classified as the 'mass' stage of HE development. Blair's 50% target thus sought to advance the system towards 'universal' HE.

Levine (2001) identified two distinct phases in the expansion of HE: an initial quantitative phase characterised by massification, followed by a qualitative phase focused on efficiency and enhancing the value of degree attainment, a shift later noted by Fairweather and Blalock (2015). The UK's trajectory reflected a broader global movement towards mass HE, accompanied by WP and diversification of the student body (Huisman, Meek and Wood, 2007). Achieving Blair's 50% target necessitated the inclusion of non-traditional students, thereby challenging prevailing assumptions about who HE was for. Maringe and Fuller (2006) contend that the economic rationale central to the 1997 reports was the principal driver of this expansion, as New Labour built upon the Conservative market-oriented reforms of the 1980s and 1990s to promote national productivity through an increasingly skilled workforce. Heath, et al. (2013) further note that Blair's 50% target was regarded as both pragmatic and achievable within the government's policy timeframe (Blair, 2001).

3.2.10 Future of Higher Education White Paper (2003)

The Future of HE White Paper (2003) articulated the government's strategic vision for UK HE, encompassing all aspects of university activity and addressing perceived sectoral challenges. The White Paper emphasised the need to expand HE provision to address the skills gap highlighted by international competition and to improve participation among under-represented

social groups, responding in part to the recommendations of the Roberts Review (2001). To support these objectives, the government pledged an additional £1.25 billion per annum for science and research over three years.

A key policy initiative was the promotion of foundation degrees as work-focused qualifications aligned with the local labour market needs, thereby mitigating skills shortages (Department of Education and Skills, 2003). The White Paper also proposed measures to enhance competition and accountability, including the publication of external examiner reports, provision of information on teaching standards, and surveys of student opinion managed by the National Union of Students (Department of Education and Skills, 2003, section 4.3). Such initiatives were intended to guide students' choices toward institutions with higher graduate employment rates.

The White Paper reaffirmed that increasing enrolment was central to the Government's HE policy, setting a target of 50% participation among 18-30-year-olds by 2010, later achieved in 2017 (Department for Education, 2019a). This expansion was positioned as both an economic imperative and a mechanism to promote social equity, recognising that access to HE could enable upward mobility for individuals from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. The government committed to sustained investment in universities while simultaneously emphasising institutional responsibility for financial management and strategic planning (Department of Education and Skills, 2003, para. 6.1).

Overall, the 2003 White Paper framed HE expansion as a dual strategy, enhancing national economic performance through a skilled workforce and fostering a socially just society.

3.2.11 HE Act 2004 – The Introduction of Tuition Fees

The Higher Education Act 2004 represented a key element of UK education policy, particularly regarding WP and fair access. These themes were also central to the preceding 2003 Future of HE White Paper. The Act mandated that universities ensure that admissions processes were equitable and inclusive. However, as Simister (2011) noted, the so-called 'top universities' remained essentially elitist, thereby undermining WP initiatives by disproportionately admitting students from affluent backgrounds; individuals who were already likely to enter HE (Bourdieu, 1986b) section 4.2.1.1).

The significance of the 2004 Act was further highlighted by the Sutton Trust, which reported that 3,000 students in the UK were underachieving academically because they attended post-1992 universities (Sutton Trust, 2004). The 2003 White Paper outlined mechanisms to achieve these aims, including a capped tuition fee of £3,000 (Harrison, 2011), the provision of Rikowski bursaries, and the establishment of the office for fair access (Harrison, 2011).

Additionally, the Act introduced a graduate contribution scheme via the taxation system, where graduates earning above £10,000 would have an automatic deduction applied by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Universities retained the discretion to set tuition fees within the £0-£3,000 range.

3.2.12 Equality Act 2010

New Labour enacted the Equality Act 2010 to

“Harmonise discrimination law and strengthen the law to support progress on equality”
(Evennett, 2022)

The EA (2010) consolidated 116 separate pieces of legislation into a single legal framework, simplifying the legal process for addressing discrimination (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). This consolidation ensured protection for individuals with any of the nine protected characteristics:

1. Gender Reassignment
2. Being married or in a civil partnership,
3. Being pregnant or on maternity leave,
4. Disability,
5. Race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin,
6. Religion or belief,
7. Sex,
8. Sexual orientation.

The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination across six domains, including education. This study focuses on students with and without disabilities, rendering the area of disability particularly pertinent. Evennett (2022) notes that the House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 found that, under the DDA (1995) disabled individuals had stronger protections than under the Equality Act (2010). However, the Committee concluded that reversing the legal situation would be impracticable; instead, it recommended targeted modifications to the existing Equality Act (2010), including adjustments to the public sector, of which universities form a part, many of which were already under review.

3.2.13 Coalition years 2010-2015

On 6 May 2010, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party formed the Coalition Government, which curtailed certain New Labour HE policies, while advancing others, notably

the implementation of new WP strategies through the (Department of Education, 2010). Under the Coalition, responsibility for WP strategies was devolved to individual universities, allowing each institution to develop tailored initiatives. Unlike New Labour, which prioritised career advisors, the Coalition Government emphasised providing students with broader guidance and accessible information about the full range of opportunities available after graduation (Department for Business Innovations and Skills, 2011).

3.2.14 Browne Report

The Coalition Government commissioned John Browne to lead an independent review on sustainable financing for the HE sector. In the Independent Review of *Higher Education Funding and Student Finance*, the Browne Report recommended removing the cap on tuition fees, allowing universities to set their own rates and fostering a market-driven HE system underpinned by student choice (Hubble, Foster and Bolton, 2019). Browne also proposed that students should pay no fees upfront, with repayments contingent on post-graduation earnings. The Career Progression Task Force endorsed the Browne Report's emphasis on choice, improved opportunities, and expanded information about courses, suggesting that optimal provision could use student choice as a mechanism to enhance WP and fair access (Department for Business, 2010; Wilkins and Burke, 2013). They further argue that meaningful choice is particularly crucial for students from non-traditional backgrounds, who require adequate guidance to select courses suited to their interests and potential.

In response to the Browne Report (2010), the Coalition Government increased tuition fees, intensifying the marketisation of HE (Thompson, 2017). With public spending cuts, policies prioritised university choice, competition, and efficiency, raising concerns about the genuine promotion of equality. Thompson (2017) critiques these measures as 'weak,' serving more as a nominal nod to WP and fair access than as an active effort to address inequality.

All additional direct funding from New Labour was withdrawn, except for STEM subjects, leaving tuition fees as the primary source of income for universities from 2012 onwards. Rather than removing the cap entirely, the Coalition raised the tuition fee ceiling from £3,250 to £9,000, financed mainly through student loans repayable only after graduates earned above £21,000 annually. Most universities opted to charge the maximum fee, reinforcing a marketised system in which students were framed as consumers (Bock, Poole and Joseph, 2014).

Concerns emerged that a de facto binary system was developing. Pre-1992 universities benefited from supplementary research funding, whereas post-1992 institutions became reliant solely on tuition fees (Thompson, 2017).

3.2.15 Conservative Governments 2015-2024

In the academic year 2016/17, the UK Government introduced a new Master's loan for students undertaking postgraduate taught degrees. The loan, available in any subject area, was disbursed in three instalments annually and could be used for both tuition fees and living expenses, with a maximum value of £10,000. Hubble, Foster and Bolton (2019) note in the Postgraduate Loans in England Research Briefing Paper that some students may miss out on opportunities due to limited awareness of such funding.

Concurrently, non-repayable maintenance grants for full-time students were replaced by repayable loans, with a supplementary £766 available annually for students from low socio-economic status (SES) households. Maximum loans for living costs were also increased by approximately 10%. In addition, the reform of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) saw universities assume responsibility for non-specialist, non-medical support (e.g., notetaking), while specialised support remained under DSA oversight (Gov.uk, no date a) The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 was informed by the 2016 White Paper Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice (DBIS, 2016). The White Paper recommended the creation of a single regulator to replace HEFCE, the removal of student number controls for compliant institutions, and the establishment of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Overseen by OfS, TEF evaluates universities on teaching quality, learning environment, and student outcomes, explicitly emphasising equity for disadvantaged groups (Shaw, 2024).

Following the EU referendum in June 2016, HE policy distinguished between UK and EU-domiciled students. Maintenance loans for new students increased by just under 3%, and the repayment threshold for existing loans (2012/13 onwards) rose from £21,000 to £25,000. The academic year 2018/19 saw the introduction of postgraduate and doctoral loans of up to £25,000, payable in equal annual instalments over four years. Part-time Maintenance Loans, income-assessed according to course intensity, were also introduced. By 2019/20, HE providers were required to register with the OfS as either 'Approved (Fee Cap)' or 'Approved Providers'. In 2022, Blair announced a target HE participation rate of 70%. This initiative was endorsed by Lord Johnson, the former Minister for HE. In the foreword to the report, Blair observed that,

“We still do not have a sufficient number of highly skilled individuals to fill many of today's vacancies (Johnson, foreword).”

Lord Johnson further noted that, as the UK continues to evolve as a knowledge-based economy, new employment opportunities will increasingly emerge within sectors that disproportionately rely on graduate-level expertise (Weale, 2022), whereas Langton (2022) recommended reducing the proportion of school leavers entering HE to 20%. In 2019/20, the

HE participation rate was 53.4%, an increase of 1.5% from the previous year (Gov.uk, no date b). Donelan (2022), the former Higher and Further Education Minister, advocated shifting HE focus from traditional university degrees towards degree apprenticeships, as noted by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI).

3.2.16 Augar Review 2019

The Augar Review was commissioned by former PM Theresa May in February 2018, chaired by Dr Philip Augar, and officially titled *Post-18 Review of Education and Funding: Independent Panel Report*, and aimed to provide recommendations for reforming the HE system (Department for Education, 2019b). The 200-page report, published in May 2019, contained 53 recommendations. One of these being to reduce tuition fees as it was acknowledged that they were a barrier to WP (Morgan, 2020) thereby encouraging non-traditional students to attend university. While the government adopted some of these recommendations into policy, their implementation was delayed due to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, a change in PM in July 2019, and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Morgan, 2021).

3.3 The Widening Participation Agenda

The purpose of the WP agenda was to broaden access for non-traditional and underrepresented student groups (O'Sullivan, et al., 2019). The concept of WP is inherently complex and lacks a single, universally accepted definition (Shaw, et al., 2007). Initially, policies surrounding access to HE tended to locate responsibility in the individual, assuming that perspective student needed greater aspiration or role models to pursue HE (Maringe and Fuller, 2006). However, subsequent research has highlighted that structural and cultural barriers play a more significant role than individual motivation. Jones and Thomas (2005) and Rainford (2021) argue that students from low SES backgrounds often receive insufficient information, advice, and guidance about HE during compulsory education. This inequity necessitated a cultural shift in which educational institutions proactively provide targeted support and accessible pathways for students from underrepresented groups.

Given its multifaceted nature, WP can be understood as an outcome, a process, or a student classification (Shaw, et al., 2007). For this study, WP is conceptualised as a process that reflects how English and Welsh universities develop and implement WP initiatives tailored to their local and institutional contexts (O'Sullivan, et al., 2019). Within this framework, universities exercise autonomy through their governing bodies, such as executive boards or boards of governors, who define and endorse institutional WP strategies. These policies are

subsequently enacted by key practitioners within selective universities, translating institutional commitments into operational practice (Fleming, et al., 2009; O'Sullivan, et al., 2019).

3.3.1 Rationale for Widening Participation

Maringe and Fuller (2007) identify five principal rationales underpinning the WP agenda: economic, equity and social justice, Lifelong Learning, political capital, and social capital. These rationales collectively frame WP as both a moral and instrumental imperative within HE.

From an equity and social justice perspective, WP aligns with Bourdieusian theory, recognising that individuals from low-SES backgrounds are systematically disadvantaged compared to their more privileged peers due to differences in habitus and capitals (Bourdieu, 1985; Maringe and Fuller, 2007; sections 4.2.1.1; 4.2.1.2). This approach builds on the work of Jones and Thomas (2005), who emphasise that participation in HE is deeply influenced by the interaction between social structures and individual agency. Addressing these structural inequalities is thus central to achieving genuine equity in educational access and outcomes.

The Lifelong Learning rationale reflects a longstanding policy interest in education as a continuous process. Maringe and Fuller (2007) note that this perspective can be traced to the 1919 Education Act and the 1972 *UNESCO Faure Report (Learning to Be)* (Faure, 1972), which promoted education as a lifelong endeavour. This shift encouraged the development of non-formal learning pathways and work-based learning as legitimate routes into HE, broadening the admissions landscape and recognising diverse forms of knowledge and experience.

The political rationale for WP is rooted in the notion that an educated populace strengthens democratic participation and civic engagement. By fostering critical thinking and communication skills, HE contributes to the development of a more informed and active citizenry (Maringe and Fuller, 2007).

The social capital rationale links WP to social mobility and economic productivity. Healy and Côté (2001) argue that social capital facilitates upward mobility, enhancing individuals' capacity to participate in the economy as both workers and consumers. This, in turn, contributes to broader economic growth and improved societal well-being. When individuals experience social mobility, they often attain greater life satisfaction and contribute to a more skilled, adaptable, and productive workforce.

Schwartz (2004) underscores the persistent underrepresentation of certain groups within HE, including students with disabilities, despite an increasingly diverse student population. Stuart (2002) further suggests that WP initiatives have introduced a more competitive dynamic within the HE sector, compelling institutions to adapt to the needs of a broader demographic. In contrast, Hazelkorn (2014), drawing on Parry (2006), contends that WP has been less a

deliberate policy outcome and more an unintended consequence of the massification of the HE sector.

During the New Labour Government (1997-2010), WP was a central policy priority. However, the resulting surge in demand for HE led to a decline in per capita funding for universities, ultimately prompting the introduction of tuition fees (Clark, Conlon, and Galindo-Rueda, 2005). According to Gibbs and Knapp (2002), WP has resulted in a more demographically diverse student body, whose varied expectations and needs present ongoing challenges for institutional policy and pedagogy (section 4.3.2.6).

3.3.2 Who is WP for?

WP initiatives primarily target non-traditional and underrepresented groups in HE whose participation has historically been limited by structural, socioeconomic, and cultural barriers. These groups include students from minority ethnic backgrounds, those from low or high-SES households, first-generation entrants to HE, mature learners, and students with disabilities (Fleming, et al., 2009). Since the inception of WP policies in the 1960s, evolving social, political, and economic conditions have necessitated shifts in HE policy to ensure equitable access for these groups. Universities have been compelled to adopt a more holistic understanding of applicants, recognising that academic merit alone does not fully account for disparities in access and success (O’Sullivan, et al., 2019). In this sense, WP initiatives are not merely about increasing participation rates but about addressing deficits in cultural capital and creating inclusive institutional environments that value diverse forms of knowledge, experience, and potential (section 4.2.1.2). WP frameworks often assume that tertiary education is the optimal pathway for all individuals who meet entry requirements (Callender and Dougherty, 2018; Weale, 2020). However, this assumption can obscure persistent inequities in admissions processes and institutional hierarchies. While elite or research-intensive universities (often pre-1992 universities) continue to attract students who are socioeconomically advantaged and educationally high-achieving, post-1992 universities tend to embrace greater diversity in their student populations, playing a crucial role in the democratisation of HE access.

3.3.3 Government Statistical Analysis

Despite over five decades of policy intervention, progress toward equitable participation in HE remains uneven. Reay, et al. (2001) analysed admissions data from the 1997/98 academic year and identified a significant decline in applications from groups targeted under WP initiatives, highlighting the persistent barriers facing non-traditional students.

Recent evidence underscores the slow pace of change. According to the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) report *Social Mobility and Elite Universities* (Major and Banerjee, 2019), It is projected to take approximately 96 years for elite universities in England to achieve proportional representation between students from the most and least advantaged areas. Achieving such parity will require a fundamental cultural shift within the HE sector (McKie, 2019). This set explicit targets for universities with higher entry requirements mandating that they close the access gap by 2038/39 and halve the progression and attainment gaps within that period.

Disparities between institutional types remain pronounced. On average, 25.5% of students enrolled in post-1992 universities come from non-traditional backgrounds, compared with 11.7% in pre-1992 institutions (Fleming, et al., 2009). This reflects a broader pattern of stratification across the HE landscape, in which selective universities continue to underrepresent students from low-SES backgrounds, while post-1992 institutions play a disproportionately large role in delivering WP objectives (O'Sullivan, et al., 2019).

Using the UK Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, McKie (2019b) reported that the number of 18-year-olds applying to university from the most deprived areas in England rose modestly from 36,560 in 2018/19 to 38,770 in 2019/20, suggesting incremental but insufficient progress. Former universities minister Chris Skidmore highlighted record levels of university applications from 18-year-olds yet acknowledged that the success of WP initiatives remains uneven and requires deeper structural reform (McKie, 2019a).

Government data from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2017) indicates that participation rates among students aged 17–20 increased substantially from 19% in 1990 to 49% in 2015/16, signalling overall system expansion but not necessarily proportional inclusion. Within England, students from non-traditional or low-SES backgrounds remain particularly underrepresented in pre-1992 universities and especially within the Russell Group (Robertson and Hillman, 1997; Boliver, 2013; Boliver, 2015; Jerrim, Chmielewski and Parker, 2015; O'Sullivan, Robson and Winters, 2018; O'Sullivan, et al., 2019). Although Universities UK (2018) reports that university offer rates are at an all-time high, inequalities persist in who receives offers and where (UCAS, 2017). Rainford (2019) and Younger, et al. (2019) note that empirical evidence on the effectiveness of WP interventions remains limited, with many initiatives lacking robust evaluation frameworks to determine what works and why. This highlights an urgent need for evidence-based policy and evaluation to ensure that WP achieves its intended social and educational outcomes.

3.3.4 Evaluation of Widening Participation

Despite decades of policy interventions, WP in HE has not fully realised its intended objectives. Gorard, Siddiqui and Boliver (2017b) argue that while some improvements have occurred, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds remain underrepresented, indicating that substantial progress is still required. As they note,

“Although things have improved, less socioeconomically advantaged students are still underrepresented” (Gorard, Siddiqui and Boliver, 2017a, p. 95).

Scholars such as O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy (2006) and Gallacher (2006) suggest that although overall participation has increased, numerical growth alone is an inadequate measure of WP success, as it does not account for retention, completion, or outcomes. This perspective is echoed in political discourse: Grove (2020a) reports that the former Minister of State for Universities, Michelle Donelan, emphasised that growth in student numbers is an insufficient indicator of social mobility. Donelan argued,

“True social mobility is not just getting [students] to the door, it is getting them to the finishing line,”

highlighting the importance of universities supporting students through completion and into meaningful careers.

The effectiveness of WP initiatives is further hampered by a lack of empirical evaluation. Hayton and Bengry-Howell (2016) and (Thiele, et al., 2018, (citing Department for Education, 2014) stress that robust evidence regarding the impact of WP interventions is sparse, limiting the ability to make informed policy judgments. Rainford (2019) observes that WP is fundamentally concerned with equality. However, the notion of intrinsic equality can be misleading: equality as an ideal does not necessarily confer tangible benefits to individuals. Temkin (2000) illustrates this with the analogy of a population comprising 50% sighted and 50% blind individuals; making everyone blind would achieve equality but would clearly diminish workforce productivity.

Temkin (2000) also warns that focusing WP exclusively on the most disadvantaged applicants may inadvertently exacerbate intersectional inequalities, potentially reinforcing societal divisions rather than alleviating them. Critically, WP initiatives predominantly target applications to HE, rather than guaranteeing admission, a distinction that manifests differently across institutional types. Pre-1992 universities continue to emphasise students with high academic attainment, whereas post-1992 institutions generally prioritise diversifying their student body to include underrepresented groups, reflecting a broader commitment to inclusivity in HE access. Collectively, these critiques underscore that while WP has facilitated incremental progress, its current design and evaluation mechanisms are insufficient for addressing structural inequities, ensuring meaningful participation, or promoting genuine social mobility across the HE sector.

3.3.5 Widening Participation under New Labour

Over the past two decades, UK government policy has increasingly focused on raising aspirations among non-traditional applicants to HE (Schwartz, 2004; Rainford, 2019). Central to these efforts was the Future of Higher Education White Paper, published by the Department of Education and Skills (2003), which explicitly sought to address the underrepresentation of specific social groups within the HE sector.

In response, the New Labour Government commissioned the White Paper to identify and implement strategies to enhance participation among non-traditional students, including those from low SES backgrounds, minority ethnic groups, and first-generation entrants to HE. This policy initiative marked a shift from passive outreach to a more strategically targeted approach, aiming not only to increase applications but also to foster sustained engagement and successful completion for underrepresented groups.

3.3.5.1 Milburn Report

Alan Milburn, a former Member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister for the Labour Government, was tasked with examining how aspiration levels among children from differing SES backgrounds could be sustained to ensure parity in educational and professional outcomes (Whitty, Hayton and Tang, 2015). This inquiry culminated in the publication of the Milburn Report, *Unleashing Aspiration: A Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access and Professions*, in July 2009 (Curtis, 2003).

The report emphasised that achieving meaningful social mobility requires a re-evaluation of the predispositions and opportunities available to individuals, highlighting the importance of aspirational capital in shaping educational trajectories (sections 4.2.6) To this end, the Milburn Report recommended the expansion of career advisory services to support children in developing higher aspirations and informed career choices.

Importantly, the report noted that challenges in accessing professional careers were not confined to low-SES families; middle-SES families often encounter similar barriers in navigating pathways into the 'professions.' Consequently, the Milburn Report proposed a comprehensive set of measures, including:

1. Broadening student recruitment HE to ensure fairer access across SES groups.
2. Enhancing promotion of HE in FE colleges, making information about opportunities more accessible.
3. Publishing detailed demographic data on university entrants and those entering regulated professions to improve transparency and accountability.

4. Embedding aspirational guidance in university careers services to support students' long-term professional goals

Despite these recommendations, Milburn concluded that previous WP initiatives had limited cost-effectiveness, suggesting that more targeted, evidence-based approaches are necessary to achieve sustainable social mobility (BBC News, 1999).

3.3.6 Widening Participation through Contextualised Admissions

Contextualised Admissions is a policy mechanism designed to support applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds by considering a broader range of factors beyond standard examination results (Boliver, et al., 2017). By evaluating contextual information such as SES status, school performance, or personal circumstances, universities can bridge access gaps and operationalise WP objectives.

O'Sullivan, et al. (2019) define Contextualised Admissions as an approach that enables students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds to access foundation years or courses tailored to mature learners and other underrepresented groups. Evidence suggests that Contextualised Admissions has gained traction in the UK: a survey of 68 out of 130 universities revealed that the adoption of Contextualised Admissions more than doubled between 2012 and 2015 (Sundorf, Vasilev and Coffait, 2017). Proponents argue that Contextualised Admissions is advantageous because it allows applicants to be assessed holistically, considering the entirety of the information provided within their application rather than relying solely on examination results (Schwartz, 2004; O'Sullivan, et al., 2019). Boliver, et al. (2017) further emphasise that students admitted through Contextualised Admissions should receive additional support to ensure successful progression and retention.

However, Contextualised Admissions has faced several criticisms. Machin and Vignoles (2006) argue that it may mask the underlying correlation between social origin and academic achievement, potentially obscuring systemic inequalities within schools. Fullick, et al. (2014) note that students from more affluent backgrounds can sometimes circumvent Contextualised Admissions mechanisms through personal statements or other elements of the application process. Additionally, some critics contend that contextualised admissions at elite universities may not meaningfully widen participation, as those admitted through such schemes might have attended university regardless, thereby limiting the policy's transformative potential (Pickering, 2019).

Despite these critiques, Contextualised Admissions remains a key instrument in the WP agenda, offering a pathway for universities to consider broader measures of potential and to support students who may otherwise be excluded from HE.

3.4 Students with disabilities, how they have tracked against policies of growth (3.2) and the Widening Participation Agenda (3.3)

This section examines how HE policy has influenced the participation of SWDDs compared to SWNDDs. Policies aimed at expanding overall participation such as those emerging from the Robbins Report and Blair's 50% participation target, were designed to impact all prospective students, encompassing both traditional and non-traditional populations, including SWDDs. In contrast, WP policies specifically target non-traditional students, a category that encompasses SWDDs alongside other underrepresented groups.

The objective of this analysis is to determine whether government policies have affected university decision-making differently for SWDDs versus SWNDDs. Growth-oriented policies focus on increasing overall enrolment and broadening access across the population, whereas WP initiatives, such as the DSA and provisions under the Equality Act 2010, are designed to mitigate structural barriers faced by non-traditional students, including those with disabilities. Understanding how these distinct policy streams interact provides a nuanced perspective on the equity and accessibility of the HE sector for students with varying needs.

3.4.1 Disability

Several policy frameworks have shaped the participation of SWDDs in HE, including the DSA, WP initiatives, and broader growth-oriented policies such as Blair's 50% participation target. While SWDDs experience many of the same influences as all prospective students, specific policies have also targeted their unique needs, alongside interventions aimed at their influencers, including families and educators.

DSA was transferred from Local Education Authority control to central government oversight in 1993 (edm.parliament.uk, 1993) providing financial support to cover additional costs arising from a disability (UCAS, n.d.). The Student Loans Company administers the DSA, ensuring that students with disabilities receive resources to promote equality with non-disabled peers.

The DDA 1995 initially offered limited protection for disabled students in HE, prompting criticism that it constituted an 'inadequate compromise' (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012, p. 260). Consequently, the Disability Rights Task Force (established in 1997) recommended enhanced measures, culminating in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001) extended the remit of HE institutions to actively remove barriers to participation and promote equality, effectively instituting positive obligations for students with disabilities (DfEE, 1998).

The Equality Act 2010 subsequently consolidated prior discrimination legislation, formalising parity between students with and without disabilities and prohibiting discriminatory practices against individuals with protected characteristics (section 3.2.12).

Policy instruments such as TEF further incentivise universities to enhance accessibility and support for disabled students. According to McLaren (2016), universities with higher proportions of disabled students can improve TEF scores by investing holistically in their student experience, mitigating the potential negative effects of the DSA's decentralisation, which shifted funding responsibilities from government to institutions.

Within the WP agenda, disabled students are recognised as a non-traditional student group. WP initiatives, including outreach and promotional activities in schools and colleges, aim to reduce barriers and encourage participation. Contextualised Admissions (section 3.3.6) targets some non-traditional groups more explicitly, while initiatives such as the DSA directly address the needs of disabled students, demonstrating how WP can operate alongside massification policies (Robbins, 1963; Blair, 2001; section 3.3). Overall, evidence suggests that SWDDs have generally tracked similarly to non-disabled students regarding access under WP policies, particularly when compared to non-traditional, non-disabled peers.

Stigma remains an important consideration. Goffman (1963) originally defined stigma as though subsequent scholars (Murphy, et al., 1988; Cahill and Eggleston, 1994; Fife and Wright, 2000; Link and Phelan, 2003) have argued that this definition is overly broad. 1988; Cahill and Eggleston, 1994; Fife and Wright, 2000; Link and Phelan, 2003) have argued that this definition is overly broad. For this study, Link and Phelan (2003, p.337) definition of stigma is used; they state that

“When elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination occur together in a power situation”

this applies to disabled students because they may not want to disclose their disability. Stigma may discourage some students from disclosing disabilities, particularly invisible disabilities, whereas students with visible disabilities generally report easier disclosure processes (Eccles, et al., 2018) Roberts (2009) further notes that students often expect universities to communicate with them regarding support once a disability is disclosed, yet some students choose not to disclose due to perceived administrative or social barriers.

The conceptualisation of disability also influences policy. The medical model frames disability as an individual deficit requiring remediation (Kasser and Lytle, 2005), whereas the social model, emerging from disability activism in the 1960s and 1970s, emphasises societal barriers as the primary source of disadvantage (D'Alessio, 2011; Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare, 2010, p.163). The shift from the DDA (1995), which permitted justifiable discrimination and largely ignored HE, to the EA (2010) reflects this societal reorientation.

Tuition fees were introduced because of massification policies recommended by Dearing (1997) and implemented under Blair, increasing from £1,000 in 1998 to £9,535 in 2025 (Lewis,

Bolton and Wilson, 2024). Despite rising costs, participation rates for both disabled and non-disabled students have continued to increase (HESA, no date c); Hubble and Bolton, 2021), suggesting that tuition fees have had minimal differential impact on SWDDs relative to SWNDDs.

The first part of the literature review provides a detailed analysis of growing participation in the English education system since the 1960s. This explores the changing landscape through policy change and intervention. The earlier policy drives show shifts toward increased participation. Alongside increased participation, the chapter tracks moves and special attention to WP. In the main, this is written in a chronological account, explaining a variety of politically driven reports and bills. The latter part of this first section provides a summary of how policy has highlighted and impacted students with disabilities' participation.

The second part of the literature review (Chapter 4) gives an in-depth discussion around different theories and concepts that influence students' decision to attend HE. Again, this chapter shows how the issues affect the wider student body, and as the chapter progresses, more attention to applicants with disabilities is explored.

Chapter 4: Literature Review (Part 2)

4.1 Introduction

The second part of the literature review provides an in-depth discussion of factors influencing students' decision to attend HE. This chapter shows how the issues affect the wider student body, and as it progresses, it explores greater attention to applicants with disabilities.

Three overarching themes are considered in this chapter:

4.2 Concepts of student identity that influence their decision-making (theory)

4.3 Student choice and what influences it (including marketing and expectations)

4.4 Students with disabilities, how their identity and choice models track against discussions in 4.2 and 4.3

4.2 Concepts of student identity that influence their decision-making

This section explores the theoretical concepts relating to the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) and how they apply to students within the decision-making process.

4.2.1 Bourdieu

Mahar and Wilkes (2004) and Grenfell (2008) describe Bourdieu as being an eclectic scholar; he brought to the forefront the issue of class reproduction, as do Agbenyega and Klibthong (2015). Bourdieu's working style contradicts many of his peers (Mahar and Wilkes, 2004), including Foucault, Ferry, and Renaut. Sullivan (2002) suggests that Bourdieu's concepts must be contextualised in two ways: firstly, the continuing debate on class inequality in an educational setting; Adams (2021) asserts digital poverty will disadvantage a generation of students due to the COVID-19 pandemic (section 4.3.2.5) which echoes Sullivan's statement made almost 20 years earlier concerning class inequality. Secondly, the issue of class reproduction in an advanced capitalist society needs consideration. Bathmaker, et al. (2016) suggest that HE perpetuates class reproduction within the UK.

Bergerson (2009) asserts that social reproduction results from the individual's habitus and their access to different forms of capital; this impacts the types of schools they attend and the fields they access during their lifetime; this means that the status quo remains, and inequality persists (Duckworth and Cochrane, 2012; Cooper, 2013; Johnson, Bowden and Alonso, 2020).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is a very complex, misunderstood, and often misused concept (Maton, 2008). Bourdieu wrote his theories in French, and as a result, the need for translation occurred, resulting in elements of the meaning being lost in translation (Martin-Mazé, 2017).

One issue raised by Grenfell (2008) is that French society is very different culturally from other countries such as the USA and the UK; it was at the time Bourdieu first expounded his theories

and remained so when Grenfell was writing. Bourdieu's theories, therefore, are not necessarily fully transferrable to other societies outside of France.

4.2.1.1 Habitus

The definition of habitus has been produced by numerous authors, including Edgerton and Roberts (2014), as being the acquired elements of predilections or inclinations that a person uses to navigate society; they go on to say the individual's habitus is learnt from their family and friends dispositions, and the environment in their formative years so that they can prosper in a social world. However, Bourdieu (2002, p27) defines habitus as

“a transposable, cognitive ‘schemata’ or structures of perception, conception, and action”.

Another definition is found in *Homo Academicus* (1988, p279), where Bourdieu defined habitus as

“a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures, which generates perceptions, appreciations and actions”.

He also contends that an individual's social class demonstrates itself through their habitus (Pather and Chetty, 2016). Students from a lower socioeconomic background are consequently more likely to choose a post-1992 university where they feel that they will be studying alongside like-minded people (Bathmaker et al., 2016), in comparison to higher socioeconomic status students who feel an entitlement to be able to attend a pre-1992 university. Bourdieu (1984) also defines habitus as a social agent, an agent being, in terms of this thesis, families, friends, or schools.

Adams (2006) suggests that habitus is informed by a reconstituting loop where the individual's past influences their present, which then, in turn, influences their future. Bourdieu states that

“when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself

“as a fish in water” (1998, p53),

which means that the individual habitus and the world have a reciprocal relationship. Habitus is ordered in a structured manner rather than an unmethodical way (Bourdieu, 1990). Beattie (2017) expresses those agents within a field influence the individual's habitus capability to move around within the identified social fields, and due to this, the agent can hold a specific role (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 101) created a formula of $[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$. Zevenbergen, Mousley, and Sullivan (2004) suggest an individual's habitus and doxa ensure that, theoretically and practically, inclusive education is provided for SWDDs; this can be achieved by researchers questioning teaching regulations, how the individual is assessed as well as attitudes towards SWDDs within society.

The idea of habitus is not limited to an individual's personality; it is more innovative, reactive, and less prescriptive (James, 2011). Bourdieu (1977) suggested that habitus influences the individual subconsciously, which lies outside a person's control. This application of habitus indicates how important Bourdieu's work is to this thesis. Habitus is used to transcend the set of deep-rooted opposing opinions that structure how the individual thinks about the social world, and this also provides a meaning of how the social world can be analysed through investigative studies (Maton, 2008).

Therefore, the family habitus affects the student's predisposition towards education and whether to invest time, energy, and finances in reproducing or altering the familial status quo (Košutić, 2017).

Reay (2007) believes that habitus is a conceptual tool; she views it as being constituted of many disparate elements that can bring multitudinous choices to the individual and various options that can lead to numerous diverse outcomes during their lives, e.g., Lived experiences continuously shape and change developed in childhood; individuals make choices at the core of their habitus and tend to behave similarly to others in their social class.

According to Wacquant (2014), there are three elements to habitus: affective, conative, and cognitive. Affective relates to how an individual deals with how they connect on an emotive level with situations or objects. An example in this context is when prospective students attend open days and create an emotional connection with the current students showing them around the campus.. Conative suggests a situation occurs when a choice needs to be made in which the individual must adjust their actions to make a decision. An example is when a student must choose a university by going through the clearing process. Cognitive is how the individual's perceptions change, so how they think about a particular object or situation must also change. An example of this, relating to HE, is when a first-generation student comes to university with the perception that university centres around social rather than academic activities; this is disproven upon their arrival, so they must change how they view university.

4.2.1.2 Capitals

Bourdieu (1997) discussed three types of capital that operate within an educational setting and are essential for understanding social inequalities: cultural, social, and economic capital. An individual's capital is predetermined by their habitus (section 4.2.1.1) and early educational influences during the formation of their habitus. Pather and Chetty (2015) state that Bourdieu defined capital as any asset that holds a symbolic value and hence acts as a medium of exchange that individuals can utilise in their daily lives. Notwithstanding this, Beattie (2017) makes it clear this is not a definition Bourdieu provided himself of capital; instead, this is an

understanding that individuals can use capital like a resource that can be used, like money, which allows individuals to enter desired fields.

4.2.1.2.1 Cultural Capital

According to Adams (2006), Dumais (2006), and Košutić (2017) all suggest that cultural capital is the most useful form of capital in an academic environment; in this setting, it holds symbolic stature that is converted into economic capital. Bourdieu (1997) suggests cultural capital has three categories: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital is described as the individual's accomplishments, such as language skills, cultural sympathies, and style. Objectified cultural capital identifies the tangible forms of capital, such as a book or journal. These items must add something to society beyond their intrinsic worth. Institutionalised cultural capital, such as a degree, is the qualification obtained at the end of a course. Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital but only in an educational setting; it is evident that cultural capital refers to educational qualifications (James, 2011).

4.2.1.2.2 Social Capital

Social capital involves relationships between individuals and other individuals or groups (James, 2011). Social capital has a value that can be passed down through generations, which is embodied in the changes people experience within their lifetime; social alongside cultural capital, can be converted into economic capital (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2015). Social capital is inherited and accrued if the individual accepts compromise because they must move outside their habitus to accrue additional social capital.

4.2.1.2.3 Economic Capital

According to James (2011), economic capital is presented in monetary terms and, therefore, is not as relevant as the other two forms of capital in this thesis. Beasley-Murray (2000, p.107) expressed that "Bourdieu remains strangely loath to discuss economics" as in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) Bourdieu infers that he did not wish to focus on economic capital, and went further in Bourdieu (1993, p.32) by stating,

"As regards economic capital, I leave it to others: it's not my area".

LaVigne (2019) suggests that students come to university with the expectation of obtaining a better career, and it could be inferred that this could be for economic gain.

4.2.1.3 Fields

A field is a bounded area where social interactions occur between agents that share a commonality (Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu, 1998). For example, students on the same course are in the same field. Agents within a field hold different positions determined by their capital levels and consequently have different responsibilities within the given field (e.g., the student representative on a course holds higher levels of cultural and social capital than their peers). The agent's position within a field determines how the agents interact with one another. Bourdieu (1996) highlights the significance of the location of the field in question concerning others.

Bourdieuian theory states a field cannot operate independently of habitus and capitals. An individual's habitus consists of learned behaviours, upbringing, and environment. Capital is inherited from the family in which you are raised or can be earned by obtaining different qualifications (cultural), networking (social), and working (economic). A field, capitals, and habitus are all interconnected. Fields and capital are linked, as an individual cannot enter a given field without the prerequisite form. Habitus is linked with field and capital because learned behaviour and inherited and earned capital determine how the individual's social interactions occur within a field.

4.2.1.3.1 How a field operates

Thomson (2012) points out that when the word for field was translated, this process was completed inaccurately as the intended meaning for the word *le champ* (battlefield) was translated as *le pré* field, which implies a rural setting.

An essential element of a field is how much autonomy it has, as this influences its interactions with other fields (Bourdieu, 1992) referred to what occurs within a field as a game. Every field has a different set of rules, also known as doxa, which agents within that specific field should abide by. Bourdieu goes on to say that if agents inherit or earn enough capital, they can change the doxa if it benefits them, as competition is a crucial concept in field theory. When the agent enters a new field, they must learn new doxa (Meierdink, 2018); an agent then uses these doxas to understand how social interactions operate within that field (Beattie, 2017). Bourdieu (1992) defines doxa as the main occurrence in a social world, as the framework within which both reality and the intellectual world are played out, which is agreed to be unequivocal. Within any given field, there is a constant state of flux, which necessitates changes to the doxa in the field,

but there is a delay because of an agent's habitus and resistance to accepting change (Beattie, 2017; Threadgold, 2018).

Atkinson (2011) infers that doxa are unwritten rules that most people automatically abide by and are not questioned; therefore, doxa encompass shared beliefs that allow strangers to live together, e.g., in Halls of Residence, whilst minimising conflict. Agbenyega and Klibthong (2015) say that all of Bourdieu's congruent concepts of habitus, the different types of capital, doxa, and fields work in concert with one another to help bring about equality in education.

4.2.1.3.2 Application of Bourdieusian field theory to the English Higher Education sector

The English HE sector is autonomous, as every university has its doxa and ways it operates internally (Bathmaker, 2015). The HE sector is also heteronomous because of its relationship with UK governmental policy (Naidoo, 2004), e.g., the Equality Act (section 3.2.12), which applied to all sectors, and is synonymous with the industry's growth and increasingly diverse nature; autonomy and heteronomy can coexist interdependently. For example, when data collection for this study occurred, the government set a cap for tuition fees of £9250 (Gov.uk, no date b). A 50% target for university participation for all young people aged 18-30 was announced to the general public because there was a need for university graduates to help the UK economy (Bathmaker, 2015), and universities in England and Wales were informed that they must adopt strategies to encourage this; this ran parallel to WP. Everchanging external factors beyond the university's control have required HE to evolve different doxa as they adapt to changing circumstances, such as neo-liberalism. These doxas have had to be applied by university executives and adopted by agents within the field. (Burawoy, 2011; Meierdirk, 2018). An example is students viewing themselves as consumers rather than learners (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2010; McGettigan, 2013). Maton (2005) suggests that the UK government e.g., the Robbins Report in 1963 (section 3.2.1.1) have led to HE now becoming more acutely aware of the needs of industry; this is in response to the need to assist the individual in obtaining a career and also to help the economy grow.

Burawoy (2011) describes how Bourdieu's field theory impacts individual who becomes acclimatised to one field; upon arriving in a new field, they may struggle to interface with other agents in this field. An example is when a school pupil transitions from further to tertiary education. Burawoy (2011) implies that the symbolic capital that an agent carries within one field may be valued differently in a different field, which will impact the agent's positioning in the new field. An example is when a pupil leaves FE and is the most senior within that field (school/college); however, once they transition to university, their prestige or status is altered as they transition into a new field.

4.2.1.3.3 Fields of power

Fields of power perpetuate inequality for students when choosing which university to attend (Bunn et al., 2020). (Bourdieu, 1992, cited in Hilgers and Mangez, 2014) affirmed how the postulation of a field of power is used to understand and describe a specific field with conceptual characteristics. A particular job or task does not define a field of power. An agent can hold a significant position within multiple fields, enabling them to attain the necessary capital required to occupy a field of power (Bourdieu, 1992, cited in Hilgers and Mangez, 2014). In a field of power, two factions are needed to counterbalance one another, economic and cultural. According to Bourdieu (1992) field theory, the field of power is dominated by economic capital as opposed to cultural capital (Hilgers and Mangez, 2014).

4.2.1.4 Critics of Bourdieu's Concepts

There is a myriad of scholars who critique Bourdieu's work; those considered the most appropriate for this study are discussed and include Sullivan (2002), Perna (2006), Kingston (2001) and Spiliopoulou, Koustourakis and Asimaki (2017); moreover, these authors, in their discussions of cultural capital are a representative cross-section of Bourdieu's critics.

Kingston (2001) opines that Bourdieu's inexact descriptions of different terms when discussing capital have led to many interpretations. As Bourdieu wrote in French, the vagaries of his terms were exacerbated when translated into other languages. Sullivan (2002) goes on to say that the concept of capital is robust enough for empirical studies but has some limitations regarding the preciseness of his language. Adams (2006) suggests that the critics of Bourdieu find that the idea of habitus is too inescapable.

Warde (2004) concurs with Kingston (2001) and other writers that Bourdieu fails to provide exact definitions concerning his theoretical nomenclature, whilst O'Hara (2000) focuses on fields. Warde (2004) made four other criticisms of Bourdieu's field theory. Firstly, if agents within a field have increased their competence, their position within that field is elevated; however, this is not necessarily transferrable to real-world settings. Bourdieu's field theory indicates that all agents should act strategically and competitively; however, Warde (2004) argues that this is impossible to achieve within some scenarios. Thirdly, O'Hara (2000) agrees with Warde (2004) when they say that the idea of competitive advantage is not always appropriate within a field. An example is that not all students can be student representatives of a course. Finally, Warde (2004) expounds on his criticisms by expressing that Bourdieu's use of the game analogy only consistently fits in with his field theory rather than with all aspects of his framework.

How cultural and social capitals are viewed has overlapped at many points in time (McNeal, 1999, cited in Perna, 2006). Families who lack the expected cultural capital may have lower educational and career aspirations; this means that they might not enrol on a university course because they are unaware of the process to follow and cannot seek advice from their parents as having not attended university themselves and lacking knowledge of them, would likely be unable to provide informed advice. Equally, these individuals may have to counteract their lack of cultural resources. If the individual starts with less capital and inputs the same amount of effort as peers who possess higher levels of cultural resources, they will not obtain the same degree classification from the educational institution (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Crawford (2014) suggests that this may result from those with higher levels of resources beginning with more developed non-cognitive skills, encountering fewer external pressures or unexpected challenges, and having greater access to support, financial or otherwise.

An agent holds capital within an existing field; the capital itself cannot be unquestionably transferred between fields with the agent, and even if this is possible, the capital may not hold the same value after moving fields.

Perna (2006) states that contrary to Coleman's (1988) view, specific individuals may be seen to have an advantage as they have access to particular groups or events. However, according to Bourdieu (1986), the amount of social capital an individual may obtain through social events and relationships depends on the size of the individual's network. This includes the amount of cultural, social, and economic capital an individual acquires, and this means that if a person is part of a low SES group, they have less capital to 'share' compared to a person who is part of a high SES group (Bourdieu, 1986). Lin (2001) in Perna (2006) reference Bourdieu when describing social capital as a way for higher economic groups to maintain prestige.

Perna (2006) says that structural barriers prevent and impede access to institutional resources by different minority groups, including those in an educational setting (Dika and Singh, 2002). An individual's habitus and belief systems influence university-related expectations, attitudes, and aspirations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997). As a result of this, a student's university choice is not a rational decision but a 'sensible or reasonable' choice (McDonough 1997, p9). This point shows some level of disagreement that students are 'rational consumers' (Tomlinson, 2017), for example the discourse around Human Capital Theory.

4.2.2 Rational Choice Theory

Elster (1986) defined Rational Choice Theory (RCT) as being

“a simple action theory that allows us to understand how “aspects” of a social situation can affect the choices and actions of individuals” (Krstić 2022, p.10).

However, Elster (1988) did not state what the ‘aspects’ should be; therefore, implying the ‘aspects’ can change depending on the situation the individual faces, e.g., the decision to go to university. Four assumptions must be adopted to use rational choice as a theory. There is general acceptance for the first three assumptions. However, many scholars have criticised the fourth assumption. The first assumption is that behaviour can be understood as individuals choosing different alternatives. The second assumption is that choices are shaped primarily by three key factors: individual preferences, beliefs about the world, and the constraints they face. The third assumption is that for preferences to guide decision-making effectively, they must satisfy certain conditions, most notably completeness and transitivity. Completeness means that individuals can compare any two options and determine which one they prefer or if they are equally desirable. Transitivity ensures preference consistency: if an individual prefers option A over B and B over C, they should also prefer A over C. The fourth assumption is that within this theory, individuals are assumed to select the best possible option available to them, given what they want (preferences), what they believe to be valid (beliefs), and what limits their choices (constraints) (Krstić, 2022)

There are many criticisms of RCT; the primary one is that its use in social science fields creates an illusion of robustness comparable to that of the natural sciences (Krstić and Pavlović, 2020, cited in Krstić, 2022). Another criticism given by DesJardins and Toutkoushian (2005) questions whether the decision to go to university is rational because they suggest that when students enter HE, it often involves taking on debt based on the assumption that a degree will fulfil certain future expectations, an inherently uncertain outcome. Hilgers and Mangez (2014, p.22) say that

“when an individual lets his social nature follow its inclinations in a field where the objective rules are congruent with his dispositions, without even trying to do so he produces acts that correspond to the course that rational action would recommend. His acts appear rational actions without necessarily being guided by rationality. They are simply reasonable,”

according to Bourdieu. Elster (1989) suggests that when perspective student decide to go to university, they make a rational choice concerning their future.

4.2.3 Identity Development Models

This section explores Identity Development Models (IDM), this begins by explaining to the reader the concepts and how these impact on decision-making for young people. It is expanded to apply to those with disabilities. Erikson (1968) developed the essence of Identity

Development Models based on the work of Freud (1905), and this involved creating a psychosocial model of identity development by utilising anthropology and social ecology. Similarly to most earlier IDMs, this is a stage model.

Erikson created an eight-stage IDM in which the individual cannot proceed to the next stage until all tasks in the current stage are completed.

4.2.3.1 How is Identity Development defined?

There is no fixed definition for identity development (Bosma, et al., 1994) McLean and Syed (2015) defined personal identity as the individual's beliefs or intentions. Forber-Pratt, et al. (2017) cite Identity development as a social process in which individuals mirror those around them. Sokol (2009) voices that Erikson highlights sociocultural factors (section 4.2.1) as he thought they were crucial in developing an individual's identity.

4.2.3.2 Identity Development and Disability

An individual with a disability must complete all stages of an IDM that a non-disabled person has to complete but also has additional impediments to address. An example of this is many disabled people live with a family where they are the only person with a disability. Hence, they have fewer role models to follow that they can identify with, meaning that the disabled person forms their identity through their engaging with society, their families and their self-awareness and adjusting to their disabilities and any obstacles that they may need to overcome (Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). The individual with the disability must internally navigate their preconceptions of having a visible or invisible disability (or a long-term health condition) as well as the potential social stigma that accompanies having a disability. Riddell and Weedon (2014) go on to express that disability is only one element of a disabled person's identity. A disability, or a long-term health condition, can manifest at any time during one's life, whether the disability is visible or invisible, but according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), there is a higher likelihood the more older an individual gets, there is an increased likelihood they will become disabled; there are several types of disability thereby making it difficult for researchers to agree upon, or create a single model Frank (1993), Charmaz (1995), Gill (1997), Olkin and Pledger (2003) and Darling (2003) have all created unique models to illustrate how disability identity development works.

4.2.3.3 Limitations of Identity Development Models

The first limitation discussed, cited by Syed (2016), is that there is no agreement amongst authors writing in this subject area about whether identity development is completed through stages or is on a continuous trajectory; this means that change is viewed as ongoing and influenced by the individual's context. Another limitation is that identity development cannot foresee an individual's behaviour. Alternatively, IDMs describe the processes necessary for identity development (Tajfel, 1970). Another limitation of IDM is the fact that an individual's identity is in a state of flux due to how society views you as an individual if the individual is viewed through the lens of a continuous trajectory IDM, whereas if a stage model is utilised context is considered (Hendry and Kloep, 2007). Tajfel (1970) states that context is essential and must be regarded when IDM is in motion.

4.2.4 Social Exchange Theory

Homans (1958), Emerson (1962) and Molm (2003) define Social Exchange Theory (SET) differently. Peter Blau was among the first authors to define social exchange. Unlike economic exchanges, Blau (1964) documented that social exchanges are implicit. Cropanzano, et al. (2017) define social exchanges as events that only occur between people who have an existing relationship. In contrast, an economic exchange can occur between two or more people without a prior relationship.

SET utilises multiple theories to explain how social exchanges work by saying how resources are valued in exchange for a cost. SET can be viewed as an all-purpose framework or conceptual perspective to explain how social exchanges work (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2007). An example concerning this thesis is a prospective student applying to a university whose costs include paying tuition fees and a loss of potential earnings whilst they complete their degree. The resources are the student's time and money that could have been saved for future life events. Their profit should be obtaining a better-paid job than their peers who have not attended university. The student and the university must understand that their relationship is built upon trust, with loyalty demonstrated by the student returning year after year to complete their course (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2007).

4.2.4.1 How Social Exchange theory is utilised

According to Redmond (2015), there are three approaches that economic exchange theory can use to explain social exchanges. The first approach can be enacted when deciding if the expectation of the result outweighs the cost incurred by making the decision (section 4.3.2.4.2).

The second approach occurs during the exchange process between an individual and an organisation (i.e., between a student and a university) or between two or more people. The final approach evaluates whether the relationship or decision is worth entering and/or continuing (Redmond, 2015).

Redmond (2015) laid down five principles that must be fulfilled for SET to be apposite. SET applies to this study because, as the first principle states, social interaction can be expressed in terms of reciprocity, similar to economic exchanges. Hence, a student decides to go to university by evaluating the positive and negative implications of attending university. The second principle that can be applied to this study concerns how people reach their end goal by seeking the most considerable possible benefit for the smallest amount of outlay. This study demonstrates this as the student and the university only accepts the exchange if it is in their best interests (Mitchell, Cropanzana and Quisenberry, 2012). Principle three asserts that all parties must gain something from the interaction. Within the HE sector, an exchange occurs between a student and the university; the student studies and applies for a place at a university, and the exchange occurs when the university rewards the student with a place if the required criteria are met. Principle four concerns itself with the development and organisation of relationships, as these are things that SET can shed light on. An example of this applied to HE through outreach schemes is when a university sends current students to a school to raise awareness of what the university can provide; this encourages someone who has hitherto not considered attending university to re-evaluate their prospects. Principle five describes how different types of social exchanges within an organisation may affect its members' behaviour toward one another. An example is at an open day where prospective students either decide to attend the institution or do not (sections 7.2.3.1; 7.5.5.4.4) after these prospective students have undertaken social exchanges with current staff and students.

Due to the expansive nature of SET, it can be used in many different fields of study as it can illustrate any findings.

Cropanzano, et al. (2017) developed a generic model to explain how social exchanges work. This model has been used to create an example that is pertinent to this research (figure 4.1)



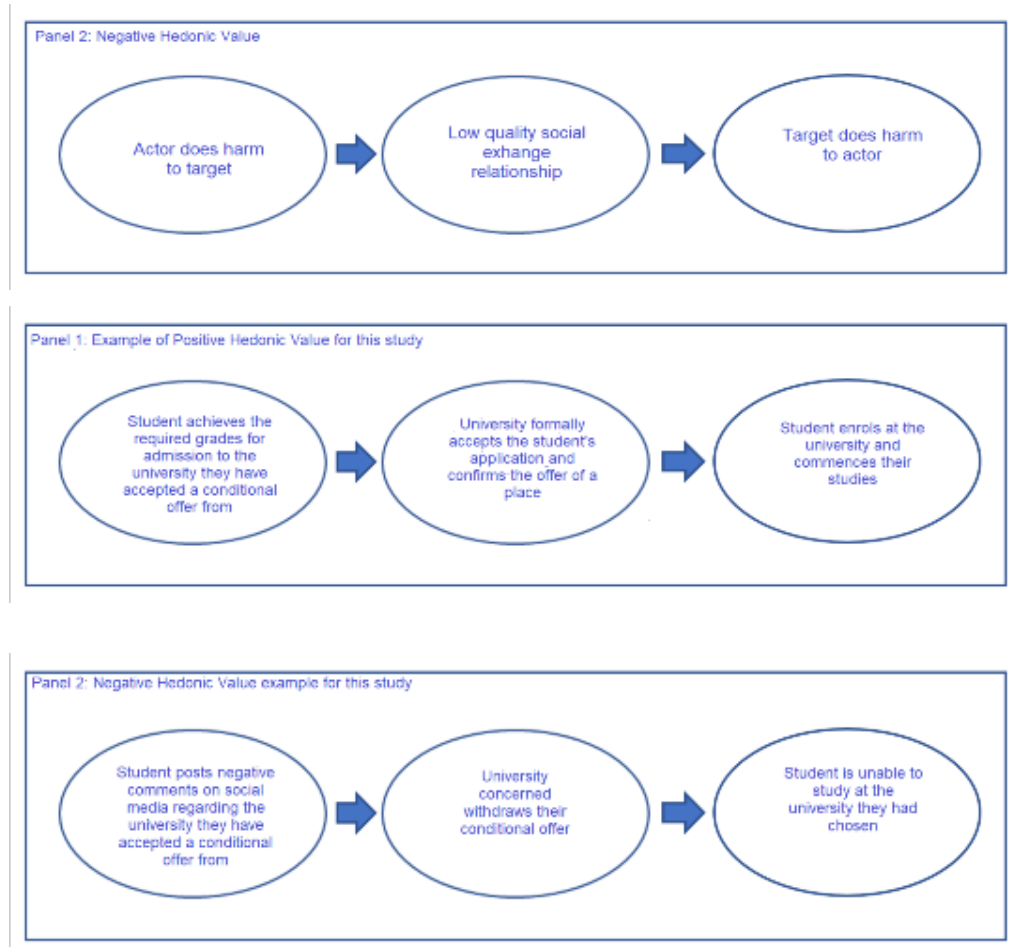


Figure 4.1 Examples of a model of social exchange Source: Adapted from Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels and Hall (2017)

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2007) discuss three key principles common to all theories that involve social exchange. Firstly, rules or norms of a social exchange require an element of reciprocity. Secondly, the perception of the result of the social exchange, which is judged as being positive or negative depending upon what the individual gave in the transaction. It is deemed worth more, less or the same as what they receive in return from the individual. The final principle may involve relationship formation resulting from repeated social exchanges between all parties. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2007) indicate that a further commonality of social exchange theories is that interactions between individuals can be interpreted as a series of transactions.

4.2.4.2 Limitations of Social Exchange Theory

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2007) state that SET has certain limitations. The first limitation of SET is that it is better utilised in broader and more generalised studies. However, it is more difficult to use when describing specific actions and decisions, such as the decision-making

process of choosing a university. The second limitation is that SET does not account for social exchanges that leave one or both parties feeling neutral about interaction, which those who use SET in their studies overlook. A third limitation denoted by SET is that there is no neutral exchange; a positive or negative value is each interaction; this is an issue because some interactions are neither hedonically positive nor negative. The final limitation is the repercussions of the three above limitations. Looking at past behavioural patterns concerning SET cannot accurately envision what may happen in the future due to the vague nature of the exchange description.

4.2.5 Human Capital Theory

CIPD (2017) reported that Human Capital Theory (HCT) was first defined by Schultz (1961, p.140) when he said it concerned itself with the

“knowledge, skills and abilities of the people employed in an organisation”

This definition had some limitations. Still, these were mitigated by Schultz (1981, p.21) when he updated his definition to

“...all human abilities to be either innate or acquired. Attributes ... which are valuable and can be augmented by appropriate investment will be human capital”.

HCT was redefined by Dess and Picken (1999, p.8) when they added that the individual could continue learning; they say that

“the individual’s capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience of the company’s employees and managers, as they are relevant to the task at hand, as well as the capacity to add to this reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experience through individual learning”.

The rationale for HCT in business was to explain the need for investing in an educated workforce; when relating HCT to HE, it justified for governments to allocate funding to HE students because an educated workforce can increase the nation’s economy (Oliver, 2004).

van der Merwe (2010) opined that an element of the decision-making process when going to university is the premise that HE be treated as an investment in the potential student’s future. He posits that the Robbins Committee (1963) (section 3.2.1.1) was one of the first policymakers to understand the influences behind the potential student’s decision to go to university (Menon, 1998 in van der Merwe, 2010)

Marginson (2019) outlines some limitations of HCT in the HE sector. Many, including economists, have not endorsed HCT as a workable theory because it is overly simplified. Marginson (2019) suggests other theories better explain why students go to university, including Bourdieu (section 4.2.1). HCT only deals with the economic rationale for attending

university, whereas Bourdieu ties cultural and social capital (alongside economic capital (sections 4.2.1.2.1; 4.2.1.2.2; 4.2.1.2.3).

Marginson (2019) states four criticisms that align with HCT, the first one being that after making a decision, HCT does not allow external events to change the outcome of that decision. The author also criticises HCT as a linear theory, arguing that it does not suit the heterogeneous and adjustable nature of the HE sector. He indicates that HCT cannot be applied to education and the workplace because both sectors are non-homogeneous, as HCT is a linear theory. Finally, no other explanations can be given for HCT to be used thoroughly in a study.

4.2.6 Aspirational Capital

Yosso (2005, p.77) defines aspirational capital as

“the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers”.

For this study, aspirational capital refers to the perspective student who desires a better future for themselves and people within their familial habitus who have the same desires as the perspective student.

The concept of aspirational capital can be linked to WP (section 3.3) because both deal with expectations, which are, in essence, realistic aspirations (Marjoribanks, 1998). WP removes real or perceived barriers to entering HE for non-traditional students, whilst aspirational capital deals with the belief that people can achieve their goals in life. Disabled students are a type of non-traditional student and can sometimes require the belief to create the aspiration to go to university.

Basit (2012) suggests that aspirational capital can be a substitute social (section 4.2.1.2.2) and cultural (section 4.2.1.2.1) capital and these forms of capital are what non-traditional students have not inherited from their parents; therefore, their parents can accrue aspirational capital to transmit to their children instead of social capital. Basit (2012) says that young people expect a better career, but this can only be achieved by attaining a good education, which forms a part of the ambition for social mobility, a crucial part of aspirational capital.

Andrew, et al. (2021) suggest that aspirational capital is a concept that encompasses student ambitions. They indicate that aspirational capital develops through first-hand experience of going to university; once the participants in their study had aspirational capital, they used it as a role model for their children. For the participants in Andrew, et al. (2021) study, aspirational capital helped them overcome their barriers to entering HE.

4.3 Student Choice and what Influences it (including Marketing and Expectations)

This section explores student choice and associated factors. Unlike section 3.3, which explored theoretical concepts of student identity that may influence their decision-making, this section analyses more practical factors and targeted interventions within the HE sector to influence applicant behaviour.

Due to the ever-changing nature of HE, since the 1960s, many different frameworks have been developed to help deconstruct the decision-making process undertaken when deciding which university to attend is being made (Iloh, 2018). Moogan (2011) suggests that the Higher Education Act (2004) and the introduction of tuition fees have led to the marketisation of HE, leaving the HE sector to balance its academic reputation with student demands. Additionally, increased competition among institutions has led universities to become more strategic and adopt more business-like methods. Vigurs (2010) and Brown (2011) state that universities must provide clear and relevant information if students are to make an informed choice. Moogan, Baron and Harris (1999), Lubbe and Petzer (2013) and Zechariah and Eissa (2019) state that influencers play a crucial role in this decision-making process when going to university because influencers support the prospective student in this decision and the choice of a specific university. According to Moogan, Baron and Harris (1999), influencers can be divided into two distinct categories: internal and external factors, which influence differently. (section 4.3.2.2).

4.3.1 Choice models regarding going to university and the choice of attending a specific university

Tinto's original model in 1975 had three distinct phases, none of which concerned the choice of institution. Tinto revised his model in 1993 to add the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university within his model. This revision consisted of only a small framework element, so this model was rejected.

Perna (2006) student choice model is based on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capitals (cultural, social and economic) (sections 4.2.1.2.1; 4.2.1.2.2; 4.2.1.2.3). Some scholars, including McDonough (1994) and Perna and Titus (2005), believe habitus and the school an individual attends influence the university decision-making process.

Perna (2006) uses economic and sociological elements. The economic component of this model concerns the returns on the resources invested in developing human capital. The sociological aspects of this model include the notions of habitus, cultural and social capital and institutional context.

However, according to Illoh (2018), several assumptions must be adopted to use Perna (2006) model. These assumptions include performing a cost-benefit analysis before deciding to enter

HE whilst analysing the supply and demand for HE. Due to the timeframe and the nature of a degree, there are too many unknown and unidentifiable factors leading the individual to be unable to complete an accurate cost-benefit analysis; hence, a rational choice cannot be enacted (Iloh, 2018).

A second assumption that must be adopted if using Perna (2006) model is understanding the demand for HE and the cost of supplying resources. This assumption cannot be carried forward as the individual deciding to attend university has limitations on their choice. These include the rising costs of commuting to university or, if the individual chooses to live on campus, the rising cost of accommodation. Similarly, the individual's habitus can be ambiguous or unambiguous in familial, educational, and locational constituents, as well as in the broader societal context when the individual considers entering HE (Iloh, 2018). This assumption has been refuted as WP tried to encourage non-traditional students to attend university (Burke, 2017; Henderson, Shure and Adamecz-Völgyi, 2020). Therefore, Perna (2006) model has been discounted for the reasons above. Also, her model is based on her research in American colleges. These have different influencing factors compared to UK universities, and American students' reasoning for entering tertiary education differs from that of UK students.

University decision-making choice models conventionally focus on economic or social issues. These models include those developed by Chapman (1981), Litten (1982), Jackson (1982) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987).

Economic models assume that the lifetime benefits, which are the monetary and non-monetary value of obtaining a qualification, are added to outweigh the costs of HE (Becker, 1962; Becker, 1993; Ellwood and Kane, 2000; Paulsen, 2001). The models focus on social issues, mainly socioeconomic rather than other sociological factors (Terenzini, Cabrera and Bernal, 2001). Perna (2006) notes, in Bourdieusian terms, that the limiting factors of human capital models include not acknowledging the influencers and influencing factors of choice such as family and income.

In contrast to socioeconomic models, Perna (2006) emphasises the sociocultural elements of the choice model. Habitually, an individual's socioeconomic status was deemed a significant determinant of their educational aspirations and essential for their application to HE (Hossler, Schmit and Vesper, 1999); attending university translates into a greater choice of career, etc. Cultural and social capital, elements of Bourdieu's construct (sections 4.2.1), are needed to increase productivity and opportunities to improve the individual's social status (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Lamont and Lareau, 1988).

A person's social status partially determines how much cultural capital they possess, with the middle and upper classes holding the most valued forms (McDonough, 1997). Sociological techniques are beneficial for comprehending how students are influenced by structural barriers

and prospects which shape an individual's thought processes regarding university choice. Sociological approaches are functional when exploring choices made by a diverse range of perspective student (Horvat, 2001)

According to Paulsen (2001), models that have elements of both economic and sociological outlooks assume that decisions made by the students are influenced at least partially by their habitus and their capitals (Perna, 2000; St. John and Asker, 2001; Paulsen and St. John, 2002; St. John, Paulsen and Carter, 2005). Models that integrate both sociological and economic perspectives do not expect students to behave as a homogenous mass but instead expect heterogeneity between different student groupings (St. John and Asker, 2001; Paulsen and St. John, 2002), which explains why economic models based on human capital are not reflective of the actions of the student demographic.

4.3.2 Influencers and influencing factors on the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university

4.3.2.1 Introduction

All universities should consider the increased diversity level in their student body (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002; Morgan, 2013) if they wish to stay competitive and operate in this marketized sector. They also discuss the need for the university's recruitment department to understand why students attend their institution, what makes them preferable to their competition and what needs to be improved; many influencers impact a student's choice when choosing a university.

Moogan, Baron and Harris (1999) opine that university choices are influenced by internal and external factors that affect the individual. More recent studies support and build on this view. Dunnett, et al. (2012) found that first-generation HE attendees found it more challenging to justify the additional costs of attending a university that resulted from the increased tuition fees in 2012, as did their families. Moreover, Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram (2019) research identify many factors that influence students' choices; these include the courses offered and the location of the institution, academic reputation, proximity to home, type of university (pre-1992 or post-1992) and the people (e.g., parents, teachers, friends) as well as the students themselves. Expanding thoughts on factors influencing students' choices to international students Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that the country in which the university is situated and the reputation of that country play a bigger role when choosing to study at university.

4.3.2.2 Influencers on the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university

Many three-stage models discuss the influencers on the decision-making process, including Jackson (1982), McManus, Haddock-Fraser and Rands (2017), and Iloh (2018). These authors concern themselves with the questions that the potential applicant to HE needs to answer to get to the application stage. Each respective author terms each stage differently but are all dealing with the same subject matter. Gibbs and Knapp (2002) differ from the other authors as they created a four-stage model where there are four key influencers on the decision-making process that help the individual make their final decision about attending university: these being the initiator, the influencer, the decider, and the user.

Table 4.1 illustrates the most cited people who influence students when they decide whether to attend university. The top three influencers found by the researcher during their review of the existing literature are parents, schoolteachers, and peers. For the purposes of this study this term peers are interchangeable with the term friends.

Authors	People who influence institution choice by prospective HE students				
	Parents	School teachers	Peers	Friends	Careers officers
Connie and Rahman, 2019			✓		
Gibbs and Knapp, 2002	✓			✓	
Iloh, 2018	✓				
Kusumawati, Perera & Yanamandram, 2019	✓	✓			
Lami and Mele, 2014	✓			✓	
Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999		✓		✓	
Moogan and Baron, 2003	✓	✓	✓		✓
Perna, 2006	✓				
Ryan, 2018	✓	✓	✓		✓
Soutar and Turner, 2002					

Table 4.1 People who influence institution choice by prospective university students

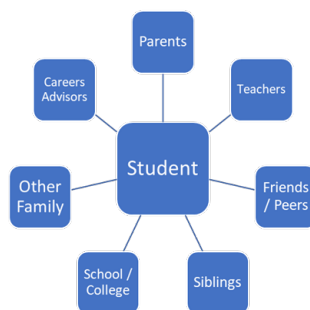


Figure 4.2 Influencers on university choice. Adapted from Gibbs and Knapp (2002, p110)

Figure 4.2 shows the difference influencers students approach when making the decision to go to university.

4.3.2.2.1 Parents

The most significant influencers on individuals' choices of university are their parents (i.e., (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002; Moogan and Baron, 2003; Perna, 2006; Lami and Mele, 2014; Iloh, 2019; Ryan, 2018; Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram, 2019). Additionally, Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006) in (Raposo and Alves, 2007) and Spiliopoulou, Koustourakis and Asimaki (2017) suggest that all family members are also key influencers.

4.3.2.2.2 Educational Professionals

For the purposes of this study an educational professional is a person working in the education sector who may influence a prospective student to go to a university and/or assist their choice in attending a specific university.

4.3.2.2.2.1 Teachers

Parents are followed by teachers (Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; Ryan, 2018; Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram, 2019). School teachers can prove to be either a positive or negative influence on an individual's decision to go to university (Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram, 2019) However, they are not as important an influencer as others suggest (Moogan, Baron and & Harris, 1999) as they found other influencers such as friends to be of far greater importance.

Schools and teachers (section 4.2.3) also play a part in educating students on viable university options and this needs to start from an early age (sections 3.2.5; 3.3) and continue throughout their educational journey (Horwedel, 2008).

4.3.2.2.2.2 Career Advisors

Careers advisors (Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; Ryan, 2018) are ranked at the same level of importance as influencers. This point is agreed with by Chapman (1993), Kallio (1995), Lin (1997), and Donnellan (2002).

4.3.2.3 Influencing factors on the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university

4.3.2.3.1 Students as consumers

As well as parents, family, friends and teachers, other influences exist including the cost, in terms of debt, that could be accumulated, information obtained about different universities by the individual, academic reputation, the experiences that the individual had at school and because the student body is diverse, and many more (Moogan and Baron, 2003; Price et al., 2003) (Briggs, 2006) (Simões and Soares, 2010) (McManus, Haddock-Fraser and Rands, 2017). Students now view themselves as consumers which can be attributed to the increase in tuition fees from £3250 to £9000 in 2012 (Harris, 2017). The consumer buying decision-making process is something that the student goes through when choosing the right university for them. This process includes realising that there is a decision to be made, investigating the information available; evaluating different universities, applying, and enrolling and evaluating whether you have made the right choice (Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; Briggs, 2006; Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño, 2006; Maringe, 2006; Maringe and Carter, 2007). Whilst Iloh (2019) cites institutional characteristics as being additional influencing factors, (citing the following sources (Chapman, 1981; Stage and Hossler, 1989; Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith, 1989; Hearn, 1991).

4.3.2.3.2 Location

One of these influencing factors is the location of the institution, this is because a large proportion of students move away from home, in the UK, and for commuting students, universities need good transportation links (Lubbe and Petzer, 2016; Mitchell and Ramsey, 2019). Lubbe and Petzer (2013) agree with Smith and Cavusgil (1984), and Raposo and Alves (2007) when they state that proximity to home and costs are strong influencers in the choice-making process but go on to say that personal recommendations are also a strong fact Parliament.uk suggests that non-traditional students tend to go to their local university. Farr (2001) commented that this pattern was becoming more pronounced. A report commissioned by the Sutton Trust (Busby, 2018) found that the choice of university is dependent on their socioeconomic status and whether the student can afford the costs of HE, a finding that is backed up by this study (section Findings 4.2.5). To compensate for this many students, continue to live in their parental homes rather than in accommodation on or nearby a university campus. This restricts the student's choice of university (Callender and Wilkinson, 2003) to those which fall within a commutable distance; a view supported by

Mogaji and Yoon (2019) (section 2.8). Reay, Davies, and Ball (2005, p86) term this phenomenon as being 'working-class localism' (section 4.2.5) or in this process.

4.3.2.3.3 Course and Career

Lami and Mele (2014) state that the opportunity for securing a better career is a further reason given for attending HE if a student wishes to enter a specific field to gain a higher income and a more prestigious position.

Soutar and Turner (2002) suggest that the quality of course placements, employability, and career guidance are also important factors that influence choice-making decisions.

For a large segment of the HE sector, since the 1960's, the number of courses that are on offer to students has grown exponentially and, according to Price et al., (2003), this complicates the decision-making process as the more choice there is available the harder it is to choose. However, Grove (2020) posits that in recent years some universities, for example, Southampton University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London are reducing the number of courses they offer.

4.3.2.3.4 Other Influencing Factors

According to Shanka, Quintal and Taylor, (2006) the overall academic reputation and the perceived quality of the degree to the student themselves and future employers, the quality of teaching and facilities and the availability of the course that student wishes to pursue.

Mitchell and Ramsey (2019) conducted a study in which students could select three influencers from a list of options – they found that the city where the university is located, campus facilities and the open day were ranked as having the most importance. Briggs (2006) lists the top 10 factors influencing the choice of a university including academic reputation, distance from home, location, own perception, graduate employment, social life nearby, entry requirements, teaching reputation, quality of faculty, the information supplied by the university and research reputation. Many of these factors are also highlighted by Hooley and Lynch, (1981), Lay and Maguire (1981), Murphy, (1981), Moogan et al. (2001), and Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram (2019). LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) suggest that perceived value for money is another important factor when students are deciding to attend university. This is backed up by Wilkins, Shams and Huisman (2012), who suggests that students want financial stability and that this is a key issue for them they counter this argument with the fact that institutions can implement strategies to assist students that are financially disadvantaged in some way.

Ford et al. (1999) recognise issues that could prevent students from entering HE including academic reputation, for example, if the student is from a low socioeconomic background, they may feel intimidated at the prospect of going to Oxford University (Noble and Davies, 2009; Hazelkorn, 2014).

4.3.2.4 University Marketing

Universities must differentiate themselves from their competition (Taylor and Darling, 1991; Nicholls et al., 1995; Coates, 1998; Canterbury, 1999; Ivy 2008), for the different demographics of students local, national, and international. To achieve this the institution must ensure they give a reason for the student to apply to them, rather than their competitors, and accept their offer of a place. Marketing materials including prospectuses and the website are considered useful as are attending open days. First-generation students rely more on these because they have no informed parental advice from which they can draw (Lubbe and Petzer, 2016). Merchant et al (2015) state that advertising and publicity are the factors that could affect the HE choice of prospective students.

Marketing is a key element of the decision to go to university, and particularly a specific university. UK universities are marketing in a highly competitive and complex world as marketisation has created a business-like sector within the education environment. Therefore, marketing departments within universities need to understand how students make their decision to attend university and what influences this decision. Marketers, for the university, can then customise their marketing strategies to attract their desired student demographic to their institution (Veloutsou et al. 2005; Simões and Soares 2010).

4.3.2.4.1 Marketing

Marketing aims to attract customers to the product or service that you are offering (Moogan, 2011). For the HE sector currently, this is done through brand awareness (section 4.3.2.4.3), league tables (section 4.3.2.4.1.1), social media (section 4.3.2.4.1.2), and a plethora of online platforms. Regarding universities, they aim to entice the potential customer, the student, to choose the university they are 'selling' in preference to their competition.

Neoliberalism was the start of corporatisation and marketisation within HE (Lynch, 2006). According to Nedbalova et al (2014) within UK universities competition for students has grown considerably on a national and global scale this is backed up by Camilleri (2020) as he states that promoting HE to a global market to attract students from a global setting to a specific institution is becoming increasingly important in student recruitment (Friga et al., 2003; Maringe and Gibbs, 2008; De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2010; Pucciarelli and Kaplan,

2016). With universities facing tighter fiscal pressures, as a way of potentially solving this, international students provide an additional income stream to survive in a more competitive climate (Russell, 2005).

In England, the introduction of tuition fees has led to an expectation from students for universities to cater to their specific needs (section 4.3.2.3.1), to a high standard (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon, 2011 in Nedbalova et al, 2014) (section 8.2.5.3). To accomplish this the marketing departments within universities are under an obligation to understand their diverse student body which consists of students with varying demographical statuses e.g. disabled, distance-learning, mature, part-time, and have parental responsibilities in addition to the traditional full-time undergraduate. Hence all demographics need different marketing strategies (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002). Many universities have started to create a marketisation policy to accommodate the change in perceptions from their customer base (Camilleri 2020). According to Maringe and Gibbs, (2008), Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), and Mazzarol (1998) universities can better promote themselves by marketing through techniques such as word of mouth from alumni as well as personal recommendations from students and their friends and family. Universities could measure the success of their marketing campaign by using the following metrics including student enrolment figures, graduate rates, the number of students who do not complete their course, and students who continue to a degree higher than their previous qualification.

When developing a marketing strategy Mogaji and Yoon (2019) suggest the following things need to be embedded in that strategy (figure 4.3).

Location	Course Offered	Student Experience	Reputation and Credibility	Career Prospects
City Setting	Variety of courses	National student surveys	League Tables	Graduate employment outcomes
Campus Environment	Collaborative course partnerships	Shared student testimonials	International rankings	Links with industry
Social Opportunities	Lecturers should have expertise in different areas	Accommodation	Alumni network	Placement opportunities
Sports and Recreation	Research-informed curriculum	Gym	Global presence	Career placement support
Culturally diverse population	Accreditation by professional organisations	Access to learning resources	Institutional heritage and legacy	Employability services
A range of facilities and amenities should be available		Financial aid and scholarships	University affiliations/groups	Notable alumni success
		Childcare services	Awards and recognitions	
		Religious facilities		
		Student unions & clubs and societies		
		Student support services		

Figure 4.3 factors required to form a marketing strategy. Adapted from Mogaji and Yoon (2019, p1573)

Mogaji and Yoon (2019) describe how universities market themselves in their prospectuses and found that the information provided mainly concerned the institution's location, course offered, student experiences, reputation and credibility, and career progression. Prospectuses present positive imagery and information to promote the experience they offer and foster a sense of compatibility and belonging in prospective students. It is important to show a diverse cross-section of students to promote an inclusive environment within university campuses (Mogaji and Yoon, 2019). Naude and Ivy (1999) put forward that proactive marketing by any university can result in an improvement in the size of market share for that institution if it is measured by the number and caliber of the students that enroll.

4.3.2.4.1.1 League Tables/Ranking

According to Briggs (2006) league tables are an indicator of how a university has performed during the previous year but they do not indicate present and future performance or satisfaction levels, Matzdorf and Greenwood (2015) state leagues tables were first published in 1992 their purpose was to rank universities against each other, and this is one of the contributing factors towards marketisation, these were then adopted globally (Hazelkorn, 2014).

Student choice has been widely influenced by league tables because of the ease of their availability, accessibility, and media attention (McManus-Howard, 2002). He further goes on to state that the further that you live from a university the more influence that institution's position in the rankings is likely to have on the individual's decision to attend that university; this is supported by Lyons (2013) cited in Poole, Levin and Elam (2017).

Stella and Woodhouse (2006) found that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to use rankings whilst Clarke (2007) found that first-generation and low socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to consult rankings.

In the student choice process, prospective students and their parents look to league tables for making crucial decisions (Lyons, 2013). League tables tend to rank universities against weighted generic criteria, which tends to assume all universities are homogeneous (Poole, Levin and Elam, 2017) and they also assume that students have the same needs. Brennan, Brodnick and Pinckley (2008) discuss how league tables are not 100% accurate as they are heavily influenced by university marketers and their shortcomings are well documented (Poole, Levin and Elam, 2017).

4.3.2.4.1.2 Social media

Mitchell and Ramsey (2019) found that students value the opinion of family and friends more highly than they do the information that they receive from media and online sources. Generation Z is cynical about what they are told by social media and is more likely to believe what is written in print (Principal, no date).

Mitchell and Ramsey (2019) found that of the 90% of students thought that University open days and university materials such as prospectuses were either very helpful or helpful; they also found that there for 60% of students' schools were a helpful resource for researching universities. However, 60% of their participants found social media and online materials to be unhelpful or did not use them at all.

Social media is the latest way that universities have found to capture students' attention; however, because students are use different variations of social media platforms, universities need to develop strategies that allow them to keep pace with the latest trends (Constantinides and Stagno, 2011); Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2016; Melchiorre and Johnson, 2017). Social media is a tool used by marketing departments within the HE sector that requires consideration because many students have grown up as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001 in Mogaji and Yoon, 2019). Social media are constantly changing and moving platforms, so any policies, by either the institutions or the government, should be regularly monitored and updated. This is achieved by understanding the university's target demographic, hence making

the content engaging which will help attract students to the university. Infographics, videos, and images work better on social media compared to traditional media sources. Each demographic uses social media differently (Statista, 2021) selecting the correct one can have a positive impact on your ability as a university to attract perspective student into applying to your institution (Zechariah and Eissa, 2019).

Mogaji and Yoon (2019) expand on the argument put forward by Melchiorre and Johnson (2017) concerning the need to use the right type of social media for the age group that the university is trying to target.

4.3.2.4.2 Influences on expectations

Disabled students' educational expectations are heavily influenced by their parents, according to Chatzitheochari and Platt (2018). They go on to say that their study found that disabled pupils when compared to their non-disabled peers are 10% more likely to have low educational expectations irrespective of their academic ability. This may be because of the lower expectations placed on SWDDs by their parents. Consequently, their child's additional needs, parents can become overly protective due to the apprehension of the increased risk of discrimination and stigma being placed upon them by the HE sector (Chatzitheochari and Platt, 2018). This study concurs with their finding (sections 7.2.3; 7.5.6.3.1). However, social justice cannot be achieved until social attitudes change to help eradicate inequality and discrimination in HE Sutton-Long, et al. (2016) in (Bunbury, 2020). Bibby (2018) suggests that low expectations come from an individual's mindset toward life; as a result, stereotypes can be formed and can be set by society. When people with a disability/ies decide to attend university, they are enabling themselves to further their knowledge, improve their social skills and gain good qualifications (Fuller, Bradley and Healey, 2004; Logan and Martin, 2012 cited in Brown and Leigh, 2018; Morgan, 2013). This is important as attendance at university helps SWDDs to maximise their skillset and achieve their full potential both at university and beyond just as it does for SWNDDs. Accessing information that can assist a potential student, who has a disability, in deciding where to attend university can be problematic, as stated by Fuller, Bradley and Healey (2004) and Koca-Atabey (2017), whose findings from their study identified that disabled students were presented with difficulties when trying to find information relating to support at the university and ways in which the university would meet their learning and assessment needs, the same has been in this study Accessing information that can assist a potential student, who has a disability, in deciding where to attend university can be complex as stated by Fuller, et al. (2004) and Koca-Atabey (2017), whose findings from their study identified that SWDD students were presented with difficulties when trying to find information

relating to support at the university and how the university would meet their learning and assessment needs, the same has been found in this study (section 4.3.2.6.1.1).

As with their non-disabled peers, disabled students are just as concerned with issues that affect everybody such as time management, money worries, having a social life, and finding suitable accommodation. However, on top of these concerns, their impairment may bring up additional challenges that their peers may not face (Green, 2007; Koca-Atabey, 2017).

Chris Skidmore, University Minister (2019-2020), stated

“Universities must do all they can to help disabled students succeed” (Skidmore, 2019).

The Disabled Students Commission was established by the Conservative government in 2019 (Office for Students, 2021) and is designed to help remove the steps that prevent disabled students from entering HE. Although Skidmore stated that in 2017-18 a record number of SWDDs had chosen to attend a university in England the figure he gave was 250,000 he went on to say that this had been supported by DSA However, Fuller, et al. (2004) suggest that SWDDs participating in tertiary education cause issues with both equal opportunities and empowerment because allowing disabled people to enter HE is met with several barriers. This is because, for disabled people entering HE, there is a deficit of information for disabled students and a lack of support from family and friends, as some disabled students might not know anybody who has attended university, and this may cause issues when making the university choice. This is also a problem for some non-disabled students. Once a disabled student arrives at their institution of choice there are further hurdles to climb including access to support and participation in seminars.

Michelle Donelan was the universities minister who succeeded Chris Skidmore, who according to Office for Students (2022a) pledged £3 million to facilitate the closer working of university mental health services and the NHS. Donelan also committed to reforming the Disabled Student Allowance

“That will increase flexibility for students to access the support that they need” (The Pocklington Trust, 2021).

According to Vickerman and Blundell (2010), disabled people are still being marginalised by the HE sector as many institutions are not developing strategies to support disabled students to prevent these barriers from occurring in the first instance. According to Skidmore (2019), disabled people are still a marginalised group but less so than previously; this is supported by Green (2007). Disabled students were underrepresented in HE according to Vickerman and Blundell when they were writing in 2010 and Skidmore suggested that this was still the case in 2019.

Disabled students who need support must first disclose their disability or long-term illness to the university to gain access to appropriate accommodation and support (Getzel and Thoma,

2008). Some students, however, decide not to disclose their disability, and this could be for a variety of reasons including having a fresh start in HE compared with school and not wanting to have a label attached to them. Some decide to manage without support because they

“Lack the understanding of how to access the services on campus” (Getzel and Briel, 2006; Getzel and Thoma, 2008, p.77

If disabled students feel that they are part of the university community they are more likely to feel less challenged when barriers are put in their way (Greene, 2008).

4.3.2.4.3 Branding

Creating a brand fit for the multitude of stakeholders, that a university has, is complex due to perceptions of different stakeholder groups (Roper and Davies, 2007) thereby adding to the growing challenge of creating a brand in HE. The difference between pre-1992 and post-1992 universities is that pre-1992s use their reputation as a substitute for having a brand; while post-1992s must differentiate and create a brand for their institution if they are to be able to compete globally, in the HE sector (Chapleo, 2011; Idris and Whitfield, 2014).

When marketisation was introduced into the UK HE sector, the introduction of tuition fees created a cost for undertaking tertiary education, so branding had to be changed to consider this (Stamp, 2004). If a brand is used well in the HE sector it can improve the position of that university in the league tables.

Students' perceptions of universities are of great interest to universities, especially their views on service quality and satisfaction as well as their rankings on different league tables. Branding practices are utilised by universities through the promotion of their core values as they incentivise staff to adopt them (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005).

Marketing culture is concerned with producing an image that is in line with the institution's values. However, Jevons (2006) expresses that despite universities creating brands within their courses it is evident from research that no follow-up studies are taking place to see if student recruitment has increased.

University branding has become more important because of the reduction in governmental funding for HE in the UK; research carried out shows that there is limited data available on the effectiveness of branding on students' perceptions of universities (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009). There is a consensus that a competitive advantage can be gained by universities differentiating themselves from one another by creating a consistent brand (Jevons, 2006; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chapleo, 2011; (Merchant, et al., 2015).

Authors such as Jevons (2006), Watkins and Gonzenbach (2013), and Harris (2009) argue that HE is a complicated sector and hence does not fit within the conventional norms, this is why a

more specialised approach must be taken, (Rutter, 2013). Roper and Davies (2007) and Watkins and Gonzenbach (2013) state that branding needs to appeal to the multiple stakeholders that a university has.

Traditional styles of advertising such as newspapers, television advertising and prospectuses must match online branding such as that used on social media and websites as consistency is key (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Arruda, 2009; Barnes and Mattson, 2009 M'zungu and Merrilees, 2010). The effectiveness of branding on social media, when used interactively with students, is increased (Kim and Ko, 2012; (Hall-Phillips, et al., 2016). Post-1992 universities have been shown to perform better than pre-1992 at managing their brand (Rutter, 2013). Chapleo (2015) offers a possible explanation for this when he states that pre-1992 universities may be constrained, by the reputation that they have developed over time, from engaging in overt marketing methods.

Having a strong university brand is one of the essential ways in which to recruit students to a specific university thus attracting them away from that university's competition Chapleo (2011).

4.3.2.4.4 Open Days

Several authors agree that open days change people's opinions when they make their decision to attend university (Gorman, 1976; King, Kobayashi and Bigler, 1986 Sevier, 1987; Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; sections 7.2.3.1; 7.5.5.4.4;).

Mitchell and Ramsey (2019) convey that in their study, 81% of those who attended an open day said they found it very helpful. Moogan, Baron and Harris (1999) suggest that open days are a useful tool for students who have been offered a place by multiple universities and must decide which offer they wish to accept. Winter (2018) backs this up when she explains that the open day is more important for students than the location of the institution, the nightlife in the area and the transport links that are used to get to the university. During the open day, the social experiences of prospective students make a long-lasting impression. Prospective students want enthusiastic staff who build a relationship and engage with them (Winter, 2018). Students who attend the open day need to feel that they fit in with current students and hear positive things discussed, as well as this, the local community need to embrace the new cohort; a sense of belonging is very important (Winter, 2018).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred during data collection, open days had to be carried out virtually as social distancing measures were put in place by the UK Government. However, a plethora of advice was previously and is still currently available for students

informing them how to derive the best from virtual open days offered by universities, including advice from (UCAS, n.d.).

4.3.2.5 COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the UK in early 2020. According to Baker and Lau (2020), different countries tackled COVID-19 in different ways in terms that impacted the education of international students (for example, borders closed, and students being transported to their home countries).

In the academic year, 2020-2021 McKie (2020) predicted that the experience of students will be unlikely to replicate the usual one. However, positive alternatives could be put in place according to a spokeswoman from HEPI.

If universities emerge from COVID-19 with trust won back from the public, government, and crucially frontline staff, the HE sector will look very different post-pandemic. LeFevre (2020) quotes Karl Marx as saying,

“people make their history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances”.

This has been corroborated by Jones (2020) who states that due to COVID-19 the HE sector has had to move its focus away from campus-based teaching to online teaching and that the sector is now able to reimagine its place in society.

The summer months provided the most turbulent and influential period for universities of our lifetime (LeFevre, 2020) and change needs to be proactive as well as reactive; that is looking towards the future and possible opportunities not simply firefighting problems as they arise (LeFevre, 2020). Opportunities could be presented by an increase in university enrolment, which according to McKie (2020) has the potential to expand during times of financial recession.

4.3.2.6 Expectations

For this study, an expectation is defined as an assumption that a certain outcome will occur based on the facts presented and previous experience outcomes. Examples of an expectation include that attending university will lead to better career prospects and an opportunity is provided for the student to move away from their current home residence (Phinney, Dennis and Osorio, 2006; LaVigne, 2019). As students have different life experiences their expectations differ from their peers regarding their introduction to university life and how they study for their degree (Leese, 2010). A study conducted by Balloo, Pauli and Worrell (2015) discovered that

an expectation of better career prospects is a reason for attending university. This is proven in this study (section 7.5.7.4).

Due to the marketisation of the HE sector, section 3.2.4), and the introduction of tuition fees a shift has ensued from students viewing themselves as a learner to now identifying as a consumer of education (LaVigne, 2019; section 4.3.2.3.1). The expectation from students has changed from earning a degree to being entitled to getting a degree upon completion (LaVigne, 2019). Some have even gone so far as to question if it is 'worth' coming to university due to the financial burden placed on them (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013) and whether the reward is greater than the (Redmond, 2015). Baker (2021) comments that all OECD, the UK being part of that conglomerate, public funding, as a percentage of gross domestic product, has fallen whilst the cost of an undergraduate degree has increased by over one-fifth.

4.3.2.6.1.1 Students' Expectations

According to LaVigne (2019) students arrive at university with an expectation of making friends, attending social gatherings, and joining clubs and societies (McDonough, 1994; Williams, 2006), this is true for interviewees in this study (section 7.5.4.3). This expectation comes from a multiplicity of factors including media that portray an image of universities being a social sphere compared with an academic version (Jung, 2010).

Bourdieu's concepts of capital as described by Whitty, Hayton and Tang (2015) illustrate how a lack of constant social and cultural capital can result in an absence of the expectation of attending university for students with a low SES status. This illustrates that students with higher levels of capital can expect to attend university and therefore this demonstrates that a lack of diversity and inequality of experiences is aligned with sociologies of education. The expectations of parents, who have at least one child with disabilities, and who have higher levels of social, cultural or economic capitals have higher expectations of the education sector after receiving a SEND diagnosis (Ball, 2017; Reay, Crozier and James, 2011 in Holt, Bowlby and Lea, 2019). Chatzitheochari and Platt (2018) highlight the issue of expectations from families of SWDDs being lower by 10% compared with SWNDDs.

Expectations are acquired through the accumulation of cultural capital through an amalgamation of factors including information gathering, parents who have attended university, attended a good school, and had a friendship group with similar life goals and aspirations. These factors can assist a student in gaining admission to a reputable university (Reay, Crozier and James, 2013). The expectation of going to university is often accompanied by the level of cultural and social capital needed to acquire a middle-class habitus, meaning certain criteria are required to achieve this. These include having specific inclinations, particular

lifestyle characteristics and values, as well as the expectation of attending a reputable university (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). First-generation students may struggle to acquire the necessary levels of social and cultural capitals required to make an informed decision about attending university because their habitus', do not have all the necessary elements to help facilitate and create the networks and opportunities middle-class families and traditional students, might have (Ball, et al., 2002; Reay, David and Ball, 2005). The higher an individual's cultural capital is, the more knowledge and information they possess regarding the graduate premium; this is illustrated by higher expectations from students with higher cultural capital.

Government policies, such as WP, aim to ensure that students from minority groups, such as disabled students and those from low SES backgrounds, are given the same opportunities as students with higher levels of SES and those from non-minority groups. If the opportunity is not provided by government policies, then the expectation of attending university may not be developed.

Regarding SWDDs, an expectation is set that additional student support services will be available and signposted to them by their academic tutors (Money, et al., 2017). Evidence of this expectation was found within this study.

4.3.2.6.1.2 Expectations not met

If expectations are not met by universities for students they may ultimately disengage, fail, and withdraw from a course (Byrne, et al., 2012, cited in Money, et al., 2017). An alternative interpretation to this explanation is provided by Nölleke, Maares and Hanusch (2020) when they illustrate how people's individual expectations of a field cannot be evaluated until they have entered the field in question. Concerning this study, this can be applied to the expectations that the individual has before attending university compared to the experience they have while at university. If their expectation is not met by their experience a feeling of disillusionment can occur (Nölleke, Maares and Hanusch, 2020). This is true for several participants in this study.

As students become more conscious consumers the gaps between their expectations and the reality of their multiplicity of experiences, including their course, socialising and living in student accommodation etc., become more prominent.

Money, et al. (2017) suggest that an expectation held by students is that academic staff understand the support that the university offers and can direct students appropriately (section 7.5.9.1). However, according to Kandiko and Mawer (2013) literature suggests students attend their first year with a set of expectations and return in their second year with the same set of expectations with the understanding that some of these will not be met.

4.4 Students with disabilities, how their identity and choice models track against the discussions in 4.2 and 4.3

Whilst the discussion in 4.2 and 4.3 applies to all students, this section provides a more detailed analysis of how differing factors may have a greater or lesser influence on students with a disclosed disability's participation. This section will only discuss the elements of the literature reviewed where a difference was found between students with a disability and students without a disclosed disability.

4.4.1 The theoretical concepts of student identity that influence their decision-making

Forber-Pratt et al. (2017) state that people with disabilities, including prospective students have different types of people who heavily influence their decisions and hold positions of power; therefore, it can be inferred that students with disabilities have different types of people, e.g. medical professionals, who can affect their decision to attend university. The HE field has additional barriers to entry for some prospective disabled students, including physical barriers and barriers in terms of support (Fuller, et al., 2004). Although WP aimed to introduce non-traditional students into HE, some may lack cultural and social capital, thereby perpetuating inequality (Bunn, Threadgold and Burke, 2020); non-traditional students may fail to hold positions of power within any particular field. According to Forber-Pratt et al. (2017), a person with a disability develops their identity differently than a person with no disability, and they say that the development of the person's identity is different depending on whether they have a visible or an invisible disability.

According to Chatzitheochari and Platt (2018), parents have lower academic expectations for their disabled children, meaning that they are less likely to expect them to attend university.

4.4.2 Student Choice and Its Influences on It

Universities should have in place the necessary accessibility requirements for all students (UCAS, n.d.) however, the disabled student may have additional limitations, placed upon them by their circumstances, that restrict their choice of a specific university.

From the different types of choice models reviewed it was deemed that socioeconomic choice models e.g. Perna (2006) were the most relevant type for this study as they discuss the reasons why students go to university. However, in the literature reviewed, no specific choice model for disabled students was located, this identified a gap that existed in the literature (section 5.3) Friends are a crucial element in many choice models that were reviewed e.g. Lami and Mele (2014) and Ryan (2018). LaVigne (2019) goes further when she suggests that people go to

university with an expectation of making friends, and Skär (2003) suggests that young disabled people have fewer friends and the friends that they do have tend to be not from their own age group and therefore may wish to make friends when they go to university. Consequently, Skär (2003) goes on to say that young disabled people often feel isolated from people within their peer group. She links this to the young disabled person's identity development, which is influenced by how others in society view them as being different and as people who require help.

Students go to university with the expectation of gaining a better job than they would have if they did not go (Balloo, Pauli and Worrell, 2015). Shah (2005) notes that the disabled person, depending on the type of disability, has different expectations regarding their career due to the barriers encountered during compulsory education. However, according to Scope (no date b), there is a 29% disability employment gap, which suggests that disabled people are less likely to gain employment, despite the findings of this study, section 7.5.5.2, suggesting that disabled people want to obtain a career as much as people without a disability do.

Overall, disabled students, according to the literature reviewed, track in similar ways to their non-disabled peers when making the decision to go to university, their choice of a specific university, their influence(r)s and their expectations.

4.4.3 Addressing the gaps in literature

The following list illustrates the gap in the literature which were evidenced upon completing the literature review.

1. There was limited research comparing student choice regarding disabled and non-disabled students (Chapter 7 addresses this)
2. Lack of studies exploring the expectations held by students prior to enrolment and whether these expectations were met (section 7.5.7)
3. There is an underrepresentation of student voice, specifically disabled students in understanding decision-making
4. Existing studies tend to focus on a deficit-based model of disability e.g. the medical model; section 5.3 shows disabled students are a part of diverse student body.
5. Limited research has been conducted on whether influencers, university practices impact whether expectations are met.

Chapter 5: Conceptual Framework

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the researcher's approach and decisions around designing and adopting a conceptual framework. Parts of this chapter are personally reflective and linked to the author's positionality and lived disability experience.

A Conceptual Framework (CF) is often used to visually represent the variables within a study and the relationships between them (Pathar and Chetty, 2016). For this study, the CF was initially informed by the variables identified in the research question, which guided the preliminary literature review.

Creswell (2014) categorises variables within a CF as either independent or dependent. Independent variables are those that respond to or interact with them. In the context of this study, the independent variables include the decision-making process around attending university and selecting a particular institution, specifically among SWDDs and SWNDDs. The dependent variables are the SWDDs and SWNDDs themselves, whose choices are influenced by the independent variables. The interaction reflects a causal relationship: the decision to go to university and the choice of UniA are influenced by student identity and context.

Swaen and George (2022) build upon Creswell's (2014) framework by introducing three additional types of variables: moderating, mediating, and control variables. Moderating variables alter the strength or direction of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. In this study, 'influencers' (e.g., family, teachers) act as moderating variables because they can significantly affect students' university choices. Mediating variables help explain how and why such relationships occur. For instance, 'influencing factors' mediate the impact of the independent variables on students' decisions (the dependent variable), showing how opinions are shaped and choices made. Control variables, by contrast, are not expected to influence the outcome but are necessary to account for – for example, students must demonstrate academic readiness or possess transferable skills to enter university programmes.

Identifying variables within a research question is essential, as it informs the literature that must be reviewed. Once these variables are identified, they should be classified according to their type – independent, dependent, moderating, mediating, or control (Goodman, Robert, and Johnson, 2020). Understanding the causal links among these variables is central to the development of a conceptual framework and should be informed by the literature Creswell (2014).

A CF is commonly depicted as a visual image that illustrates the area under study (Maxwell, 1996). Such representations are useful in understanding complex phenomena by highlighting how the key concepts relate to and influence one another (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017).

5.2 Development and evolution of a conceptual framework

Following an extensive review of the literature, it became evident that no existing CF adequately encompassed the multidimensional nature of this study (section 4.3.1). Consequently, a bespoke CF was developed. The initial iteration of the CF emerged from a bullet-point list based on the key variable identified within the research question. These were then mapped visually into a basic mind map with five core subtopics (figure 5.1)

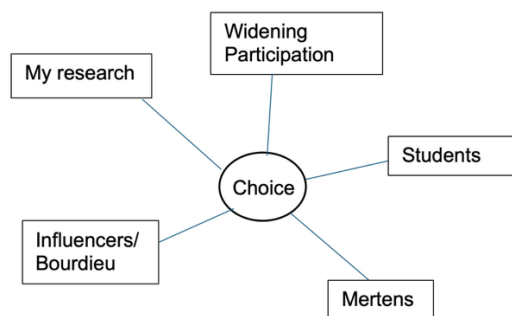


Figure 5.1 Mind map for the conceptual framework

Figure 5.1 demonstrates a mind map structured with a central theme and five radiating branches, evoked the image of a hand which is a deeply personal and functional symbol in my own life. As a wheelchair user, my hand's function much like legs do for others. They control my electric wheelchair and push the toe rims of my manual wheelchair. This embodied significance contributed to the hand becoming a natural metaphor and structural representation for the conceptual framework.

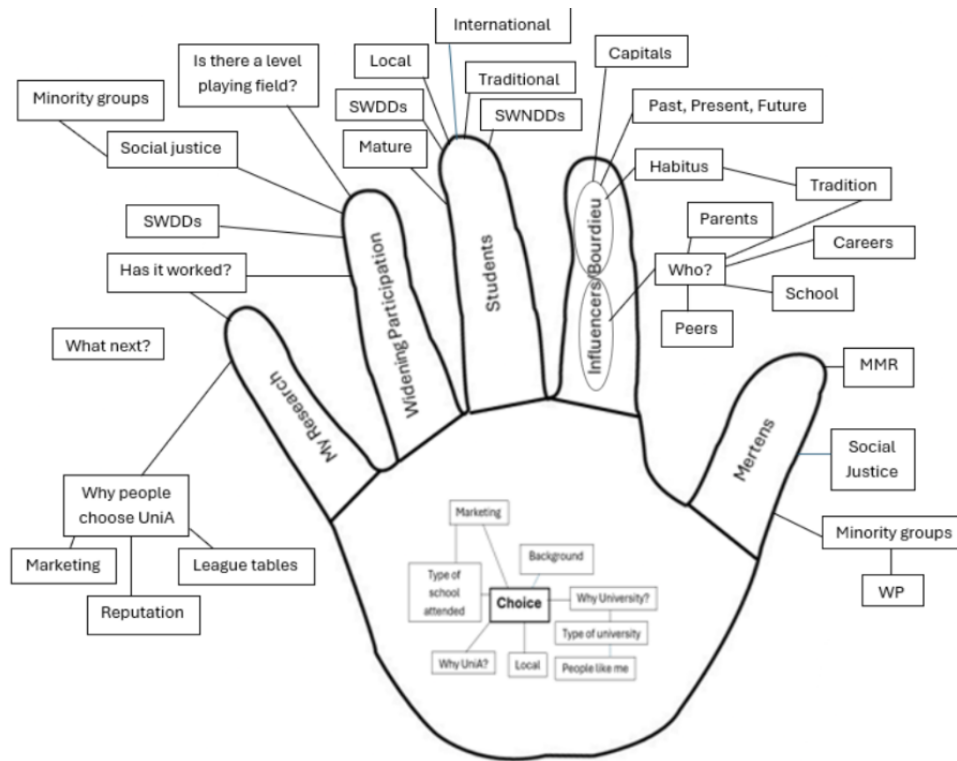


Figure 5.2 The original hand

Figure 5.2 illustrates the foundational version of the hand framework, which combined theoretical and conceptual elements. Attempts to reconfigure the hand into a more conventional model proved unsuccessful, as they lacked both clarity and memorability of the hand structure. During the literature review process, the work of Bourdieu emerged as foundational. His concepts of habitus and capitals were instrumental in understanding students' decision-making processes, their choice of university, and the influence of external social and cultural factors. As such, Bourdieu was initially positioned in the 'wrist' of the hand, symbolising his role as a support structure for the entire framework.

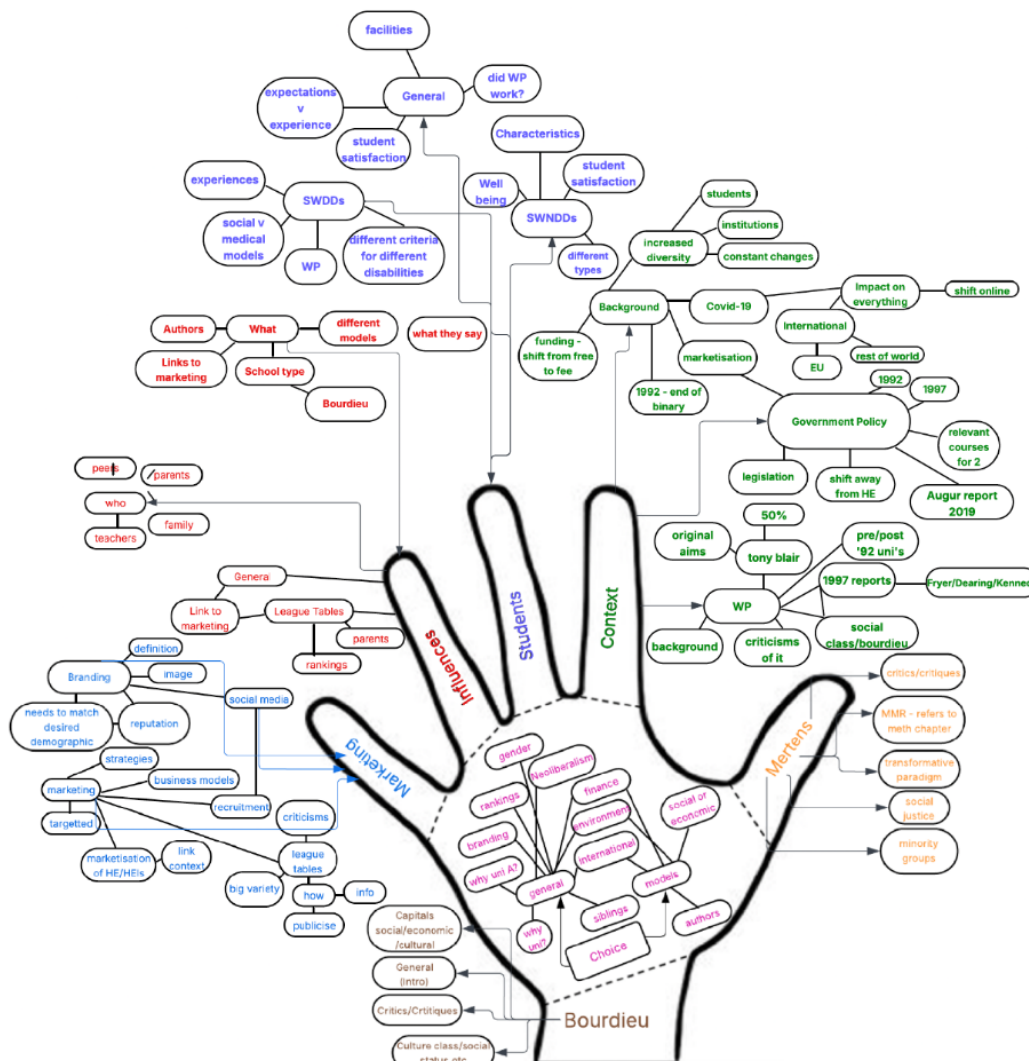


Figure 5.3 Hand with increased detail showing theory and concepts

As the CF developed, it became increasingly interconnected. Figure 5.3 reflects this evolution, demonstrating how each theoretical element links to various conceptual strands. The major components of the hand included: Bourdieu (wrist), choice (palm), Mertens (thumb), context (index finger), students (middle finger), influencers (ring finger), and marketing (little finger). For example, Widening Participation (WP) is represented by the index finger, intersecting with SWDDs and SWNDDs (middle finger), while influencers – particularly parents – are captured in the ring finger due to their relationship with habitus (Bourdieu, 2002). Colour coding was introduced to distinguish the subthemes, although this iteration was later deemed too complex for reader accessibility.

Furthermore, as the literature review expanded, the role of marketing in students' university choices became more prominent than initially anticipated. As such, 'My Research' originally located in the little finger, was replaced with 'Marketing'. The growing marketisation of HE has led to a paradigm in which students increasingly perceive themselves as consumers (Gibbs

and Knapp, 2002; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Consequently, marketing now plays a central role in shaping UniA's reputation, credibility, and student appeal.

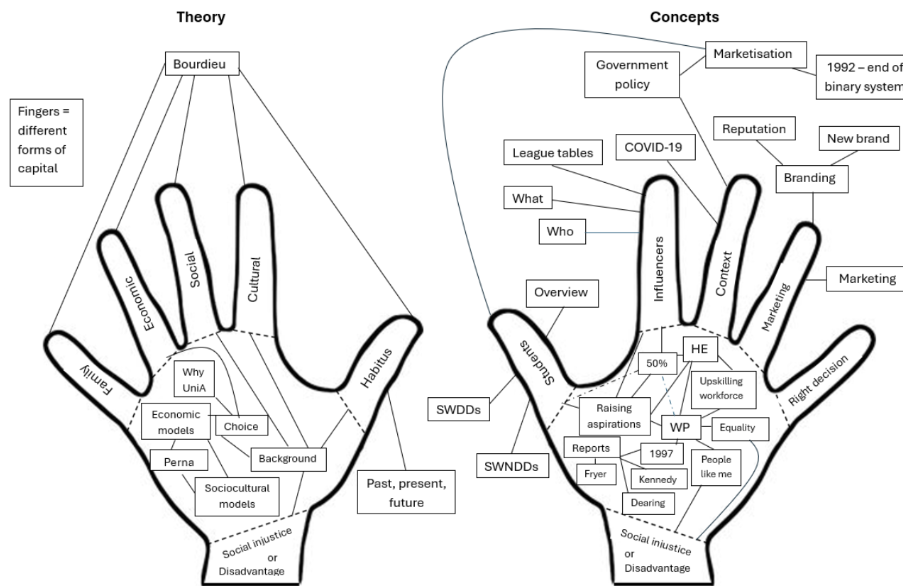


Figure 5.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks (Separated Hands)

Recognising the need for clarity, the CF was subsequently divided into two hands – one representing the theoretical framework and the other the conceptual framework (figure 5.4). The left hand illustrates the theoretical framework. Here, Bourdieu's role expanded further, and the notion of family capital, an extension of his theory, was incorporated (Spiliopoulou, Koustourakis, and Asimaki, 2017). Mertens's (2010) work on social justice was repositioned in the wrist, differentiating her focus on inequality from Bourdieu's emphasis on social reproduction. The palm continued to represent 'choice', the core focus of this study.

In the right hand, representing the conceptual framework Hand, WP moved into the palm, denoting its centrality to the research, while 'students' shifted to the thumb due to its opposable nature symbolising interaction with all other components. Influences (both interpersonal and structural) moved to the index finger, having emerged as more significant than context. 'Context' and 'right decision' (a construct associated with informed university choice) were swapped post hoc, as reflected by asterisks in figure 5.4. Within the context of HE, context was found to have greater explanatory power than a binary notion of correct choice.

Numerous further iterations of the hand were developed, each reflecting the progression of ideas and additional literature reviewed throughout the PhD process (see Appendix A).

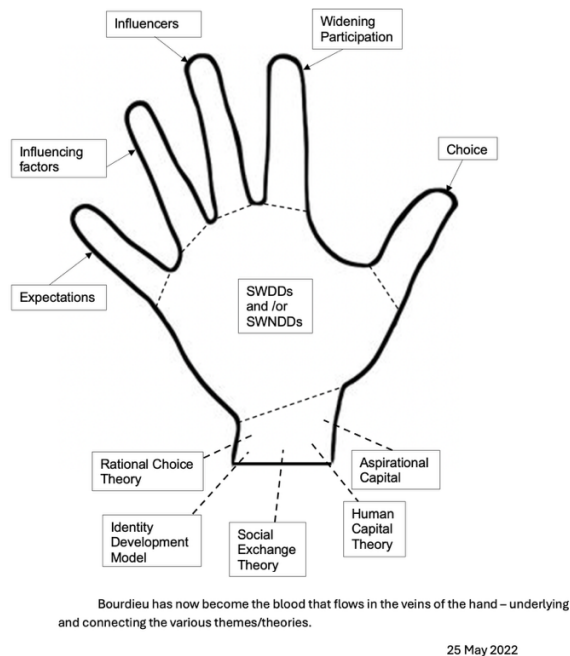


Figure 5.5 The Conceptual Framework (Final Iteration)

The final iteration of the CF is depicted in Figure 5.5. In this version, Bourdieu's theories have moved from the wrist to become the 'blood' that flows throughout the hand, illustrating how his theoretical concepts permeate all aspects of the framework. His theory no longer simply supports the structure; it animates it. In his place at the wrist are now the Identity Development Model (IDM) and Social Exchange Theory (SET), which together provide a theoretical foundation for the CF. IDM contributes an understanding of how identity and expectations evolve, particularly in the case of SWDDs and SWNDDs (Charmaz, 1995). SET, on the other hand, addresses the cost-benefit analyses involved in decision-making (Redmond, 2015).

This conceptualization also aligns with the Yin-Yang philosophy, which encapsulates all components of philosophy (Molina-Azo and Feters, 2020). Just as Yin-Yang represent complementary forces that cannot exist in isolation, the hand model reflects the interplay between opposing yet interconnected elements and reflects a pragmatic stance (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2018). This is reflected in the hand through different theoretical concepts such as Bourdieusian concepts interacting with the SWDD or SWNDD being first gen or the choice process being interdependent with WP. The Hand visually depicts the constant shift between the different labels representing the Hand (figure 5.5), affirming the concept the student decision-making is not the same for all students in either group but is consistently shaped by influences and influencing factors interwoven in the student's life.

The imagery of the hand thus functions as more than a metaphor; it is a structural tool that accommodates the dynamic, interconnected, and embodied nature of the study. It offers a

conceptual framework flexible enough to accommodate the study's multidimensionality yet grounded in rigorous theoretical foundations.

5.3 The Hand and My Thesis

The imagery of a hand was deliberately chosen to represent the CF of this study. Following a comprehensive literature review, it became evident that no pre-existing framework encapsulated the breadth and complexity of this research. As such, no existing model could be suitably modified to support the multiple interwoven dimensions involved. This study investigates four related facets of student decision-making regarding HE (section 1.1). The Hand, as a metaphor, serves as an appropriate visual and conceptual device to represent these interconnected components. Much like the human hand; a multifaceted and coordinated instrument capable of executing complex functions; the framework accommodates multiple theoretical and conceptual variables in a coherent and accessible form.

The use of a hand also bears personal significance. As a wheelchair user, my hands are not merely symbolic but essential for daily navigation and mobility they push the tyres of my manual wheelchair and operate the controls of my electric wheelchair. This embodied reliance may have subconsciously influenced the adoption of the hand as a metaphorical structure (section 2.5).

In alignment with Sbeglia, et al. (2021), cited in Luft, et al. (2022), a study's conceptual framework shapes the methodological choices a researcher makes. In this context, the hand served both as a visual representation and as a heuristic device for understanding the relationships between the various components under investigation. Each part of the hand; wrist, palm, fingers, thumb, and even the blood that flows through it was used to symbolise theoretical constructs, decision-making factors, and their interrelations. For instance, the opposable thumb is metaphorically significant: it denotes a variable that interacts with all others, illustrating the dynamic nature of student decision-making.

5.3.1 Interconnectedness and My Conceptual Framework

The interconnected nature of this study's conceptual framework is most clearly illustrated through the hand model. Core theoretical foundations, including Bourdieu's theory of habitus and capital, IDM, and SET, were chosen because of their ability to explain how social position, personal development, and rational weighing of costs and benefits influence student choice. These theoretical elements flow through and connect with all other components of the framework, akin to the blood coursing through a hand.

Bourdieu (2002) concept of habitus and capitals is linked, for instance, to the notion of influencers. According to Bourdieu, individuals from families where parents have attended university are significantly more likely to do the same due to mechanisms of social reproduction. This concept was foundational in explaining the influence of parental expectations on student decision-making, for participants in this study.

IDM is situated in the wrist of the hand (figure 5.5), representing identity formation and the role of developmental experiences in shaping expectations. Students' prior experiences, whether they were diagnosed with a disability early in life or during their time at university, impact their view of HE and their role within it. Charmaz (1995) highlights the transformative role of their disability in identity formation, supporting the use of IDM to understand how their expectations are formed for some SWDDs.

SET, articulated by Redmond (2015), underpins the representation of choice. This theory assumes that individuals make decisions by weighing potential benefits and costs. In this context, students are conceptualised as agents evaluating the advantages of attending university versus other pathways. Once they decide to enter HE, they must also choose which institution aligns with their goals and expectations. SET thus provides explanatory power for analysing how both SWDDs and SWNDDs navigate this cost–benefit terrain.

The metaphor of the hand is further extended through its alignment with the methodological approach of this study; MMR. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p.44) argue, MMR can generate synergistic insights, where the combined effect of qualitative and quantitative data produces outcomes greater than the sum of their parts; what they describe as ' $1 + 1 = 3$ '. Fetters and Freshwater (2015) reinforce this view, suggesting that MMR produces richer insights than single-method approaches. Within the hand metaphor, qualitative and quantitative elements may be represented by individual fingers, the palm, or the wrist, but it is the whole hand representing MMR that encapsulates the integrative power of the study's design.

Chapter 6: Methodology

6.1 Introduction

This research is a case study conducted at UniA. It used a MM a to data collection. The data collection tools for students who agreed to participate included a questionnaire and online interviews. The term respondent refers to the students involved in the questionnaire, the label

interviewee refers to students who responded to the questionnaire and who accepted an invitation to interview, and the appellation participants refers to all students who contributed to the data collection in this study. Other data that has been used includes a Freedom of Information (FOI) request that was submitted and approved in April 2022 (Appendix B).

This chapter concerns itself with the elements that comprise of methodology; these are

- Philosophies and Paradigms
- Research Questions
- Approach – Case Study
- Mixed-Method Research
- Ethics
- Strengths and Limitations

The aim, objectives, and research questions of this research were considered alongside an understanding of their philosophies and paradigms.

The paradigm chosen was yin-yang (section 6.2), an approach Fetter and Molina-Azorin (2019a) discussed. This paradigm has five philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetorical.

6.1.1 COVID-19

Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed online in September 2020 (section 6.6.2.1). The initial online interviews phase took place in January 2021, and the second round in June 2021 (section 6.6.2.3). Data collection happened online because of the UK government's COVID-19 regulations and lockdown requirements precluded face-to-face interactions.

6.2 Philosophies and Paradigms

6.2.1 Introduction

The classifications for research philosophy are ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Biddle and Schafft, 2015). These philosophical approaches enable researchers to decide which approach to adopt and why (Graue, 2016). The philosophical stance adopted should originate from the research questions (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2009). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) define a research paradigm as the broad framework of perception, beliefs, and understanding of several theories and practices used to conduct research.

6.2.2 Philosophies

Biddle and Schafft (2015) state that four necessary criteria are required to form a philosophy of knowledge. This view differs from that of some authors e.g., (Freshwater and Cahill, 2012), who suggest that there are three criteria. Alongside ontology, epistemology, and axiology, Biddle and Schafft (2015) also add methodology, which concerns the tools used to examine the above concepts. Gorman and MacIntosh (2014) differ from Biddle and Schafft (2015) in substituting a methodological approach for the rhetorical issue, namely the language selected for the research.

6.2.2.1 Yin-Yang philosophy

Molina-Azorin and Fetters (2020) blended all criteria (ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodological approach, and rhetorical issue) into the philosophy of knowledge to develop their approach, which they called the 'yin-yang philosophy'.

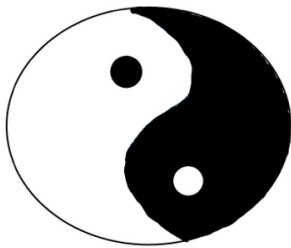


Figure 6.1 The taijitu symbol (illustrates the Chinese concept of yin and yang)

Figure 6.1 depicts that within each teardrop, there is a small circle with the opposite colour; this has similarities to MMR as it denotes the interconnectedness of the two teardrops as there is an element of each within the other (Fetters and Molina-Azorin, 2019b). Wang (2012) states that yin was associated with subjectivity, which aligned with qualitative research, which deals with subjective data, and yang was associated with objectivity, linked to the objective nature of quantitative research. When yin and yang combined to create a whole, it has greater significance than the two components possessing as separate entities, hence its kinship with MMR (section 6.5.2)

All five criteria are required to constitute a philosophy of knowledge (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Moreover, this model aligns with the pragmatist paradigm applied in this research (section 6.5.2). Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) highlight, from an ontological perspective, the

importance of multiple views of reality. Yin and yang can be viewed as separate interconnected entities whilst also being indivisible; this philosophy, applied in MMR, complements each other by having opposing strengths and limitations, like qualitative and quantitative research. From the point of view of epistemology, yin-yang understands the necessity of comprehending the togetherness of a phenomenon and its components. Axiology aims to understand how these separate segments connect, achieved by accepting a yin (qualitative) and yang (quantitative) research style, to understand the reciprocal cojoined whole. From a methodological perspective, a study must accept that one form may be more dominant depending on the method's purpose. Research can use both forms to comprehend the whole; in the case of this study, qualitative data was the dominant method.

Prior to commencing an MMR study, the type of research design requires selection between sequential, convergent, or cyclical (section 6.6). Data collection necessitates a usable format. Organising data from the two different types of data collection by differentiating the qualitative from the quantitative, the data sets require deconstruction before collating the data as a whole prior to data analysis.

From a rhetorical perspective, Fetters and Molina-Azorin (2019b) state that the researcher must adopt a flexible approach when using a yin-yang philosophy, as the study can employ different methods with equal weighting or with one method receiving greater emphasis than the other. Gog (2015) states that researchers do not choose their research philosophy. Instead, it is inherent within the research itself and, rather than being fixed, it can change and evolve. Somewhat countering Gog (2015) view is that of (Foss and Ellefsen, 2002, cited in Halcomb and Andrew, 2009), who states that the researcher should select a philosophical stance for their research method rather than using research tools to support a weak study. This study adopted the philosophy of yin-yang because the researcher employed a pragmatic approach and chose to use a MM approach to gain the breadth and depth required for the subject matter under investigation; therefore, since the philosophy of yin-yang incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, it seemed the most suitable choice.

6.2.3 Ontology

Ontology, one of the necessary philosophical criteria defined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of existence and the nature of reality (Mertens and Zimmerman, 2014; Biddle and Schafft, 2015; Gog, 2015; Tumele, 2015). Ontology has three different paradigms: positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. This research study has adopted an interpretivist stance, with qualitative data gathered via online interviews predominating, underpinned by a quantitative questionnaire that applied a positive stance.

The online questionnaire informed the questions in the first round of interviews, which had an interpretivist element through the lived experiences of the interviewees and, subsequently, the researcher's interpretation through the lens of the participant's responses.

6.2.4 Epistemology

Epistemology explores an area of philosophy that deals with disposition and the boundaries that constitutes knowledge. This is conducted by exploring different questions such as 'what forms knowledge?' and how this knowledge is acquired. In terms of this study, the knowledge came from the existing literature, and boundaries were set regarding which theories would be addressed e.g. Bourdieu, aspirational capital. Boundaries were also set regarding participants in this study, e.g. only current students enrolled at UniA participated in the study. This assisted in informing the questions asked during data collection and contributing to new knowledge.

6.2.5 Axiology

Axiology, another of the four criteria noted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), is the branch of philosophy concerning value judgements. Axiology is involved with the assessment of the role that a researcher's values have in all stages of the research process (Ponterotto, 2005; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). It primarily refers to the 'aims' of the research. (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2009, p.116) state,

"Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies judgement about values... The role your values play in all stages of the research process."

The researcher's axiological position is that all students have (or should have) equality of choice.

6.2.6 Methodology

The final philosophical criterion of Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) noted is the methodology, which, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), is how a study is conducted.

Philosophical Question	Postpositivism	Constructivism	Transformative	Pragmatism
Ontology [What is the nature of reality?]	Singular reality (e.g., researchers reject or fail to reject hypotheses)	Multiple realities (e.g., researchers provide quotes to illustrate different perspectives)	Multifaceted and based on different social and cultural positions (e.g., researchers recognize different power positionalities in our society)	Singular and multiple realities (e.g., researchers test hypotheses and provide multiple perspectives)
Epistemology [What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?]	Distance and impartiality (e.g., researchers objectively collect data on instruments)	Closeness and subjectivity (e.g., researchers visit with participants at their sites to collect data)	Collaboration (e.g., researchers actively involve participants as collaborators, build trust, and honor participant standpoints)	Practicality (e.g., researchers collect data by "what works" to address research question)
Axiology [What is the role of values?]	Unbiased (e.g., researchers use checks to eliminate bias)	Biased (e.g., researchers actively talk about and use their personal biases and interpretations)	Based on human rights and social justice for all (e.g., researchers begin with and advocate for this premise)	Multiple stances (e.g., researchers include both biased and unbiased perspectives)
Methodology [What is the process of research?]	Deductive (e.g., researchers test an a priori theory)	Inductive (e.g., researchers start with participants' views and build "up" to patterns, theories, and interpretations)	Participatory (e.g., researchers involve participants in all stages of the research and engage in cyclical reviews of results)	Combining (e.g., researchers collect both quantitative and qualitative data and mix them)
Rhetoric [What is the language of research?]	Formal style (e.g., researchers use agreed-upon definitions of variables)	Informal style (e.g., researchers write in a literary, informal style)	Advocacy, activist-oriented (e.g., researchers use language that will help bring about change and advocate for human rights and social justice)	Formal or informal (e.g., researchers may employ both formal and informal styles of writing)

Table 6.1 Elements of world views and implications for practice. Adapted from Creswell (2014).

Every philosophical assumption has different parts within its worldview (table 6.1).

Approach/Method			
	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed
Common philosophical assumptions	Constructivist/transformational	Postpositivist	Pragmatic
Common strategies	Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study & narrative	Surveys & experiments	Sequential, concurrent & transformational
Common methods	Open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text, or image data	Closed-ended questions, predetermined approaches, numeric data	Open- & closed-ended questions, emerging & predetermined approaches & both qualitative & quantitative data & analysis
Common research practices for the researcher	Position's self Collects participant meanings Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon Brings personal values into the study Validates the accuracy of the findings. Creates an agenda for change/reform Collaborates with the participants	Tests/verifies theories or hypotheses Identifies variables to study Relates variables in questions/hypotheses Uses standards of validity & reliability Records information numerically Takes an objective approach	Collects qualitative & quantitative data Develops a rationale for mixing approaches Employs the practices of both qualitative & quantitative research
Common types of data collected	Interview, observation, document & audio-visual	Performance, attitude, observation & survey	Multiple forms of data – no exclusions
Common types of analysis	Text & image analysis	Statistical analysis	Statistical & text analysis
Common types of data interpretation	Themes, patterns & interpretations	Statistical interpretation	Statistical & text analysis

Table 6.2 Comparison of research design approaches/methods. Adapted from Creswell 2014 p47

Gorman and MacIntosh (2014) state how positivism and interpretivism oppose each other in the paradigm world. However, adopting an MMR approach negates this, allowing the researcher to apply a blended positivist/interpretivist stance to investigate their research topic best, as outlined in figure 6.2.

Positivist paradigm		Interpretivist paradigm
Focus on facts	↔	Focus on meanings
Look for causality and fundamental laws	↔	Try to understand what is happening
Reduce phenomena to simplest elements	↔	Look at totality of each situation
Formulate hypotheses and test them	↔	Develop ideas through induction from the data
Operationalise concepts so that they can be measures	↔	Use multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena
Take large samples	↔	Small samples investigated in depth over time

Figure 6.2 Linking positivism and interpretivism for Mixed Methods. Adapted from Gorman and MacIntosh (2014, p61) published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited.

6.3 Research Questions

In order to answer the aims and objectives (section 1.2.1); the following RQs need to be answered. The aims and objectives of this study (section 1.2.1) were used in formulating the RQs. They are supported by literature, as seen in chapters 3 and 4 e.g. Gibbs and Knapp and LaVigne (2019). From the research conducted, this study contributes to existing literature and fills a gap in the existing literature.

1. How do SWDDs and SWNDDs reach their final decision about attending university?
2. How do SWDDs and SWNDDs reach their final decision on a specific university?
3. Who or what, if anything, influenced their decision to attend university?
4. If the two subsets of students have similar or different expectations of their experience, and if they were met by UniA?
5. Is there a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs in their decision-making process, influence(r)s and expectations?

6.4 Approach – Case Study

6.4.1 Introduction

This study uses a case study approach. There are various definitions of what a case study e.g. Yin (2014) describes a case study as

“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context” (p. 16).

Other authors, such as Harrison, et al. (2017), consider that case studies provide an in-depth analysis of a research area and place participants at the heart of the research. Aczel (2015) believes that case studies are a research strategy, whilst Saunders,

This study defined a case study as being bound, holistic concerning the descriptions and explanations, and heuristic and particularistic regarding events and phenomena. In addition to these characteristics, a case study is also descriptive when portraying a situation and its diverse circumstances (Merriam, 2009).

6.4.2 Why was Case Study Research utilised?

There are three types of research design, including case study, experiments and surveys. This study used Case Study Research (CSR) because, according to Thomas (2011) when writing about how to choose between the three types of research design (case study, experiment, and

survey) to be able to select the most appropriate option for the research question under investigation, the following points require consideration.

CSR aims to explain why a phenomenon is occurring and how it proceeds. It investigates a single case, which is applicable to this study. Thomas (2011), Gentles, Charles and Ploeg (2016), and Yin (2018) also state that for CSR, during data collection and analysis, there are a large number of features for each case due to its use of in-depth inquiry; this is what this study aimed to do. CSR is used to study and analyse real-life, real-world (Gibbs, 2012; Yin, 2018; this was highly relevant to this study as one element aimed to describe a process and its outcomes, namely, exploring why people make the decisions that they do. This study aimed to discover the differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs student choice regarding university, their influencers and influencing factors on that decision and whether their expectations were met (section 1.2.1). The quantification of data in CSR is not a priority, while it is in the other two research types, i.e., experiment and survey. CSR uses many methods to collect data, as suggested by Luck, Jackson and Usher (2006) and Harrison, et al. (2017). This study used an MMR approach and both qualitative and quantitative methods rather than fully quantitative or qualitative.

6.4.3 What constitutes CSR?

Although some authors such as Gottfert (2015) view CSR as a method rather than an approach, Yin (2008) considers it a research strategy. The constitution of CSR is defined by (Brown, 2008, p.9) when he combines the ideas of Yin (2008), (Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009) and (Stake, 1995; Stake, 2006) by stating that

“case study research is supported by the pragmatic approach of Merriam (1998, 2009) informed by the rigour of Yin (2008) and enriched by the creative interpretation described by Stake (1995, 2006)”.

Harrison, et al. (2017) suggest that organisation and preparation are key skills the researcher requires, as well as a systematic implementation procedure to bring those plans to fruition.

6.4.4 CSR Design

When designing a case study, Merriam (2009) suggests that a researcher needs to make certain decisions before the commencement of their research journey. She says the researcher needs to answer the following questions.

Firstly, will the research be written in a report or story style? This thesis is an academic piece of writing, written in the style of a report, and has different structures that prevent it from becoming a story.

Secondly, will the research be written as a stand-alone piece of writing, or will it be a comparison to other cases? This research, whilst taking account of literature and other studies, is a stand-alone piece of writing.

Thirdly, how generalisable is the study? This research pertains to participants at a single university. However, by noting the methodological approaches used, readers could draw generalisations from the arguments in this study if they wish.

Fourthly, the research's descriptive nature is under question. This research aimed to accurately describe and then analyse the participants' opinions gathered from the questionnaires and interviews.

Finally, Merriam (2009) asks whether and how much the researcher intends to protect the participants' anonymity. Section 6.6 outlines the multiple processes put into place to provide anonymity to participants.

Thomas (2011) also states that CSR design is a recursive rather than a linear process (figure 6.3).

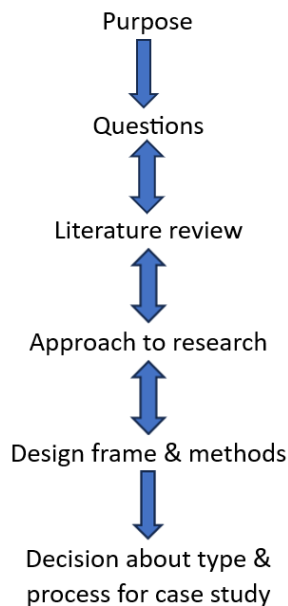


Figure 6.3 Process of CSR design Adapted from Thomas (2011, p27)

6.4.5 Types of CSR

Yin (2018) states that there are four types of case studies (figure 6.4), which can demonstrate the type of case study this research fits into.

This research is a single-case study. UniA represents the context, and the students who chose to attend UniA constitute the case. Yin (2018) provides five rationales for single-case designs. The five rationales are 'critical, unusual, revelatory, longitudinal, and common'. The study types

this research undertook was 'common', as it aimed to consider differences between how students with and without a disability go to university, how they choose a specific university, their influencers and influencing factors, and whether their expectations are met. Yin (2018) other rationales were rejected as they were not compatible with the aims, objectives (section 1.2.1) and philosophies of this research ('longitudinal' was only performed at one point in time; 'revelatory', as this decision is made yearly by subsequent groups of people, for the same reason this research is neither 'unusual' nor 'extreme', and it is not 'critical' because no hypothesis or theory was tested.)

Yin (2018) sets out four principles for data collection. The researcher must use multiple sources of evidence, create a database, maintain a chain of evidence, and exercise care when using data from social media sources. These four principles are required to establish

“the construct, validity, and reliability of the evidence” Yin (2018, p. 170).

The multiple sources employed in this study included a diverse set of students, gathered by promoting the survey in various ways (section 6.6.2.1; see Appendix C) and by using different student demographics to obtain a variety of responses, including interviews and questionnaires. A database was created using multiple tools that enabled the researcher to analyse the data collected (section 6.6.2). A chain of evidence was created and maintained throughout the data collection phase and ensured compliance with ethical guidelines to guarantee anonymity and GDPR compliance (section 6.7).

6.4.6 Strengths and Limitations of Case Study Research

Curtis, Murphy and Shields (2014) consider that the strengths of CSR include flexibility that allows for differences in ideology, epistemology, methodology, and 'individuality'. A case study does not try to simplify complex issues or ignore what is not directly relevant to them (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) identifies some limitations of CSR, including the researcher not having enough time or resources to complete the required in-depth research, and the commissioners of a case study might find the answers too detailed for their needs or challenging to implement. Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest that the case study researcher may act unethically and that this may invalidate the results of their research. However, it may be argued that if a researcher were to act unethically, they would do this irrespective of the research type they undertook; therefore, it is not just an issue for a case study approach. Another limitation is that CSR requires setting boundaries and is then confined within them (Thomas, 2011). This study's boundaries included only students who were enrolled at UniA in the academic year 2020/2021

who were eligible to participate in this research. Another boundary for the qualitative data collection was that questionnaire respondents who accepted an invitation to an interview were interviewed at a time that suited them for the first round; only those invited to a second-round interview needed to participate. Those interviewees who discussed expectations of their university experience and were expansive in their answers to the researcher's questions were invited back for a second-round interview.

6.5 Mixed-Method Research

6.5.1 Introduction

MMR is mainly used in social sciences (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2006). MMR has been referred to as: -

- a movement (Bryman, 2009),
- a third methodology (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010),
- a distinct approach (Greene, 2008)
- an emerging field (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2011) defined by a common name (that sets it apart from other approaches to combining methods) and shared terminology (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

This study used MMR as a third methodology, as defined by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010). (Rauscher and Greenfield, 2009, p91) state that MMR is used for 'collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study, thereby adopting a similar viewpoint to that of Creswell (2014). This study defined MMR as opposing methods coming together for triangulation and providing the opportunity for having a broad, sweeping approach followed by a more narrow, focused, in-depth approach to gathering data.

Adopting an MMR strategy helps researchers gain a better insight into the question(s) they are trying to answer, and it has become an accepted approach (Doyle, Brady and Byrne, 2009). Other authors, such as Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Shannon-Baker (2015) have expanded this definition by stating that MMR is a way of understanding complex phenomena that would be unattainable if only a single approach were adopted. Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) stressed the need to differentiate between MMs as being two different types of data being collected and analysed and MMR as a means of the amalgamation and analysis of two types of collected data

“the two seemed interchangeable [but there are] distinct differences between them, with the former more closely focused on “methods” and the latter on “methodology” (Creswell and Tashakkori, 200, p3).

An MMR approach was applied to the quantitative online questionnaire, followed by qualitative online interviews. A questionnaire would not have provided the study with sufficient depth of data to understand why students with or without a disability decided to go to university, why they chose a specific university, whether their influences differed, and whether their experience met their expectations. The same could be said for qualitative interviews, as the questions would not have had a foundation based on statistical analysis (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006). Mertens (2015) states that the researcher can assume the most appropriate options for the task.

To qualify as MMR, Pluye and Hong (2014) state that simply using different types of data collection is insufficient, and for research to qualify, the following criteria must be met:

- (a) at least one qualitative method and one quantitative method are combined.
- (b) each method is used rigorously
- (c) the data collection, and/or data analyses, and/or results are integrated

This research met all these criteria as this study used a questionnaire with open and closed questions (section 6.6.2.1) and qualitative interviews (section 6.6.2.3). The quantitative element was used to inform the questions using the qualitative data collection method during data aggregation.

A broad skill set is required to fully utilise MMR, as quantitative and qualitative data require different analytical competencies (Halcomb and Andrew, 2009; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). According to Mertens (2015); MMR is best utilised when a researcher is trying to resolve an issue in an educational context, which is the backdrop of his study. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggest that MMR should address a multi-faceted educational or social problem within an organization which was applied to this study as prospective students enter HE annually and they go through the same choice process of picking the best university for them. Gorard and Taylor (2004) say that MMR is key to improving educational research. When using MMR, the researcher must ensure that the research purpose and questions are integrated into the data collection tools 'whilst maintaining methodological congruence' (Greenwood and Terry, 2012, p.103).

6.5.2 Paradigms for Mixed Methods Research

Table 6.3 depicts some of the paradigms recommended for MMR and those writers who espouse them.

Morgan (2007)	Mertens (2012)	Shannon-Baker (2016)	Schoonenboom (2019)
World views	Post-positivism	Critical realism	Critical realism
Epistemological stances	Transformative	Transformative emancipation	Performative
A shared belief in a research field	Constructivism	Dialectics	Dialectics
Model examples	Pragmatism	Pragmatism	Pragmatism

Table 6.3 Paradigms suitable for MMR. Adapted from Molina-Azorin and Fetters (2020 p7-8)

Table 6.3 shows how 4 different scholars (Morgan, Mertens, Shannon-Baker and Schoonenboom) describe paradigms that are suitable for MMR.

Morgan (2007) defines paradigms differently from other writers in this field. He defines a paradigm as a shared belief that encompasses all areas when describing the worldview typology, and he classifies it as of little use in MMR. Morgan (2007) uses the paradigm as a model example when reliance is on specific exemplars to explain a solution, but this does not apply to this study.

Shannon-Baker (2016) cites other authors (Mertens, 2003; Morgan, 2007) when discussing paradigms concerning MMR to explain the differences in viewpoints that are extant in MMR theory. She cites Morgan (2007) when discussing pragmatism, who describes it as an approach whilst other authors describe it as a paradigm. He indicates that pragmatism is a connect theory, before and after data collection, that uses a mix of characteristics from quantitative and qualitative approaches; it has strong links with MMR and, according to Morgan (2007), can be used in this type of data collection.

Shannon-Baker (2016) then discusses transformative emancipation, citing Mertens (2003), who suggests that a transformative paradigm is a result of a body of work by researchers within the field of social justice. Mertens (2003) has some links with this piece of research as this research investigates disabled students who are a minority group, and this addresses social inequalities for marginalised groups. This view resonates with the conceptual framework used in this study (section 5.3; figure 5.5).

Dialectics is the next philosophical category discussed by Shannon-Baker (2016) when she refers to paradigms; she cites Greene and Hall (2010), who suggest that this is a response to the paradigm wars, which investigates differences between groups of people within society and emphasises both similarities and difference in the data. Dialectics involves discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject but wishing to establish the

truth through reasoned methods of argumentation. Dialectics resemble debate, but the concept excludes any subjective value judgements.

Bhaskar (1975) developed critical realism to understand the pitfalls within society when trying to create an equal world for everyone (Buch-Hansen, 2005; Bhaskar, 2014). Bhaskar views critical realism as maximising equality ontologically (Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006). Critical realism is like Mertens's transformative paradigm as both use an epistemological stance that

“Indicates more clearly than the other positions the appropriate direction and context of explanatory research” (Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006, p.280).

Regarding methodology, critical realism gives a positive view of the object under investigation. Critical realism is used to make causal inferences; however, this research did not adopt a critical realist standpoint because creating an equal world is not its aim, as it reports data collected at that time.

Schoonenboom (2019) work concentrates on the performative paradigm, and she created a philosophical framework that looks at objectivity. Therefore, it is not directly pertinent to this research as it concerns investigating people's opinions and why they decided to attend UniA. Mertens (2012) has a compatible stance concerning this research. She argued against the reasoning that paradigms can be methodological in their foundations and agrees with Greene and Hall (2010). Greene and Hall (2010) suggest that qualitative, quantitative, and MMR are constructs developed over time and are not static, unchanging entities and inferred by many other authors, including Guba and Lincoln (1994); Denzin and Lincoln (2008).

Morgan (2007) and Mertens (2015), when discussing MMR studies, state that pragmatic researchers combine their research questions with their choice of method to align with their study. This study adopted this stance. Feilzer (2010) suggests that pragmatism bridges the qualitative and quantitative divide, thereby terminating paradigm wars.

Mertens (2012) suggests that it is not necessary to adhere to a single paradigm, and it is not a failure of the researcher. This study followed this viewpoint and applied a pragmatic approach regarding paradigms.

According to Biesta (2010), MMR took a pragmatic approach and is a philosophical vehicle for addressing unhelpful contradictions. For this study, open text box style questions when designing the questionnaire to provide an opportunity to gain richer data, thereby using a traditionally quantitative data collection tool to serve a qualitative function (section 7.4) and the converse was done in the interview phase, for example during the, second round of interviews; interviewees were asked to rank different aspects of their experience at UniA out of 10, which was why this study is using a MM approach. Yanchar and Williams (2006) concur when they say that the 'methodological eclecticism' adopted by the pragmatic paradigm solved the problem at the centre of the paradigm wars and explains its use in MMR. Morgan (2007)

believes that when discussing paradigms, researchers can have different interpretations of the definition of a paradigm.

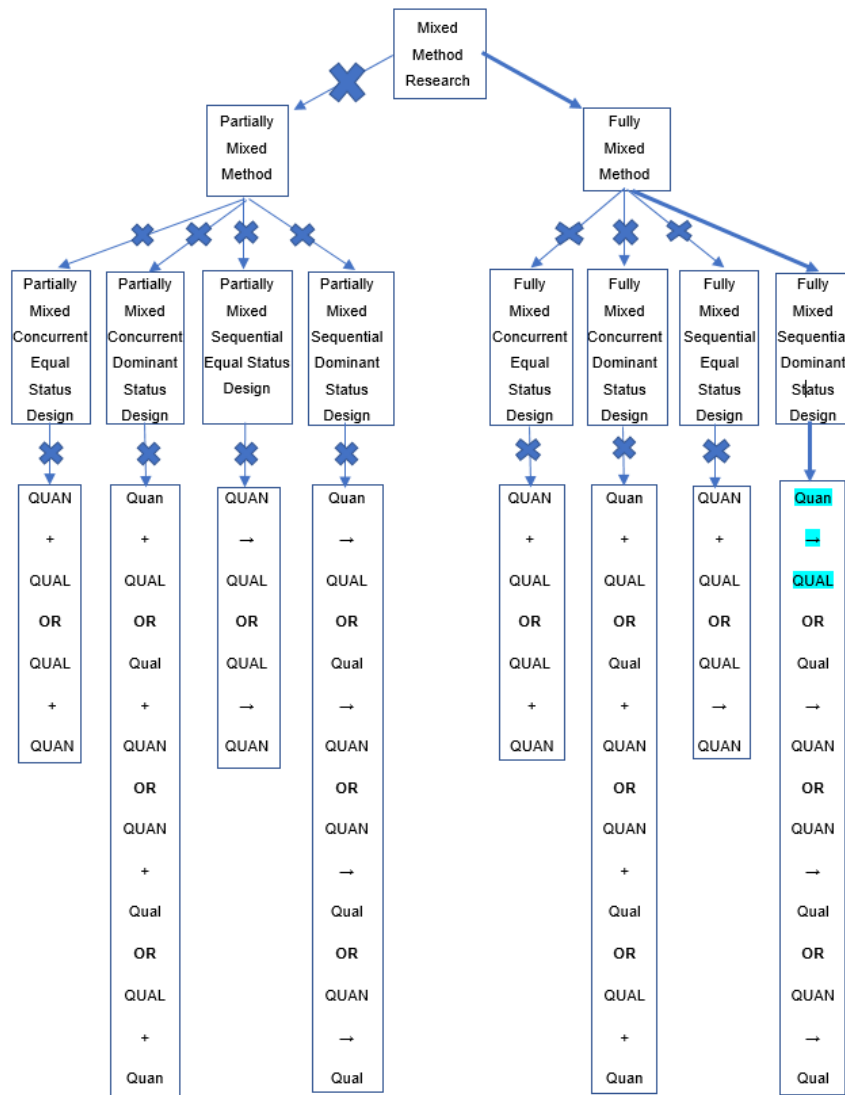


Figure 6.4 Two types of Mixed Methods. Adapted from Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009, p269).

Figure 6.4 depicts the different types of MMR. This study had a thoroughly mixed method, a sequential 'quan QUAL' design because the quantitative data supplied the foundation for qualitative data collection tools to build upon. This study used neither of the concurrent designs as the quantitative element was used to strengthen its results by informing the qualitative phase. Within this study, the qualitative element was dominant, allowing for richer data collection during the interview phase.

Pluye and Hong (2014) state three main types of MMR design and propose the following classifications: sequential exploratory, sequential explanatory, and convergent. However, Creswell (2003) identified six MMR design types, detailed below.

Design Type	Implementation	Priority	Stage of Integration	Theoretical Perspective
Sequential explanatory	Quantitative followed by qualitative	Usually quantitative but can be qualitative or equal	Interpretation phase	May be present
Sequential exploratory	Qualitative followed by quantitative	Usually qualitative but can be quantitative or equal	Interpretation phase	May be present
Sequential transformative	Either quantitative followed by qualitative OR qualitative followed by quantitative	Quantitative, qualitative or equal	Interpretation phase	Definitely present (i.e., conceptual framework, advocacy, empowerment)
Concurrent triangulation	Concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data	Preferably equal but can be quantitative or qualitative	Interpretation OR analysis phase	May be present
Concurrent nested	Concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data	Quantitative or qualitative	Analysis phase	May be present
Concurrent transformative	Concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data	Quantitative, qualitative or equal	Usually, analysis phase but can be during interpretation phase	Definitely present (i.e., conceptual framework, advocacy, empowerment)

Table 6.4 Types of MMR Design (Adapted from Creswell 2003)

The design type used in this study is sequential explanatory. Sequential because the data collection instruments were employed in succession. The initial quantitative data collected was analysed to provide an informed basis from which the second qualitative instrument was developed so that the second phase of the research provided opportunities for rich data in response to the research questions. Explanatory because this second phase sought to answer a ‘why’ rather than a ‘where’ question and was not attempting to prove or disprove a hypothesis as would be the case with an exploratory MMR study.

6.5.3 Sequential Explanatory Design

Sequential Explanatory Design (SED) is commonly used in studies that employ MMR as their methodology (Morgan, 1998; Creswell, 2003). In this type of MMR design, most researchers using SED collect and analyse quantitative data followed by qualitative data (Creswell, 2003; Pluye and Hong, 2014).

According to Morgan (1998) and Creswell (2003), researchers who wish to carry out a sequential explanatory thesis must fulfil the following criteria. Firstly, the researcher must decide which type of methodology is given the larger weighting. In this study, more weighting was given to the qualitative data. The second criterion is the sequencing of data collection and analysis. The questionnaire informed the questions asked during interview rounds, so the

questionnaire was closed to respondents on the 31st of October 2020, and interviews commenced in January 2021 while the second round of interviews started in April 2021. The final criterion is the phase where the research process is combined and integrated. The quantitative phase was connected to the qualitative phase because it informed the interview questions; each interviewee received personalised questions based on their responses to the questionnaire.

The advantages of implementing SED include the ease with which this research design is understood. Another benefit is that if unexpected results are found, this type of design helps convert them into a positive Morse (1991). A limitation of using SED is that MMR requires the researcher to complete two types of data collection and analysis, which can be time-consuming. To conduct MMR, the priorities for quantitative and qualitative data must be considered. This research emphasised a qualitative method, which formed the second element of the data collection process. This decision was made because the research questions aim to identify and explain the factors and influences that affect students' decisions to go to university, their choice of a particular university, and their expectations when entering HE.

The first phase of data collection (quantitative) aimed to discover who or what influenced respondents' decision to attend university. In contrast, the second phase (qualitative) focused on understanding why interviewees chose UniA, while the second round of interviews was focused on whether their expectations met their experience. The questionnaires were used to ascertain who, if anyone, and what, if anything, influenced their decision-making process regarding attending UniA. The qualitative phase aimed to explore and interpret the statistical analysis obtained in the initial phase. In this study, the first round of interviews found out why they chose UniA. The second round of interviews was conducted to discover if there exists a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs expectations about attending university and their subsequent experiences.

Typically, for SED (and in the case of the second round of interviews), the researcher chose participants for their qualitative phase (interviews). First, expectations for their university experience needed to be discussed during the first round of interviews; second, interviewees needed to be expansive in their answers to the researcher's questions in that round (Creswell, 2003).

SED allows for the employment of either solely qualitative or quantitative research methods to be used or for a combination of both, namely a Mixed methods approach, where both quantitative and qualitative elements can be of equal importance or either of the method types can be dominant (figure 6.6) Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2006). As noted previously, this study dominated qualitative research, and the sequence of quantitative and qualitative data collection was determined by the research questions and the study's aims.

As MMR utilises quantitative and qualitative methods, their strengths and limitations counterbalance each other (Giddings and Grant, 2006). Combining both methods is, therefore, a strength of MMR; other strengths include providing more substantial evidence for the corroboration of findings via triangulation so the researcher can seek to answer more complex questions; this is true for this study as the answers to several related questions are being sought (section 1.2.2). Another strength of MMR is that it provides more robust and valid findings than just using quantitative or qualitative research alone (Malina, Norreklit and Selto, 2011; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Greenwood and Terry, 2012). Gorard and Taylor (2004) arrived at the same conclusion when they stated that by using both methodology forms within a single study and allowing them to be fully integrated, the resulting methodology has a sum for the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Limitations of MMR include the fact that the researcher must familiarise themselves with different data analysing software. This study used Qualtrics and SPSS; it is more time-consuming as more than one type of data is collected, and more than one type of data has to be analysed (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A further limitation is that there are different definitions within the field of MMR as to what constitutes MMR. MMR has been criticised for not conforming with the traditional framework of paradigms and philosophies (Doyle, Brady, and Byrne, 2009; Greenwood and Terry, 2012), although it is becoming increasingly widely used.

Pragmatism is a philosophy that many researchers adopt when using MMR, and it has been adopted in this study. Shannon-Baker (2015) reports that it is most useful during data integration, as it allows easier connections between theory and data. According to Gorard and Taylor (2004, p144), the pragmatic approach does utilise theories but only if these theories can withstand being 'tested to destruction rather than artificially preserved'. Shannon-Baker (2016) addresses that MMR disrupts the dichotomy between absolute subjectivity and objectivity that qualitative and quantitative research traditionally seek to portray as providing.

6.6 Research Design

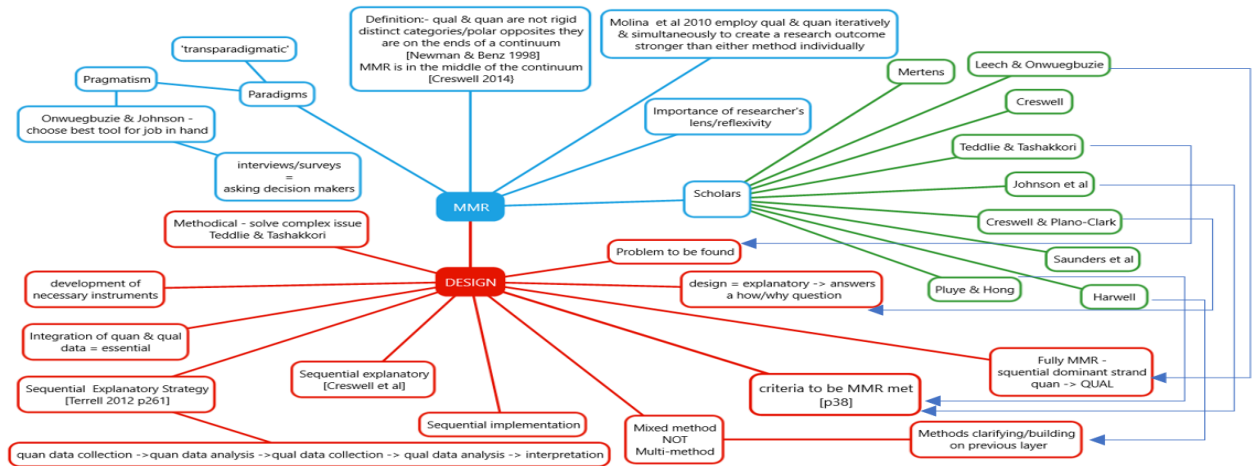


Figure 6.5 Concept map relating research design to MMR

The concept map (figure 6.5) displays the thought process that led to the current research design (in red) and demonstrates how MMR (in blue) through the literature (in green) connects with it. This process included developing various data collection instruments, including an online questionnaire, which informed the questions for the online interviews, and commenced in January 2021.

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), this research design answers a complex case because it answers a four-part question: why students decided to go to university and why they chose to come to UniA, who or what influenced this decision to go, and if their experiences at UniA met with their expectations. These questions were asked to determine whether the answers provided by SWDDs and SWNDDs differed. The research employs a pragmatic viewpoint that results from adopting a trans paradigmatic stance, which is essential when using an MMR approach. Malina, Norreklit, and Selto (2011) state that when using MMR, both approaches are used iteratively and simultaneously to create a stronger and more robust method than using only a quantitative or a qualitative method. The researcher's lens informs how the research is interpreted and designed. All research carried out was kept as objective as possible, and the researcher's lens was considered at all phases of data collection, analysis, and write-up (section 2.5).

6.6.1 Sampling

Sampling is an essential part of methodology, as researchers need to define the target population before any data are gathered, and a sample is drawn to answer the research questions (Oliver, 2008; Gibbs, 2012a; Gentles, Charles and Ploeg, 2016). For this study, the

sampling frame included all students enrolled at UniA during the 2020/21 academic year. The volunteer participants within this frame completed a questionnaire, and subsequently, everyone who provided an email address was sent an invitation to the initial interview phase of data collection (Appendix D). For the second round of interviews, expectations for their university experience needed to be discussed during the first round of interviews; secondly, interviewees needed to have been expansive when answering the questions asked by the researcher in the first round of interviews.

There are two main categorisations for sampling: probability and non-probability (McCombes, 2023). For the pilot study, probability sampling using cluster sampling was used, which involved dividing the population into subcategories. The sampling type chosen for this study was non-probability for the questionnaire. One reason the sampling types differed was that, for the pilot study, it was important to include representation from both student groups before the study commenced. Whereas, in the study, it was important not to preclude anybody who wished to volunteer and take part.

There are various sorts of non-probability sampling: convenience, voluntary response, purposive, and snowball sampling (Oliver, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Guetterman and Feters, 2018; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). In non-probability sampling, respondents are selected based on non-random criteria. One characteristic of non-probability sampling is that not every student has a chance of being included. The two main drawbacks, as stated by Gentles, Charles and Ploeg (2016), are that statistical inferences about the general population cannot be made, and there is a higher likelihood of sampling bias occurring.

This study used voluntary response sampling because the quantitative phase was advertised on social media groups affiliated with UniA and on campus, and respondents responded if they chose to. In this type of sampling, the researcher cannot select participants. Respondents volunteered by either scanning the QR code on the flyer (see Appendix C), engaging with the researcher's social media posts that the researcher made by university staff. Convenience sampling was used in the first round of qualitative data collection because all respondents who completed the questionnaire and indicated they wished to participate in an interview were emailed an invitation. There are elements of voluntary sampling because the participants who took part in the study volunteered their time and replied to the invitation to the interview. There are also elements of purposive sampling, as all those who indicated a willingness to further support the study by participating in interviews and providing their email address so an interview invitation could be sent (see Appendix D).

During the second round of interviews, purposive sampling was employed and had to meet specific criteria to be considered for this round of interviews, which were two-fold. Firstly, expectations of their university experience needed to be discussed during the first round of

interviews; secondly, the interviewees needed to have been expansive when answering the questions asked by the researcher in the first round of interviews.

6.6.2 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used are listed as follows:

- Questionnaire
- The first round of interviews
- Second round of interviews

These will be discussed in more detail below.

Chapter 7 did not address all the questions respondents answered in the questionnaire, nor did they help answer any research questions; the same was true during the interviews. (see Appendix E) The different data collection methods used in this study yielded different results; this might be because completing a questionnaire, compared to answering questions in an interview, engages different brain regions (Idiart, et al., 2019). Another reason may be that the questionnaire used voluntary response sampling whilst the second round of interviews used purposive sampling (section 6.6.1). The questionnaire is potentially more helpful for obtaining accurate responses; it also explains how best to conduct an interview (Saris and Gallhofer, 2014).

6.6.2.1 Questionnaire

As with all elements of a research project, it is advisable to aim for the minimisation of response errors, and therefore, it is necessary to follow best practice in the questionnaires. (Krosnick and Presser, 2010, p.263) suggest that the following points need to be covered:

- 'Questions on the same topic should be grouped together.
- Questions on the same topic should proceed from general to specific.
- Questions on sensitive topics that might make respondents uncomfortable should be placed at the end of the questionnaire.
- Filter questions should be included, to avoid asking respondents questions that do not apply to them'.

However, Lietz (2010) takes a different questionnaire design approach. She suggests that demographic questions, such as age, gender, education, etc., should be at the questionnaire's end. She implies that if these questions come at the end, it will stop any negative emotions towards the questionnaire, which might be reflected in respondents' answers.

The suggestions made by Krosnick and Presser (2010) were followed when creating the data collection instrument for this study, as the opinions of Lietz (2010) were unsuitable; this is because demographic data was an essential element of the survey as the characteristics of the two subsets of students needed to be identified.

Groves, et al. (2009) format details the questionnaire process and stresses the need for the data collection instrument to be employed methodically and systematically if the results they yield are valuable to the researcher.

Initially, a questionnaire using Microsoft Forms was created as this was the preferred software by the university where this study took place. However, it became apparent that it was not a user-friendly layout for SWDDs to navigate. Therefore, a decision was made alongside the Head of Disability and Wellbeing Support to use Qualtrics. The questionnaire was submitted for approval by the Ethics Committee, and this was granted (see Appendix F)

Mertens (2015) advice was followed during the development of the questions, including defining the objectives of this study and identifying the desired sample pool, which informed decisions about the questionnaire format. The resulting questionnaire comprised several batteries, each containing a separate topic: general data, education, disability, why UniA, influencers, and contact details.

Qualtrics allowed questions to be formulated and answered in multiple ways, including single-answer, slider-style, and open-text boxes; these allowed respondents to order multiple-choice questions in a way that suited them. For some single answer questions, the options included 'yes', 'no', 'maybe', or 'prefer not to say', and 'I don't know'. According to Qualtrics (2022), the option of 'prefer not to say' is usually a questionnaire answer to a sensitive question, such as gender (Taylor-Powell, 1998), which, alongside disability, is one of nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, a decision was made to add this as an option. A combination of open and closed questions enabled respondents to answer questions in more detail should they wish to do so. The use of batteries supported the respondents in answering the questionnaire as they knew the next topic to be addressed and assisted with analysing the data. If respondents answered no to a particular question, they could skip a battery as it was irrelevant; e.g. if a SWNDD answered 'no' to the question 'Do you identify as having a disability?' they skipped the disability battery; this thought concurs with Saris and Gallhofer (2014) when they state that pretesting a questionnaire helps to control the routing within it.

The initial plan was for respondents to complete the questionnaire face-to-face using a tablet or scan a QR code and complete it on their device. Concurrently, the questionnaire was to be promoted via flyer distribution at the UniA Fresher Fair and posters displayed around campus, whilst social media was intended to be used to a lesser extent. The COVID-19 pandemic and

the associated UK governmental lockdowns necessitated the questionnaire being publicised predominately online. Gottfert (2015) states that email or the internet is often the most objective type of questionnaire, so in this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic should not have impacted the objectivity of the questionnaire results.

6.6.2.2 Interview Protocol Development

The interview questions were developed from the analysis completed on data collated from the quantitative phase. The questionnaires predominantly contained closed but also had open-ended questions. The reason for this is that this research sought to investigate a 'why' type of question. Once the potential interviewees agreed to an interview, the interview questions were personalised for every interviewee based on the answers they gave in the questionnaire.

6.6.2.3 Interviews

Qualitative interviews formed the second phase of the data collection process, and the questions asked were informed by the quantitative data collection phase. (Zohrabi, 2013, p.255) quotes (Merriam, 1998, p.72) as saying that interviewing is a key to understanding what and how people perceive and

“interpret the world around them”

Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013) state that using quantitative and qualitative approaches can supplement the data collected individually, thereby enriching the quality of the data available for the study to be analysed; this is true for this study as the questions for the qualitative interview phase were informed by quantitative data collated.

There are several ways in which interviews can be conducted, as illustrated in table 6.5.

Patton (1990, p288-289)	Burns (1999, p119)
Informal conversational interview	Unstructured
Interview guide approach	Semi-structured
Structured open-ended interview	Structured
Closed fixed response interview	

Table 6.5 Comparing two of the main classifications of interview strategy. Source: Adapted from Zohrabi (2013, p256)

The type of interview used in this study was a semi-structured interview that followed the criteria set by Burns (1999), meaning that a set of questions was asked in every interview generated from the data collected by the questionnaire. However, that enquiry was pursued if the

interviewee provided an answer pertinent to the research. Semi-structured interviews allow for a rapport with the interviewee, whilst a structured, more formal interview might not. The unstructured interview was rejected because the interviewee was in control of the interview, meaning that the research questions may not be answered, and a comparison could not be made between SWDDs and SWNDDs.

Johnson and Turner (2003) cited in Zohrabi (2013) suggest that interviews have many strengths and limitations. Strengths include the interviewer observing the interviewee's body language and changing the direction of questioning should it become pertinent. This study discusses nonverbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice, in section 7.5. One limitation Johnson and Turner (2003) suggest is that transcribing the interview and analysing the collected data, including coding, are time-consuming. This limitation was addressed by using Microsoft Teams to record the sessions, allowing the researcher to revisit and revise the transcripts as required. All interviewees were assigned a code to protect their anonymity. Another limitation Johnson and Turner (2003) identify is that interviewees lose the sense of anonymity during interviews. However, in this research, interviewees were given the option at the start of the interview to keep their camera off and were assured that the recordings could only be accessed by those present at the interview: the interviewer, her support worker, and the interviewee.

Emails were sent to all interview candidates prior to the interview, explaining the length of the interview, confidentiality, how the information would be stored, and the types of questions to be asked. In addition, the email included a participant's consent form to be completed and returned, along with an information sheet. If the consent forms had not been returned before the interview, the interview would not occur.

6.7 Ethics

Obtaining ethical approval is crucial for any research. According to Jameson and Hillier (2003), the following points need to be addressed for the research to occur confidentiality, permissions from an authority, permissions from participants, informed consent, giving participants a voice, respect for equal opportunities, and using inclusive language. My support worker and I have both had confidentiality training (this was crucial due to my disability, which has necessitated my dictating my thesis to her, which she wrote), and adhered to GDPR (gov.uk, n.d.) guidelines and the ethical processes and regulations where this study was conducted. This research was carried out under the British Educational Research Association guidelines and adhered to their 'spirit and underlying principles' (BERA, 2018, p.1). It also adheres to the latest BERA (2024) guidelines. Ethical approval from the university where this research occurred has been granted

(Appendix G). All participants were provided with an Information sheet and consent form and were given the opportunity to read it and to ask any questions. King, Horrocks, and Brooks (2019) state that any study must provide enough information for 'informed consent' to be given; this is a requirement of the UniA's ethics committee. All respondents also gave informed consent. It was necessary to ensure that all participants were respected, and their voices are listened to comply with the Equality Act (2010), (section 3.2.11) which contains nine protected characteristics. Respect for the time and effort participants gave to support the research process was evident in all correspondence with them. All questions were worded carefully, with the purpose of the study borne in mind.

6.8 The Strengths and Limitations of this study

The strengths of this study include the identification of a gap in existing knowledge concerning the differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs, including their reason for going to university, their choice of specific university, their influences on that decision, and if their experience met their expectations.

This study categorised all SWDD within a unique group. To the researcher's knowledge, existing literature typically focuses on specific types of disability, often excluding other forms of disability from analysis. In contrast, this study adopted an inclusive approach that aimed to capture the experiences of all students, regardless of disability status. Similarly, all other students were grouped as a single homogenous category, without distinguishing between other intersectionality characteristics within the wider student population.

As noted by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018), MM case study design offers potential benefits in terms of transferability and generalisability. This study demonstrated elements of transferability, as the mixed-methods case study approach could be adapted to investigate minority groups in other UK universities with a dominant population.

Despite these strengths, the study has several limitations. Both SWDDs and SWNDDs represent heterogeneous populations; however, this research examined their decision-making as homogenous groups, without accounting for additional individual characteristics. Furthermore, data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and findings may have differed if the study had been conducted prior to or following periods of lockdown. Finally, the study sampled only 1.12% of the UniA student population, which limits the breadth of representation.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed philosophies and paradigms, research questions, the approach, mixed-method research, ethics, and strengths and limitations.

In summary, this research has adopted the approach of the philosophy of yin-yang, which was created by Fethers and Molina-Azorin (2019) (section 6.2) because this approach encompasses philosophical, methodological, and rhetorical issues. This approach was developed from an Eastern cultural perspective, as previous philosophical paradigms were based on Western cultural precepts. This philosophy emerged to counterbalance these and make MMR more accessible.

Section 6.5.2 noted that this study adopts a pragmatic stance, as MMR is used, so different methodologies can be utilised. Pragmatism allows the choice of the optimal research tool to achieve the best outcome for the study by answering its aims and objectives (section 1.2.2.1) and answering the research questions (section 1.2.2.2) most effectively. It encompasses all other paradigms and allows the researcher to select the most valuable elements of their study. This study adopted an interpretive stance as most of the data collected dealt with participants' opinions, which are subjective through their lens and can be subjective through the interpreter's lens. However, the triangulation of data (questionnaires and two rounds of interviews) and the rigor of approaches used minimised subjective interpretation. Moreover, through the years of doing this research, pre-held assumptions have been challenged through reflection, reading of available literature, and discussing findings with others.

The research question (section 1.2.2) visually demonstrates how the aims and objectives can answer the research questions. This study utilised a case study research approach that aligns with Thomas' (2011) categorisation of a case study as a single-site case study that can use a mixed-methods approach (section 6.5).

This study is a fully Mixed Sequential Dominant Design, with the qualitative element being the dominant one and used a sequential explanatory design (section 6.4.3) as defined by Creswell (2003). This design allows qualitative or quantitative research or a combination of the two, as in this instance, and will enable one to be predominant.

According to Giddings and Grant (2006), a strength of MMR is that it provides a solid foundation from which triangulation of data can occur (section 6.5.2). Also, the researcher can answer a more complex question than if a single method alone is used, and this study answered a complex question.

The research design concerns itself with a questionnaire informing the questions asked in semi-structured interviews. This was because this study aimed to explain who, what and why questions. The sampling type used in this study was non-probability and a voluntary response type because the survey was open to all students studying at UniA.

The following chapter reveals the outcomes of the application of the approaches and methods applied and outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 7: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the research conducted and explained in Chapter 6. It does this by presenting the findings in two main sections:

Section A - the quantitative findings (7.2; 7.3; 7.4; 7.5)

Section B - the findings from qualitative findings (7.6).

7.1 Section A

Section A has three parts, i.e., A.α, A.β and A.Γ. Section A.α reports the findings from the questionnaire questions that had a statistically significant association after performing a Chi-squared test; however, a statistically significant difference was found after conducting a MWU test. Section A.β findings can be found in Appendix (see Appendix G) and dealt with the question from the questionnaire (Q27), where a statistical test was not performed but qualitative data analysis; this question was not an open-text box style either. Section A. Γ reported the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire that required qualitative analysis.

7.1.1 Introduction and research population

The sample size for the questionnaire was 204 respondents, 49.5% of whom self-identified as being SWDDs and 50.5% as SWNDDs, was constituted as follows;

- 68% of respondents were female.
- 56% of respondents were 18–24-year-olds.
- 52% of the respondents had moved away from home to attend UniA.
- 73% of respondents were on undergraduate courses.
- 89% of respondents were full-time students.

There were 18,152 students enrolled at UniA during the academic year 2020/21 from which the sample was drawn meaning the sample size equates to 1.12% of the student population (section 6.8).

Following a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to UniA (see Appendix B), the data was tabulated (table 7.1) and then compared to the national average data as found in HESA (no date b).

		SWDDs			SWNDDs			UniA
		FOI Stats UniA	FOI Stats UniA	National Average	FOI Stats UniA	FOI Stats UniA	National Average	Total
		%	N=	%	%	N=	%	%
Disability		17	3,024	15	83	15,128	85	
Level of study	UG	33	2,515	17	67	12,219	83	81
	PG	15	457	11	85	2624	89	17
	PGR	15	52	12	85	285	88	2
Gender	Female	19	1,620	57	81	6,881	43	47
	Male	81	1,404	43	19	8,247	57	53
Age	18-24	85	1,311	-	15	5,675	-	38
	24+	15	1,713	-	85	9,453	-	62
Type of study	PT	11	860	-	89	6,868	-	
	FT	22	2,164	-	78	8,260	-	
KEY	UG: Undergraduate; PG: Postgraduate; PGR: Postgraduate research; PT: Part-time; FT: Full-time							

Table 7.1 A comparison of percentages for student demographics at UniA against the national average figures sourced from HESA (2022) (Available from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>)

		Total
		N=
Disability	Disclosed	417,425
	Not disclosed	2,329,775
Level of study	UG	2,003,685
	PG	743,510
	PGR	114,405
Gender	Female	1,564,850
	Male	1,176,810
Age	18-24	1,820,780
	24+	926,145
Type of study	PT	-
	FT	-
KEY	UG: Undergraduate; PG: Postgraduate; PGR: Postgraduate research; PT: Part-time; FT: Full-time	

Table 7.2 National average figures for student demographics within the HE sector. Available from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>

		SWDDs				SWNDDs			
		This Study UniA	This study UniA	FOI Stats UniA	FOI Stats UniA	This study UniA	This study UniA	FOI Stats UniA	FOI Stats UniA
Characteristics		%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=
Disability		49.5	101	17	3,024	50.5	104	83	15,128
Level of study	APP	100	1	-	-	-	0	-	-
	UG	50.4	72	33	2,515	49.6	71	67	12,219
	PG	48.7	18	15	457	51.3	19	85	2624
	PGR	25.0	4	15	52	75.0	12	85	285
Gender	Female	50.0	69	57	1,620	81	69	81	6,881
	Male	46.8	29	43	1,404	19	33	19	8,247
	Non-Binary	75.0	3	-	-	25.0	1	-	-
Age	18-24	44.7	51	85	1,311	55.3	63	15	5,675
	24+	55.6	50	15	1,713	44.4	40	85	9,453
Type of study	PT	54.6	12	11	860	45.4	10	89	6,868
	FT	49.2	89	22	2,164	50.8	92	78	8,260
KEY	APP: apprenticeship; UG: Undergraduate; PG: Postgraduate; PGR: Postgraduate research; PT: Part-time; FT: Full-time								

Table 7.3 Comparison of this study with selected demographic data obtained from UniA.

As with many universities, at UniA, most of the student body is on undergraduate courses (Universities UK, 2018). As UniA is a post-1992 institution, there are proportionately fewer doctoral students than a pre-1992 university (Johnson, 2020).

Table 7.1 shows that the proportion of postgraduate SWDDs is higher at UniA, and nationally, there were more SWNDD males studying. Compared to UniA The data are reported in percentile points, and numerical comparisons can be made between SWDDs and SWNDDs.

Table 7.2 reports the national averages HESA (n.d.) broken down into: disability, level of study, gender, age and type of study.

Table 7.3 illustrates a difference between the characteristic level of this study and the FOI data requested by UniA. This study is not proportionately representative of the student body at UniA as this study had approximately a 50:50 split for undergraduate and postgraduate students. However, there was a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs studying at doctoral level. Whereas the requested FOI data from the UniA showed differences at all levels of study.

7.2 A. α

This section reports the findings from the quantitative data that had statistically significant associations or statistically significant differences regarding respondents' decision to attend a

university to ascertain if there was a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs and to answer the aims and objectives (section 1.2.1).

A p-value of $<.05$ was necessary for a difference to be considered statistically significant on applicable statistical tests (Ravulakollu, 2023). Questions with continuous data had Mann-Whitney U (MWU) tests performed; this test compared the medians of the data sets of SWDDs and SWNDDs. While questions with categorical data had Chi-squared tests performed, this test compares the distribution of the data between two data sets: SWDDs and SWNDDs.

The data was recoded into positive and non-positive categories, where appropriate, to ensure that clarity in any difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs was evident. An answer had to be 'Yes', 'Definitely' or 'Probably' to qualify in the positive category, whilst the non-positive category consisted of the options 'No', 'Maybe' and 'Not at all'. Responses in options such as 'Prefer not to say', 'I don't know' and 'I can't remember' were removed from the data when statistical analysis in SPSS as this data was deemed inconsequential to the findings.

7.2.1 Demographic data

Q7 What type of student are you?

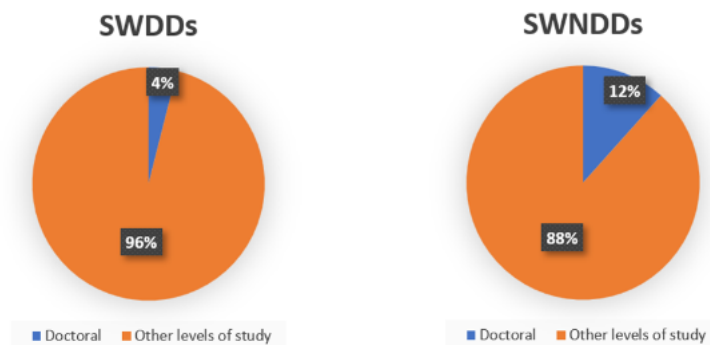


Figure 7.1 Pie charts comparing the proportion of SWDD and SWNDD studying at doctoral level.

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.172 ^a	1	.041		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.176	1	.075		
Likelihood Ratio	4.358	1	.037		
Fisher's Exact Test				.066	.036
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.152	1	.042		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.92.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.4 SPSS Chi-square output for Q7

Data was grouped into two categories, 'Doctoral' and 'All other levels of study', to discover if a statistically significant association exists between disability status and doctoral-level studies. To test if an association exists between SWDDs and SWNDDs and studying at a doctoral level, the null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding studying at a doctoral level at UniA.

H_1 = there is a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding studying at a doctoral level at UniA.

A Chi-squared test was performed to determine if there is a statistically significant association between disability and studying at a doctoral level. Table 7.1 shows $p=.041$, indicating that an association exists, meaning that SWDDs were more likely to study at a doctoral level than SWDDs at UniA

Q10 What is your age?

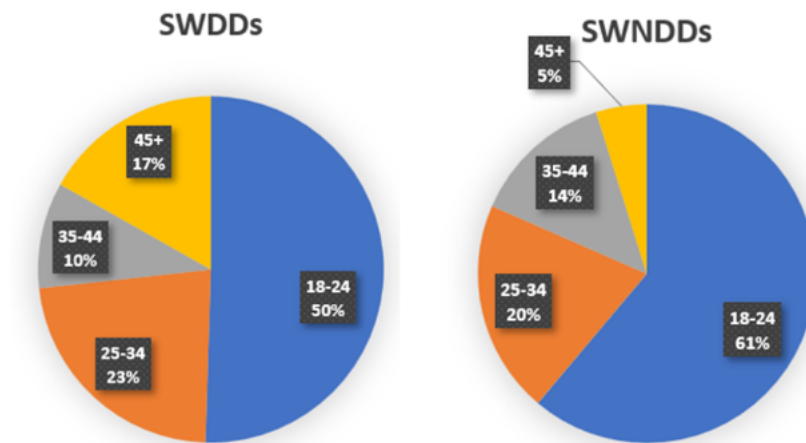


Figure 7.2 shows the age demographics between SWDDs and SWNDDs in Q10

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.547 ^a	3	.036
Likelihood Ratio	8.923	3	.030
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.594	1	.032
N of Valid Cases	204		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.89.

Table 7.5 SPSS Chi-squared output for Q10

The age of the prospective student entering HE was one determining factor in their decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university.

Age is a continuous variable; however, for this study, respondents were asked to pick one of four categories into which their age fell. Hence, it was considered a categorical variable (see Appendix G). To test if an association exists between disability status and the age of the student, the null and alternative hypotheses of interest in a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding their age at the time of this study while studying at UniA.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding their age at the time of this study while studying at UniA.

Table 7.2 shows $p=.036$, indicating an association between disability and the age at which respondents' study at UniA. This finding means that more SWNDD respondents were aged 18-24, whilst more SWDD respondents were aged 45+ compared to SWNDDs.

7.2.2 The decision-making process when going to university

Q23 asked, 'Why did you attend university? However, the responses provide insight into the factors influencing participation in HE. For this question, ranks 1 and 2 were grouped as the most important, and ranks 3 to 7 were grouped in a second category of lesser importance. Tables 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 show how respondents ranked the options from 1 to 7 in Q23, with 1 being the most important and 7 the least; therefore, Chi-squared tests were performed. In the questionnaire,

To determine if an association existed between disability and the given option in Q23, which asked how respondents reached their final decision to attend university.

Why did you decide to attend University? Please rank the answers with 1 being the most important & 7 being the least.														
For SWDD respondents.														
Option	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		4 th		5 th		6 th		7 th	
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Future career	64.7	55	20.0	17	8.2	7	5.9	5	0.0	0	1.2	1	0.0	0
Advice from parents	1.2	1	9.4	8	28.2	24	21.2	18	21.2	18	14.1	12	4.7	4
Advice from school/ College	1.2	1	15.3	13	21.2	18	28.2	24	18.8	16	10.6	9	4.7	4
Friends going	0.0	0	7.1	6	10.6	9	14.1	12	31.8	27	31.8	27	4.7	4
What I have always expected to do	14.1	12	17.7	15	16.5	14	15.3	13	17.7	15	16.5	14	2.4	2
Covid-19	0.0	0	7.1	6	3.5	3	4.7	4	4.7	4	20.0	17	60.0	51
Other	20.0	16	25.0	20	12.5	10	11.3	9	6.3	5	6.3	5	18.8	15

Table 7.6 Why did you decide to come to university?

Why did you decide to attend University? Please rank the answers with 1 being the most important & 7 being the least.														
For ALL respondents.														
Option	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		4 th		5 th		6 th		7 th	
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Future career	70.0	119	18.8	32	5.3	9	4.7	8	0.6	1	0.6	1	0.0	0
Advice from parents	1.2	2	15.3	26	26.5	21	21.1	36	20.0	30	12.4	21	3.5	6
Advice from school/ College	1.8	3	10.0	17	25.3	43	31.2	53	18.2	31	9.4	16	4.1	7
Friends going	2.4	4	5.9	10	11.2	19	15.3	26	30.0	51	28.8	49	6.5	11
What I have always expected to do	10.6	18	28.9	49	17.7	30	14.7	25	14.1	24	11.8	20	2.4	4
Covid-19	0.0	0	4.7	8	2.9	5	5.3	9	8.8	15	25.3	43	52.3	90
Other	14.6	24	17.1	28	11.6	19	7.9	13	8.5	14	12.2	20	28.1	46

Table 7.7 Why did you decide to come to university? (All)

Why did you decide to attend University? Please rank the answers with 1 being the most important & 7 being the least.														
For SWNDD respondents.														
Option	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		4 th		5 th		6 th		7 th	
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Future career	75.3	64	17.7	15	2.4	2	3.5	3	1.2	1	0.0	0	0.0	0
Advice from parents	1.2	1	21.2	18	24.7	21	21.2	18	18.8	16	10.6	9	2.4	2
Advice from school/ College	2.4	2	4.7	4	29.4	25	34.1	29	17.7	15	8.2	7	3.5	3
Friends going	4.7	4	4.7	4	11.8	10	16.5	14	28.2	24	25.9	22	8.2	7
What I have always expected to do	7.1	6	40.0	34	18.8	16	14.1	12	10.6	9	7.1	6	2.4	2
Covid-19	0.0	0	2.4	2	2.4	2	5.9	5	12.9	11	30.6	26	45.9	39
Other	9.5	8	9.5	8	10.7	9	4.8	4	10.7	9	17.9	15	36.9	31

Table 7.8 Why did you decide to come to university? (SWNDDs)

In Table 7.3 the most popular option was 'Future career', selected by 70% of respondents. In Table 7.4 and table 7.5, 'Future career' was ranked first for both SWDDs (64.7%) and SWNDDs (75.3%).

Q23 Why did you decide to attend University?

Advice from school/college

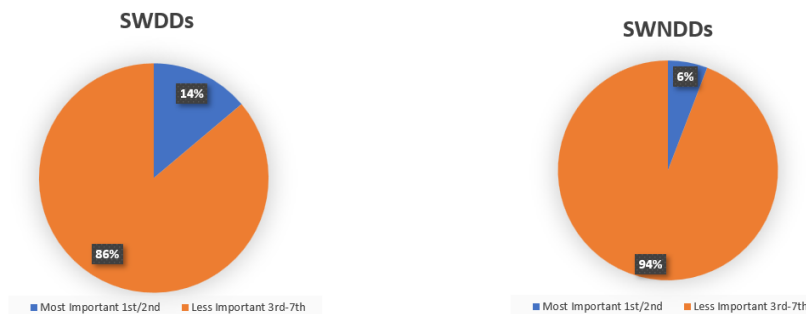


Figure 7.3 Pie chart showing the importance given to 'Advice from school/college' for SWDDs and SWNDDs

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q23 Why did you decide to attend University? Advice from School.

Crosstabulation

Count

		Q23 Advice from School		
		1 st or 2 nd	3 rd – 7 th	Total
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	14	87	101
	No	6	97	103
Total		20	184	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.724 ^a	1	.054		
Continuity Correction ^b	2.871	1	.090		
Likelihood Ratio	3.815	1	.051		
Fisher's Exact Test				.062	.044
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.706	1	.054		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.90.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.9 SPSS output for Q23 Advice from school

SWDDs were more likely to consider 'Advice from school' as being more important than SWNDDs in why they decided to come to university.

To discover if a significant association existed between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding 'Advice from school', the null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding 'Advice from school'.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding 'Advice from school'.

Table 7.6 shows $p=.054$ for the Chi-squared test conducted, which indicates that an association existed between disability status and 'Advice from school', meaning that SWDDs were more likely to find 'Advice from school' more impactful as a reason for deciding to go to university.

Q23 Why did you decide to attend University?

Advice from Parents

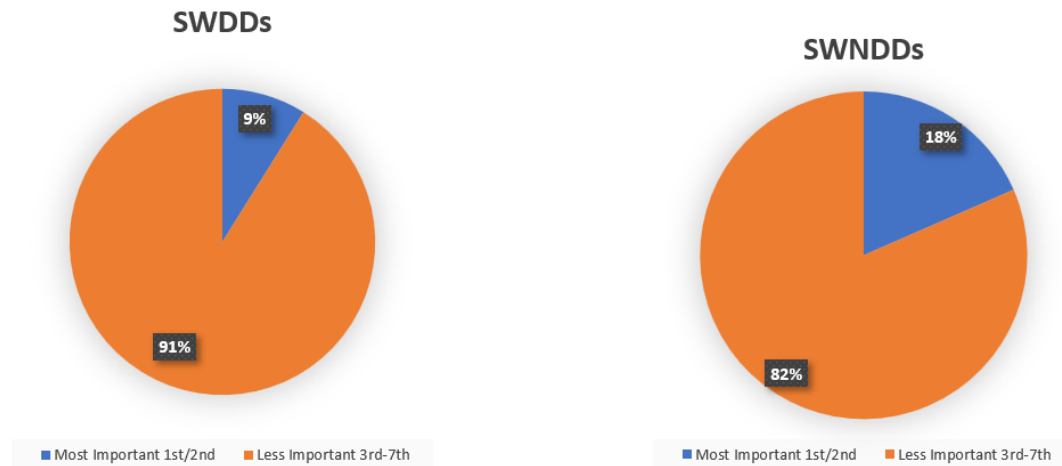


Figure 7.9 Pie chart showing the importance given to 'Advice from parents'

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q23 Why did you decide to attend University? Advice from Parents

Crosstabulation

Count

		Q23 Advice from Parents		
		1 st or 2 nd	3 rd – 7 th	Total
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	9	92	101
	No	19	84	103
Total		28	176	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.916 ^a	1	.048		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.152	1	.076		
Likelihood Ratio	3.996	1	.046		
Fisher's Exact Test				.066	.037
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.897	1	.048		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.86.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.10 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q23' Advice from parents'

SWNDDs were more likely to rank ‘Advice from parents’ among their top two most important reasons for deciding to attend university compared to SWDDs Kusumawati, Perera, and Yanamandram (2019) among other authors (section 4.3.2.2.1) indicate that parental advice is a reason why some students attend university.

To ascertain if an association existed between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding ‘Advice from parents’, the null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding ‘Advice from parents’.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding ‘Advice from parents’.

Table 7.7 shows $p=.048$, which denotes an association between disability and ‘Advice from parents’, meaning that SWNDDs were more likely to find ‘Advice from parents’ more important as a reason for attending university.

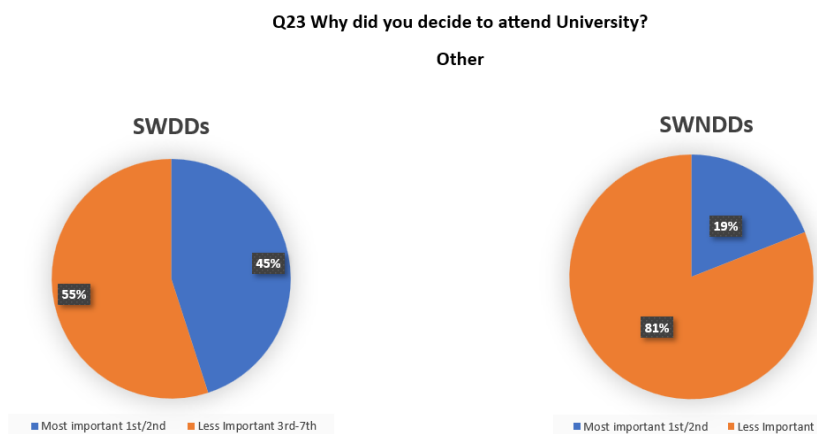


Figure 7.1 Pie chart showing the importance given to ‘Other’ for SWDDs and SWNDDs’

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q23 Why did you decide to attend University? Other

Crosstabulation

Count

		Q23 Other		
		1 st or 2 nd	3 rd – 7 th	Total
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	38	65	101
	No	16	87	103
Total		52	152	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.858 ^a	1	<.001		
Continuity Correction ^b	9.825	1	.002		
Likelihood Ratio	11.070	1	<.001		
Fisher's Exact Test				.001	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.805	1	.001		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 25.75.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.11 SPSS outputs for Q23 'Other'

Figure 7.4 depicts two different sets of data. The option of 'Other' was given in the questionnaire to allow respondents to provide their reasons for choosing to go to university (section 7.5.3). Proportionately more SWDDs than SWNDDs ranked this option as either 1 or 2, whereas most SWNDDs ranked it 3 to 7.

To test if an association exists between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding 'Other', the null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding 'Other'.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding 'Other'.

Table 7.10 shows $p < .001$, which indicates that a strongly significant association existed between disability and the option of 'Other', which meant that more SWDDs found 'Other' reasons more important than those provided as a reason for deciding to go to university.

7.2.3 Influences on the decision to go to university

Q25 examines data on influencers and the factors influencing the decision to choose a university.

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Please indicate the level of influence these factors had by sliding the marker. ALL sliders must be moved.



Figure 7.2 Image of the interface used in Q25

Q25 asked respondents to quantify from 0 – 100 the level of influence they attributed to each of the given options regarding their decision to go to university. To indicate how influential that option was, respondents moved the blue slider across the scale to select a value between 0 and 100. These eight options were used in Q25 because many authors discussed the topics associated with these options (sections 4.3.2.2 and 4.3.2.3).

As this question uses continuous variables, the statistical test performed was MWU. Q25.

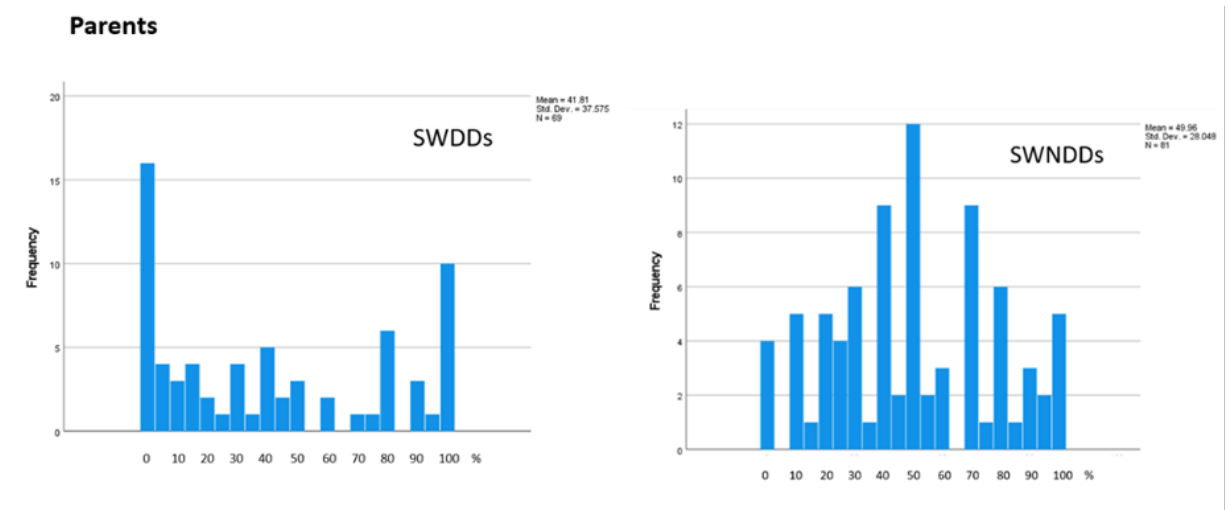


Figure 7.3 SPSS MWU bar graphs for the option of 'Parents' in Q25

Figure 7.6 shows that for SWDDs, the distribution is bimodal, with the modes at opposite ends of the histogram. Meanwhile, for SWNDDs, Figure 7.6 shows an asymmetric normal distribution. The mean rank for SWDDs is 68.57, whereas the mean rank for SWNDDs is 81.40,

meaning that proportionately more SWNDDs scored 'Advice from parents' as having a higher level of influence for this question.

Ranks				
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Parents	Yes	69	68.57	4731.50
	No	81	81.40	6593.50
	Total	150		

Test Statistics ^a	
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Parents	
Mann-Whitney U	2316.500
Wilcoxon W	4731.500
Z	-1.806
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.071

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?

Table 7.12 SPSS MWU outputs for Q25 – Parents

To test if a difference exists between SWDDs and SWNDDs in the level of influence that parents have on their decision to attend university. The null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a MWU test are:

H_0 = there is no difference in the mean rank of importance between disability and the influence of parents on the decision to attend university.

H_1 = there is a difference in the mean rank of importance between disability and the influence of parents on the decision to attend university.

The null hypothesis has been accepted in this instance, as table 7.11 shows $p=.071$, indicating no significant difference.

Although Q25 used continuous data when comparing the bar charts, there was a discrepancy in the distribution of data for SWDDs and SWNDDs (figure 7.6); therefore, a chi-squared test was performed (figure 7.7). For a Chi-squared test to meet its assumptions, the data was categorised into '0-33', '34-66', and '67-100' to ensure no longer values of less than 5.

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Parents

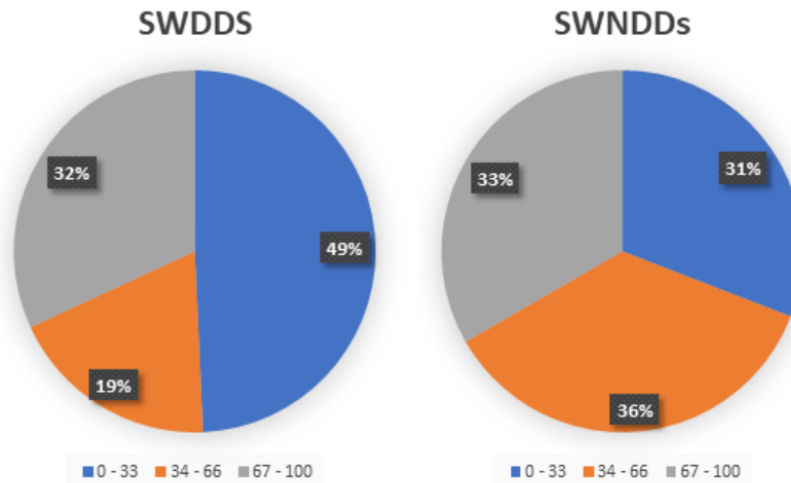


Figure 7.4 Pie charts for Q25 – ‘Parents’

Figure 7.7 illustrates a variance in distribution between SWDDs and SWNDDs.

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Parents

Crosstabulation

		Q25 Parents			Total
		0 – 33%	34 – 66%	67 – 100%	
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	34	13	22	69
	No	25	29	27	81
Total		59	42	49	150

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.064 ^a	2	.029
Likelihood Ratio	7.180	2	.028
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.040	1	.153
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.32.

Table 7.13 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q25 – ‘Parents’

A Chi-squared test discovered if the variance in distribution equated to a significant association between disability status and the influence of parents on this question.

The null and alternative hypotheses of interest are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the level of influence ‘Parents’ have on the decision to attend university.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the level of influence ‘Parents’ have on the decision to attend university.

Table 7.12 shows $p=.029$, which indicates that an association exists between disability and parental influence on the decision to attend university, meaning that there is a statistically significant association between disability status and the level of influence 'Parents' have on the decision to go to university.

7.2.3.1 Open days

This section considers how specifically the attendance and influence of open days has on the decision to attend UniA by SWDDs and SWNDDs,. Although Q45 discusses the influence of marketing, the option discussed was 'Open days'.

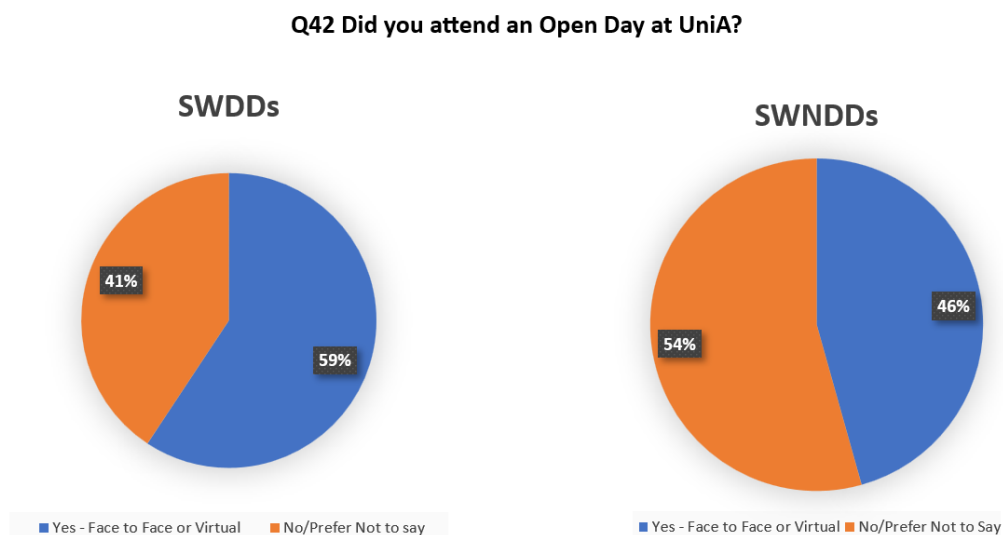


Figure 7.5 Pie charts comparing attendance at an Open Day at UniA.

Crosstabulation				
Count		Q42 Did you attend an Open Day at UniA?		
		Yes	No	Total
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	56	28	84
	No	44	43	87
Total		100	71	171

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.558 ^a	1	.033		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.919	1	.048		
Likelihood Ratio	4.584	1	.032		
Fisher's Exact Test				.043	.024
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.531	1	.033		
N of Valid Cases	171				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 34.88.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.14 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q42

Comparing SWDDs and SWNDDs and their attendance at an Open Day at UniA was the reason this question was included in the questionnaire.

To test if an association exists between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the attendance of open days at UniA, the null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the attendance of open days at UniA.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the attendance of open days at UniA.

The Chi-squared test performed resulted in $p=.033$, which indicates that there is a statistically significant association between disability and the attendance of an open day at UniA, meaning that SWDDs are more likely to attend an open day at UniA compared to SWNDDs.

Q43 Did this influence your decision to come here?

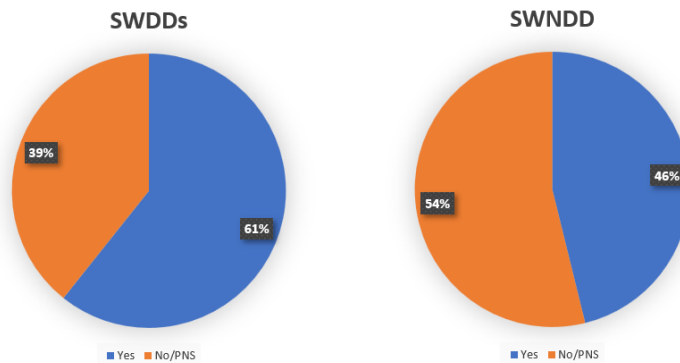


Figure 7.6 Pie charts comparing the influence of attending an Open Day at UniA to attend this university

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? *

Q43 Did this (Q42) influence your decision to come here?

Count

		Q43 Did this (Q42) influence your decision to come here?		Total
		Yes	No	
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	51	33	84
	No	42	49	91
Total		93	82	175

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.719 ^a	1	.054		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.157	1	.076		
Likelihood Ratio	3.734	1	.053		
Fisher's Exact Test				.069	.038
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.698	1	.054		
N of Valid Cases	175				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 39.36.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.15 SPSS Chi-square outputs for Q43

Q43 aimed to discover if an association existed between disability and the influence of attendance of an Open Day at UniA on a respondent's decision to attend this university., to determine this the null and alternative hypotheses of interest for a Chi-squared test are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the influence of the attendance of an open day at UniA.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the influence of the attendance of an open day at UniA.

The Chi-squared test performed resulted in $p=.054$ when rounded down (table 7.14), indicating that an association exists between disability and the influence of attending an Open Day at UniA, meaning that SWDDs are more likely to be influenced to attend UniA after going to an open day, compared to SWNDDs.

Q45 Which elements of UniA marketing policy influenced your decision to attend?
Please indicate the level of influence each of the following factors had by sliding the marker. ALL sliders must be moved.

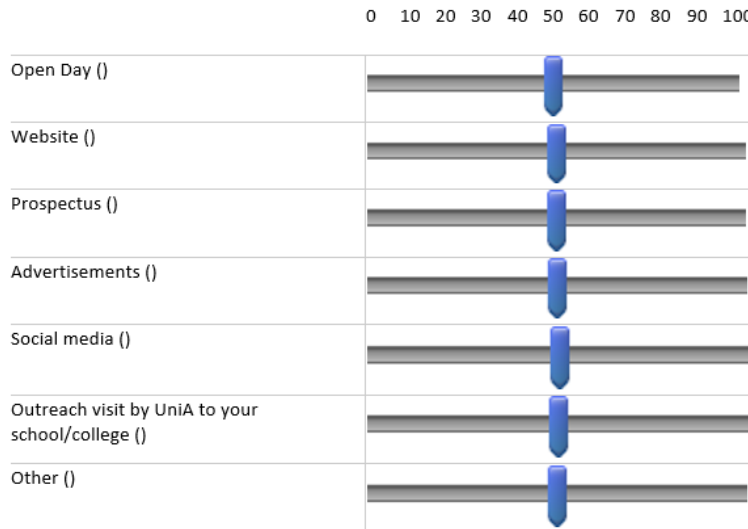


Figure 7.7 Image of the interface used in Q25 for the option ‘Open days’

Q45 asked respondents to score the seven options, from 0-100, by moving the blue slider. This question used MWU tests because the type of variable this question uses is continuous.

Open days

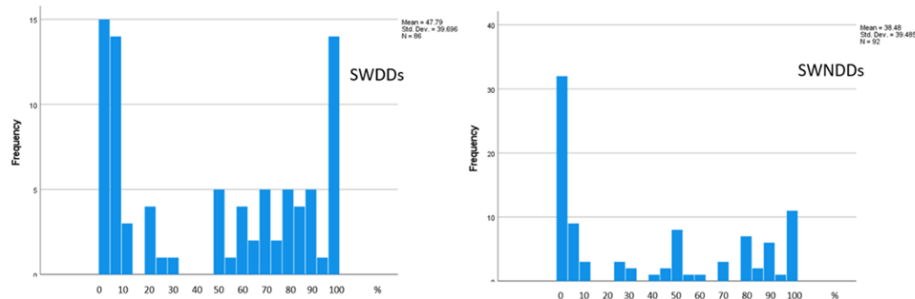


Figure 7.8 Graphical representation created within SPSS for the ‘Open Day’ option in Q45.

	Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q45 Open Day	1	86	97.72	8403.50
	2	92	81.82	7527.50
	Total	178		

Test Statistics

	Q45 Open Day
Mann-Whitney U	3249.500
Wilcoxon W	7527.500
Z	-2.065
Asymp. Sig. (2- tailed)	.039

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do
you identify as having a
disability?

Table 7.16 SPSS outputs for Q45 – ‘Open day’

To test if a difference exists between SWDDs and SWNDDs in the level of influence that Open Days had from UniA marketing policy in their decision to attend, the null and alternative hypotheses of interest are:

H_0 = there is no difference in the mean rank of importance between disability and the influence of Open Days as marketed by UniA on the decision to attend UniA.

H_1 = there is a difference in the mean rank of importance between disability and the influence of Open Days as marketed by UniA on the decision to attend UniA.

Based on the MWU test performed (table 7.15), the mean rank for SWDDs was 97.72 and 81.82 for SWNDDs ($p=.039$), indicating that ‘Open days’ as an element of UniA marketing policy had a higher level of influence for SWDDs, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis.

7.2.3.2 The COVID-19 pandemic

Q48 Has your decision to attend UniA been influenced by the current pandemic?

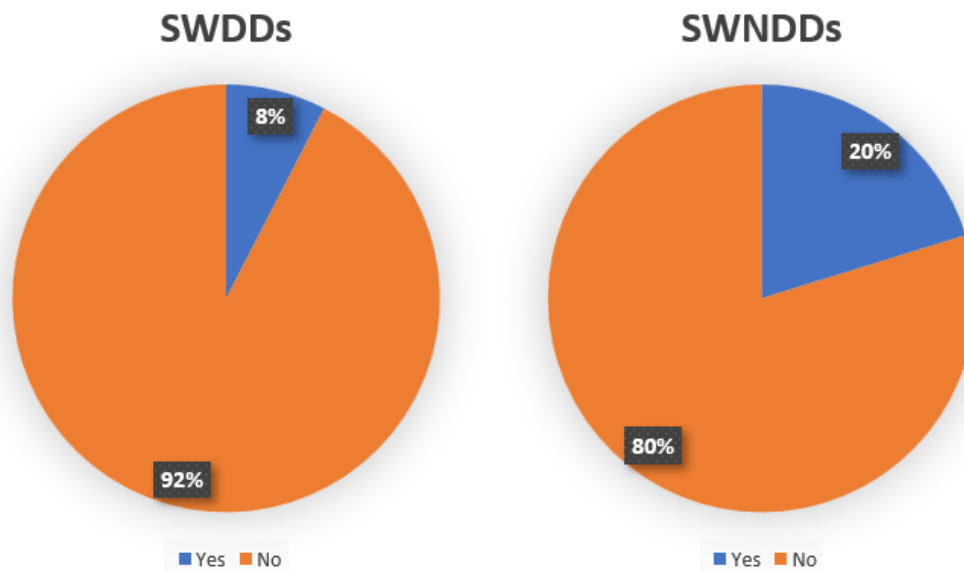


Figure 7.9 Pie-charts representing the influence COVID-19 had on the decision of SWDDs and SWNDDs to attend UniA

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q48 Has your decision to attend UniA been influenced by the current pandemic?

Crosstabulation

Count

		Q48 Has your decision to attend UniA been influenced by the current pandemic?		
		Yes	No	Total
Q18 do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	6	73	79
	No	18	71	89
Total		24	144	168

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.452 ^a	1	.020		
Continuity Correction ^b	4.469	1	.035		
Likelihood Ratio	5.711	1	.017		
Fisher's Exact Test				.026	.016
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.419	1	.020		
N of Valid Cases	168				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.29.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7.17 SPSS Chi-squared outputs for Q48

Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, so Q49 was included in the questionnaire. It was also important to discover whether an association exists between disability and the influence COVID-19 had on the decision to attend UniA.

A Chi-squared test was performed to determine if an association existed between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the influence of COVID-19 on the decision to attend UniA. The null and alternative hypotheses of interest are:

H_0 = there is no association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the influence of COVID-19 on the decision to attend UniA.

H_1 = there is an association between SWDDs and SWNDDs regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the decision to attend UniA.

Table 7.16 shows $p=.020$, which indicates that an association existed between disability and the influence of COVID-19 on the decision to attend UniA, meaning that from those who answered 'Yes' were more likely to be SWNDDs.

7.3 A. β

A chi-square test or MWU test were carried out on all of the applicable questions, and no significant relationship was found between disability status and the given option. Analysis of the data collected from the quantitative round found that for the majority of questions, no significant association or difference between disability status and the option/question asked to SWDDs and SWNDDs. Both the chi-square and the MWU test conducted on the results failed to meet. The established threshold for a statistical significance indicates that the variables in the question asked were not meaningful to SWDDs or SWNDDs. These findings indicate that the influence of those in the data are likely to be assigned to random variation rather than interconnectedness. Therefore, the questions not discussed in section 7.2, the null hypothesis was accepted. While the absence of a significant relationship does not imply that there are differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs (see Appendix G).

It does, however, suggest that within the boundaries of this study and the sample population, there is not enough evidence to support a meaningful relationship between SWDDs and SWNDDs.

7.3.1 Reaching a decision on attending UniA

In Q27, respondents were given fifteen options concerning why they chose to attend UniA and asked to select all that applied to them. Q27, in part, answers RQ2 and RQ5.

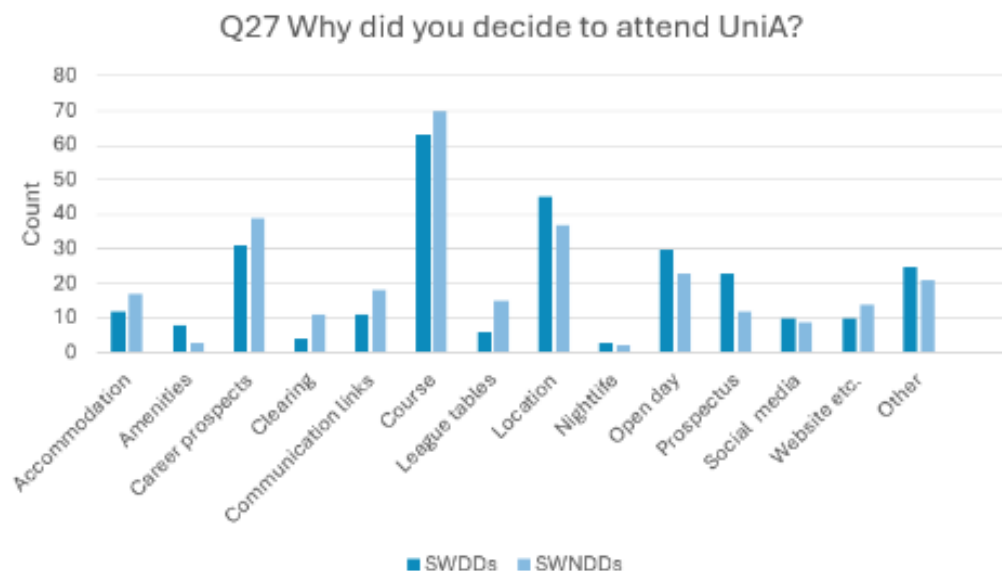


Figure 7.10 Comparison of SWDDs and SWNDDs reasons for choosing to attend UniA.

The top five reasons for choosing UniA from the list provided for SWDDs were 'Course', 'Location', 'Career prospects', 'Open day', and 'Other'. SWNDDs' top five reasons for choosing UniA were 'Course', 'Career prospects', 'Location', 'Open day' and 'Other'. The three options that were ranked the same level of importance by SWDDs and SWNDDs were 'Course' (section 7.5.9.1), 'Open day' (section 7.5.5.4.4) and 'Other' (section 7.4.4).

7.3.2 Disability

This section deals with the quantitative data generated from the disability battery in the questionnaire. The corresponding qualitative data compiled from this section in the questionnaire is reported in section 7.4.2. The total sample (49.5%) who self-identified as having a disability answered this battery of questions, including a mental health condition in Q18.

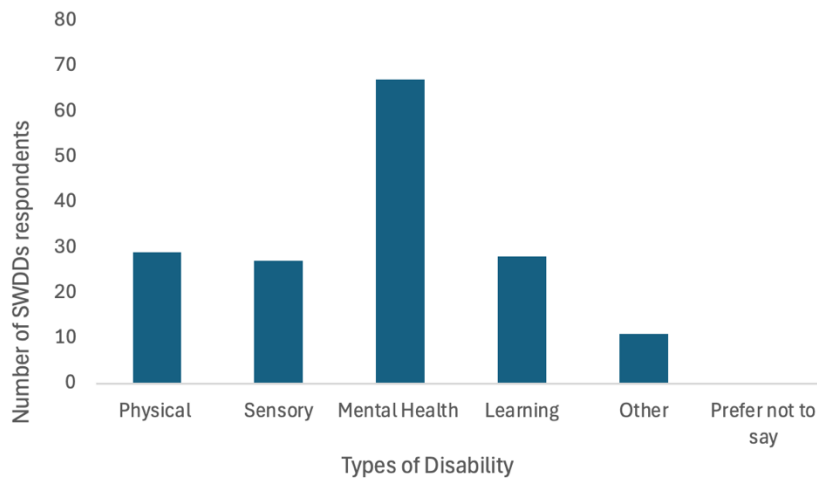


Figure 7.11 Q19 the types of disabilities SWDD respondents identified as having

Q19 asked SWDD respondents to select all the types of disabilities that applied to them. This question was asked to ascertain if there was a difference in the types of disabilities that SWDDs had (figure 7.14). These figures exceed the 101 SWDDs that took part because each SWDD respondent could select more than one type of disability; hence, the numerical value is given rather than a percentage.

For this study, an invisible disability is taken from the definition of Kelly and Mutebi (2023) when they suggest that an invisible disability is one that is not immediately apparent to others. Figure 7.14 illustrates the five types of disabilities respondents were able to self-identify into. When applying the definition given by Kelly and Mutebi (2023) all five types of disabilities, in figure 7.14, can be viewed as being an invisible disability. However, some types of disabilities can be predominantly invisible, e.g. mental health conditions, while others, e.g. physical can be viewed as being a visible disability.

7.4 Key findings from the quantitative data

The key findings reported in the quantitative elements of this study (sections 7.2; 7.3) were related to SWDDs and SWNDDs their decision to go to university, their ensuing choice of a specific university, their influencers and influencing factors on these processes, and whether having a disability impacted these decisions.

The first key finding relates to previous education and RQ1, RQ3, and RQ5 because the responses from SWDDs and SWNDDs to questions in the education battery (Q15 and Q16) found no significant association (section 7.3.2.1). Most respondents had HE promoted to them, but this was more likely to have been promoted to SWNDDs; however, responses from a follow-

up question found that the majority of respondents reported that this did not influence their decision to go to university (section 7.3.2.1).

The second key finding concerns the options of 'Advice from parents', 'Advice from school/college' and 'Other' in Q23 and, in some respects, answer RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ5 because of the statistically significant associations between disability status and these areas. Proportionately more SWNDD respondents ranked 'Advice from parents' first or second in why they decided to attend university; however, proportionately more SWDDs ranked 'Advice from school/college' and 'Other' first or second for the same question (section 7.2.2).

The third key finding from the quantitative data reported in Q25 was that the influencer with a statistically significant association between disability and the decision to attend university was 'Parents'. This finding backs up Q23, where parents were ranked 1 or 2 by proportionately more SWNDDs, and Q25 scored parents consistently throughout all three categories (figure 7.6), whilst for SWDD respondents, almost half scored this option as lesser importance. This finding meant that in the quantitative element of this study, SWNDDs felt parents had proportionately more influence and provided more influential advice in the decision to go to university. The results for the other options in Q25 found no significant difference, answering RQ1, RQ3 and RQ5.

The final key finding concerns open days, and other marketing activities conducted by UniA, e.g. website and social media, and partly answers RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ5. Q41 concerns the attendance of open days in general but found no significant difference; the majority of both SWDDs and SWNDDs indicated they had attended open days at universities. Q42 and Q43 were concerned about the attendance of open days at UniA and whether this influenced their decision to attend university. Q42 and Q43 found proportionately more SWDDs attended a UniA open day, and this visit influenced them to come to UniA, meaning that SWDDs and SWNDDs are proportionately similarly likely to attend an open day; however, SWNDDs are less likely to attend an open day at UniA and for them are less influential.

In Q45, 'Open days' was the only option where a statistically significant difference was found; meaning that marketing activities, except for 'Open days', had proportionately comparable levels of influence for both SWDDs and SWNDDs

To summarise, the majority of questions in section A found no significant relationship between disability status and the question/option being asked. Therefore, the quantitative element of section A found few differences between how SWDDs and SWNDDs reached their final decision to go to university, how they chose a specific university and their influence(s) on when the study took place, and thereby partially answered RQ3 and RQ5.

7.5 A.I

7.5.1 Introduction

This section explores responses to key open-text box questions in the questionnaire. Coded responses to each question were appropriately categorised; Which was conducted to compare responses from SWDDs and SWNDDs.

7.5.2 Disability

This section deals with questions only asked to 49.5% of the sample who self-identified as having a disability in Q18.

Q20 asked respondents whether they had disclosed their disability to UniA, the questionnaire then asked a follow-up question for those who indicated they had not disclosed their disability to explain why; there was an 83% response rate to Q21. This question aimed to ascertain whether a difference occurred between the different types of disability and whether they provided other reasons for not declaring their disability.

Q20 Have you disclosed your disability/mental health condition to UniA?	
Q21 If you have not, what was your reason for not doing so?	
Categories	SWDDs (%)
Do not need support	40
It is personal	20
Diagnosed after I first enrolled	20
Not sure if I would be entitled to support	20

Table 7.18 Coding categories with associated percentages for Q21

The category with the most responses coded into it was 'Do not need support'. The other three categories had the same proportion of SWDD responses assigned. 20% of respondents indicated they were unclear whether they would be entitled to support in HE. Examples of responses coded into this category that demonstrated this was,

"I'm not registered disabled" (a SWDD) said

"[I] ... Didn't think I would get any help because I'm not profoundly disabled" (a SWDD).

Q22 asked respondents aged 25 or over whether their disability was why they decided to attend university to discover whether mature disabled students with differing types of disabilities felt their disability was a factor in their choice to attend university; this question had a 92% response rate.

Q22 If you are a mature student (age 25 or above) with a disability, was your disability a factor in deciding to attend university? Why?	
Categories	SWDDs (%)
Had no impact on decision	57
Had an impact on decision	37
Did not answer the question	7

Table 7.19 Coding categories with associated percentages for Q22

According to HESA (no date d), here is an increase likelihood of a person developing a disability as they progress through life. After coding, responses went into one of three categories (table 7.17).

For the majority of mature SWDD respondents, their disability was not part of their rationale for attending university. An example of a response given was,

“No, I had my disability under control until I came to university” (a SWDD).

A sizeable minority indicated their disability was a factor in their decision to go to university. Examples of responses that illustrate this are

“Yes, I had been told that the support at ... [UniA] ... is fantastic” (a SWDD)

7.5.3 Reaching a decision on going to university

Q23 asked all respondents why they chose to attend university. One of the seven options in Q23 was ‘Other’; therefore, a follow-up question asked respondents to specify what ‘Other’ meant to them to ascertain whether there were differences between why SWDDs and SWNDDs mentioned other reasons. After coding, responses were assigned to one of nine categories (Table 7.19).

Q23 Why did you decide to attend University?		
Q24 Please specify what Other meant for you when ranking the responses in the previous question		
Coding categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Personal growth	26	23
Career prospects	19	21
Family	12	23
Recommendations	12	2
Health	10	0
Location	7	10
Experience	5	14
Course	3	12
Timing	3	2

Table 7.20 coding categories with associated percentages for Q24

In Q24 a higher proportion of SWNDDs mentioned family members; an example was,

“No one in my family has completed higher education and this motivated me more” (a SWNDD).

A respondent inferred they wanted to pass aspirational capital to their children when they said,

“To show my children your never to[o] old to further a career” (a SWDD).

Table 7.19 shows noteworthy differences found in the proportions of responses coded into the ‘Recommendations’, ‘Experience’, ‘Health’ and ‘Course’ categories from SWDDs and SWNDDs.

Responses coded into ‘Health’ showed 10% of SWDDs discussed their health as a reason for attending university whilst no SWNDDs did. One SWDD reported that they were

“Advised by GP to change my profession.”

7.5.4 Choosing a specific university to attend

Why did you choose to attend UniA?		
Q28 If you answered Other to the previous question, please specify below		
Coded Categories	SWDDs%	SWNDDs %
Proximity to UniA	43	42
Support Available	19	33
Access Course	24	0
Knew people associated with UniA	14	25

Table 7.21 codes with associated percentages for Q28

In response to Q27 (section 7.3.1), a follow-up question asked what the respondent meant by ‘Other’; nearly twice the proportion of SWDDs answered this question compared to SWNDDs.

A difference was found between coded responses given by SWDDs and SWNDDs. In proportionately, more SWNDDs (33%) than SWDDs (19%) had their responses coded into the category 'Support available'. A noteworthy finding was that the category 'Access course' had the most considerable proportional difference because only SWDDs (24%) had a response assigned to this category (table 7.20). The 'Knew people associated with UniA' category had similar proportions of SWDDs and SWNDDs coded into it. Q30 asked respondents who specifically influenced them to attend UniA to those who had answered yes to the previous question.

7.5.5 Influencers

The questionnaire aimed to determine if SWDDs and SWNDDs had differences regarding immediate family members who attended, or were attending, university when the study took place.

Q37 Have/do any of your immediate family attend(ed) university? Q38 If you answered yes to the previous question, please specify their relationship to you below		
Groupings for specified relationships	SWDDs [%]	SWNDDs [%]
Parents	29	41
Siblings	28	37
Offspring	6	4
Partner	6	4
Extended family	21	9
Extended and immediate family	6	4
Parent(s) and offspring	3	0

Table 7.22 Groupings for relationships given in answer to Q38 based on responses from Q37.

Table 7.21 indicates a higher proportion of SWNDDs who answered this question expressed that a parent went to university, showing that proportionately more SWDDs in the questionnaire were first-generation students who had attended university. Another key finding was that there were proportionately more SWNDDs who had a sibling who had been or were currently attending university at the time of data collection. However, proportionately more than double the number of SWDDs stated that they had a member of their extended family go to university.

7.5.5.1 Influencing factors

Q40 was aimed at discovering if the type of marketing activity that influenced their decision to come to UniA was similar for SWDDs and SWNDDs,

Did UniA marketing activity influence your decision to apply here? Q40 if you answered 'Yes' to the previous question please specify what element that was		
Coded category	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Advertising	63	42
Other	25	25
Open days	13	17
Communication from UniA	0	17

Table 7.23 coding categories with associated percentages for Q40

Table 7.22 illustrates the four categories created from the coded responses from the respondents who answered this question. Responses coded into the 'Advertising' and 'Communication from UniA' categories had noteworthy differences.

The category 'Advertising' included social media and the UniA prospectus. An example of a response coded into this category was,

"The prospectus was excellently produced and very persuasive" (a SWNDD).

A noteworthy finding regarding open days was that SWDDs and SWNDDs reported proportionately similar responses; however, in section 7.2.3.1 attendance at UniA open days and their influence reported significant associations from Chi-squared tests conducted between disability and the attendance of an open day and the influence this had on the decision.

Q45 asked all respondents to indicate the level of influence the seven elements of UniA marketing provided for them when choosing to attend this university. One of the seven options was 'Other', and Q46 asked respondents what they meant by 'Other'. This question attempted to find out if SWDDs and SWNDDs gave similar responses for 'Other'.

7.6 Section B

7.6.1 Introduction

This section discusses the findings from the qualitative data. Notably, this approach to gathering data has elicited some explanatory comments on choice, influencers, influencing factors, expectations, and why interviewees chose to study at UniA.

The first round of interviews comprised fifteen students who had volunteered to participate in the research study's interview process. These participants are referred to as Interviewee 01 – Interviewee 15. Five (Interviewee 01E, 03E, 07E, 13E, and 15E) of these fifteen were re-interviewed in a second round. These second-round interviews occurred four to six months after the first round of interviews, as seen in table 7.49. As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1981),

an opportunity to have a further round of interviews provides for further investigation following the unpacking of the data from the first round.

Interviewee Code	Date of Interview		
	SWDD / SWNDD	1st round	2 nd round
Interview 01 / 01E	SWNDD	01/02/2021	23/06/2021
Interview 02	SWDD	02/02/2021	
Interview 03 / 03E	SWDD	02/02/2021	16/06/2021
Interview 04	SWDD	04/02/2021	
Interview 05	SWDD	05/02/2021	
Interview 06	SWDD	11/02/2021	
Interview 07 / 07E	SWDD	12/02/2021	13/07/2021
Interview 08	SWNDD	15/02/2021	
Interview 09	SWNDD	22/02/2021	
Interview 10	SWNDD	24/02/2021	
Interview 11	SWNDD	25/02/2021	
Interview 12	SWNDD	01/03/2021	
Interview 13 / 13E	SWNDD	10/03/2021	15/06/2021
Interview 14	SWNDD	15/03/2021	
Interview 15 / 15E	SWDD	16/03/2021	20/09/2021

Table 7.24 Dates of Interviews

7.6.2 General Information

The demographics of the fifteen interviewees, taken following their permissions, from their questionnaires, are depicted in table 7.24 below. Due to the sampling type chosen for the interview (convivence and purposes for the interviewee). The students that self-identify as a SWDDs were equated to 47% which was similar to the questionnaire. 86% of SWNDDs interviewees identified as being mature compared to 43% of SWDDs.

Interviewee	SWDD/SWNDD	Gender	Level	Age	FT/PT	1 st gen
01[E]	SWNDD	F	PG	25-34	PT	Y
02	SWDD	NB	UG	18-24	FT	Y
03[E]	SWDD	M	UG	18-24	FT	N
04	SWDD	F	UG	25-34	FT	Y
05	SWDD	F	UG	18-24	FT	N
06	SWDD	F	UG	35-44	FT	Y
07[E]	SWDD	M	DOC	25-34	PT	Y
08	SWNDD	F	DOC	35-44	FT	Y
09	SWNDD	F	DOC	25-34	FT	Y
10	SWNDD	M	UG	25-34	FT	Y
11	SWNDD	M	UG	35-44	FT	Y
12	SWNDD	F	DOC	25-34	FT	Y
13[E]	SWNDD	F	DOC	35-44	PT	Y
14	SWNDD	M	PG	18-24	FT	Y
15[E]	SWDD	F	UG	18-24	FT	N

Abbreviations used in Table 7.50

Gender	F	Female	First-generation	Y	Yes
	M	Male		N	No
	NB	Non-Binary	Disability status	SWDD	Student With a Disclosed Disability
Level of study	DOC	Doctoral		SWNDD	Student With No Disclosed Disability
	PG	Post-graduate			
	UG	Under-graduate			
Type of study	FT	Full-time			
	PT	Part-time			

Table 7.25 Breakdown of interviewee demographic

7.6.2.1 Disability

This section considers 7 of the interviewees who self-identified as having a disability in the questionnaire (table 7.24). The questionnaire asked SWDD interviewees about their type of disability. 4 SWDD interviewees selected more than one type of disability, all of whom indicated they had a mental health condition. This finding aligns to the data in section 7.3.1 (figure 7.14). Sense (2024) suggests that a mental health condition is more likely to affect a disabled person compared to a non-disabled individual.

In the questionnaire, All SWDD interviewees indicated in Q19 that they had disclosed their disability to UniA; however, during their interviews, some acknowledged that they did not initially declare this, but disclosed their disability after initially enrolling.

When answering Q22, which asked mature SWDDs whether their disability was a factor in their decision to attend university, Interviewee 07 inferred that receiving their diagnosis meant that they had previously struggled at university but now recognised that their disability was related to their struggle. Therefore, with appropriate support for their disability being provided, they now felt able to return to university and hopefully be able to thrive.

7.6.3 Education

In alignment with other studies (Lubbe and Petzer, 2016; Connie and Rahman, 2019); (section 4.3.2.2), secondary schools were a key influence on whether pupils attended university.

When asked, 9 interviewees said they felt supported by their school/college and were encouraged to apply to universities; 5 were SWDDs, e.g. Interviewees 05 and 07.

5 interviewees said that the teaching and careers support staff at their school/college encouraged them to go to university (section 7.5.5.1).

Some interviewees stated that their school/college did not encourage them.

2 SWNDDs inferred that they felt they were given incorrect and/or insufficient information about obtaining a route into HE. This statement is evidenced by Interviewee 01 stating that,

“the head of sixth form called me into his office and just gave me a leaflet and went “you should apply to this”, and it was it was a leaflet for a company that you paid £1000 to, to help get you into [a red brick university] ... I just thought, right to be suitable [to] apply ... you need a £1000 company to help you”.

One institution discouraged an interviewee’s decision to go to university by providing them with incomplete information about the availability of the career path that they wanted to pursue. Interviewee 11, a SWNDD, stated,

“I gave up any hope of doing [named course] on the back of ... [the school’s] ... poor advice”.

While 7 interviewees stated they had always expected to go to university, 3 were SWDDs, indicating that they had personal expectations and that others also placed expectations on them about attending university. However, Interviewees 05 and 07 (SWDDs) and 12 and 13 (SWNDDs) all made similar statements indicating that they had always expected to attend university. Interviewees 05 and 13 said they could not remember a time when they did not expect to go, as demonstrated in the following statements,

“I don’t remember a time in my life where I didn’t see university in my future and I’m not 100% sure what put that in my mind because it wasn’t family” (Interviewee 07, a SWDD).

“[I was] always expected to go to uni by teachers” (Interviewee 12, a SWNDD).

These responses aligned with those of Interviewee 04, a SWDD, whose circumstances meant they could not go to university until they were a mature student due to childcare responsibilities. When asked, 5 interviewees stated that university was not promoted to them during their compulsory education, and it was not until they reached FE that they were encouraged to consider it by their college’s lecturers and careers advisors. Examples of this were opined by

Interviewees 03, a SWNDD, 10, a SWNDD 14, a SWNDD and 15 a SWDD and affected more SWNDDs, and the following comments show this.

“my career advisor at school was just about what the local job market opportunities were like factories and warehouses and stuff like that ... [after I] got into college ... the careers advisors moved away from just trying to get you to not be unemployed when you finished school, and the idea of university started coming my way” (Interviewee 08, a SWNDD).

“[at sixth form] they had like guest speakers in [from different universities]” (Interviewee 14, a SWNDD).

“I don’t remember them [their school] doing it that much; it was more about college and stuff than about university ... [college] had a specific lecture that was all about promoting the application to university and the consideration of university” (Interviewee 15, a SWDD).

A minority, 6 of interviewees did not have HE promoted to them while at school/college, e.g. Interviewee 06 (a SWDD).

7.6.4 The decision-making process concerning going to university

This section will report the interviewees’ comments from the first round of interviews. Part of the perspective student’ decision-making process is gathering information about universities and courses they may be interested in. However, the information sought may differ between SWDDs and SWNDDs.

Q23 asked participants why they decided to go to university. 13 interviewees ranked ‘Future career’ first or second, and 7 were SWNDDs. The data from the interviews found the majority of those who commented on career prospects as their main reason for going to university were SWNDDs. During the interview phase of data collection, 6 of those who stated that career prospects were the main motivational factor in attending university were SWDDs, which equates to 5 interviewees, all of whom noted that a university degree was necessary to pursue their desired career: for example,

“I chose to go and do [named course] at university to start my journey through to becoming a [named career]” (Interviewee 05, a SWDD).

“I really want to go on and do my master’s because I’m training to be a [named career] and you need to have a master’s to work as either of those.” (Interviewee 10, a SWNDD).

These findings align to other studies, a better qualification is why some students decide to go to university for a specialised career and better career prospects (Maringe, 2006; Houghton, 2017; Kusumawati, Perera, and Yanamandram, 2019).

7.6.4.1 Aspirations and Expectations

Aspirations and expectations were an aspect of prospective students' decision-making process. Interviewee 09, a SWNDD, replied,

“Yes, it was my dream”,

when asked if they had always wanted to do a doctorate. However, the converse was true for Interviewee 04, a SWDD, who decided to

“put off going to uni until ... [I] could commit myself fully”

and waited until their commitments to others changed so they could attend university. This study appears to contradict the findings of the Sutton Trust (2019), which found almost 80% of schoolchildren expected to progress to HE; this study's qualitative data analysis found that less than half of interviewees had felt they were likely to go into HE when they finished school/college.

7.6.4.2 Progression Opportunities

When asked, 4 interviewees reported a lack of career progression opportunities in the workplace. This was split equally between SWDDs and SWNDDs. Interviewees 05 and 15, both SWDDs voiced similar reasons which were they struggled to gain employment. Interviewee 15 expressed that,

“I had a job as an apprentice, and they sacked me because of my [disability]” (Interviewee 15).

This action by their employer left them feeling they had no choice but to gain more qualifications to pursue their “dream job”. Interviewee 05, a SWDD, implied they felt that having multiple disabilities made it harder to find employment when they stated,

“with jobs, it's very difficult to find somewhere that's very understanding about my [disabilities]”.

Interviewee 10, a SWNDD, wanted to make a life change; to achieve this, they required extra qualifications to gain access to their chosen path, which necessitated their attendance at a university, a similar reason for returning to education as given by Interviewee 15, a SWDD.

Interviewee 10's family circumstances meant they had limited choices about a specific university.

7.6.4.3 The 'Student Experience'

Crossing (2018) defines the 'student experience' as embracing all features of student life in HE, including social life, learning and being part of a community. However, this study found that 6 interviewees expressed they'd chose university, they came for one or more elements of the 'student experience', such as nightlife, on-site facilities, and accommodation style. Examples of interviewees who came to university for the 'student experience' include Interviewees 11 and 14, who commented;

"interacting with a new set of friends was one of the main things for me. The other things that come with uni like the clubs and things like that." (Interviewee 11, a SWNDD).

"[the accommodation] was just like really good quality ... the Halls are all freshly done and refurbished ... [other universities] were quite rundown and a bit old-fashioned." (Interviewee 14, a SWNDD).'

7.6.4.4 Course

9 Interviewees discussed their course as a factor in why they chose to attend UniA, and 3 of these were SWDDs, indicating that proportionately more SWNDDs attended UniA because of the course.

Of the 9 interviewees who discussed 'Course' as their reason for attending UniA, 5 said they chose to attend UniA because of how the course was delivered and/or the course content; for example, Interviewee 15, a SWDD, commented that,

"not a lot of universities did what I wanted to do, and I wanted to make sure that it was [a] hands-on [course]",

Interviewee 05, a SWDD, stated,

"a massive factor [for choosing UniA] was the fact that they offered the [states course] doctorate here ... and I was like, this is perfect because I've got, you know, lecturers that are familiar with my condition and people who are going to be understanding."

Interviewee 14, a SWNDD, chose to attend UniA because other universities did not offer the specificity of the course they wished to study when they enrolled.

A difference found between SWDD and SWNDD interviewees was the majority of SWDDs chose their course because of its content, while the majority of SWNDDs chose their course because of how it would be delivered.

7.6.4.5 Support Services

For this study, 'Support services' are defined as various resources specifically designed to assist students at university with all aspects of the student experience. According to this study, the availability of support services at UniA was the reason 7 interviewees attended UniA, of which 4 were SWDDs. Before applying to university, students can find out what support services are offered online through university websites and can also find out information at Open Days. Interviewee 11, a SWNDD, discovered what support services were available at UniA while conducting a general search of universities in FE. Whereas Interviewee 05, a SWDD, expressed that during an Open Day visit at UniA, they,

“... had Disabled Students' Allowance properly explained to me ... [and] I'd been to four other unis before I came here”.

12 Interviewees discussed their favourable experiences with the support services provided by UniA, proportionately equally split between SWDDs and SWNDDs. Of the 12, 4 interviewees said that a specific support service played a role in why they chose to attend UniA. Interviewees 04, 05, and 07 are SWDDs and said they chose to attend UniA because for disability support services. Julal (2013) and Wilson and Martin (2017), among others, suggest that good student support is crucial for students, especially those with disabilities.

Interviewee 07, a SWDD, provided an example of this, when said that;

“Pastoral support right from the very start ... and it just really appealed to me on that basis.”

This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee 08, a SWNDD, when they commented on the issue of stress and how attending university could be isolating by saying,

“... I think that ... [UniA] ... do support better than most.”

7.6.4.6 Accommodation

Foskett, Roberts, and Maringe (2006) suggest that the price of student accommodation should be reasonable as this can determine student expectations.

One of the reasons why Interviewee 14, a SWNDD, chose UniA was because of the quality of the accommodation when they suggested,

“...I wasn’t quite sure what to expect, so I was quite surprised at UniA, at how good the facilities were.”

Overall, prospective students seek different support services to assist them personally at UniA. A difference was found between SWDDs who were already diagnosed with their disability and those diagnosed during their time at university. Of the SWDDs who were diagnosed prior to attending UniA, 5 attended with an understanding that the support services were “the student support services at [UniA] are phenomenal” (Interviewee 05)

7.6.5 Influencing Factors

There were a variety of influencing factors (section 4.3.2.3) discussed in the literature review; however, schools/colleges, career prospects, fiscal motivations, and marketing were discussed by interviewees as reasons for going to university and attending UniA.

7.6.5.1 Schools/Colleges

As previously mentioned, (section 7.5.3), from the fifteen interviews conducted, 9 interviewees stated that they were encouraged to go to university by their school/college, and most of these interviewees were SWNDDs.

7.6.5.1.1 Not encouraged to attend university

Most interviewees self-identified as mature as over 25 (as defined by UCAS, 2021) (table 7.24). Half of these interviewees were not encouraged to attend university at school, as demonstrated by the following comments

“I spent the last two years, my A-level years, having to support myself at school because nobody wanted to invest in me; they didn’t want to make a relationship with me or take that extra time to tutor me” (Interviewee 04, a SWDD)

Some mature interviewees needed to return to college to obtain the necessary qualifications to go to university, as shown in the example below

“...the advice that I got was pretty poor ... so I gave up any hope of doing that ... [going to university but after] ... doing the Access course at ... college the next step obviously was to go to university” (Interviewee 11, a SWNDD).

Interviewee 03, a SWDD identified as aged 18-24, was encouraged by their College lecturers to attend university and “UCAS fairs.”³ a SWNDD, inferred that their school helped them before they first attended

university as an undergraduate, which is why they “stayed at the same school to do my A-Levels”.

However, 6 interviewees said they were not supported or encouraged to attend university; 4 were SWNDDs, including Interviewee 10, who stated that,

“after college, there was no kind of push towards University or anything like that ... it was just, there you go, there was no information on what to do next.”

Interviewee 06, a SWDD, commented that

“[my] school was very old-fashioned ... and it didn’t encourage me to attend HE”.

Donnelly (2015) found similar things in his study.

7.6.5.2 Career Prospects

Another influencing factor for those applying to HE was the opportunity to obtain a better career for some interviewees in this study.

Career prospects were mentioned by 9 interviewees, and 6 of whom were SWNDDs.

From the interviews, 2 of the interviewees, both SWDDs, stated that others explicitly told them that going to a university would enhance their career prospects. According to Moogan and Baron (2003), the information provided by influential parties, such as a career advisor, can help change the choices regarding attending a university. Interviewee 03, a SWDD, was not initially going to attend university until they received advice from their career’s advisor about university providing access to a better career, which ultimately led them to change their mind as they commented that,

Interviewee 05, a SWDD, also had their career advisors make a similar suggestion from their career advisor

Interviewee 01E, a SWNDD, had a different perspective regarding university, as they did not feel that coming to university could enhance their current career and wanted to broaden their horizons to seek a new career,

“[I thought] ... this course won’t get you a better job, but it will get you thinking about what else you can do.”

Smith (2022) presents figures on graduate employment levels among students with and without a disability. He reported on the findings made by (HESA, no date d), which stated that 58% of students with no known disability were in full-time paid employment compared to 51% of students with a known disability fifteen months after graduation from a UK university. There were 11% of students with no known disability, compared with 13% with a known disability, in part-time paid employment after the same period.

7.6.5.3 Fiscal motivations

6 Interviewees stated that incentives such as scholarships assisted them in reaching their final decision and choosing a specific university; 5 of these were SWNDDs. Lami and Mele (2014, p.4748)

“financial support ... was directly related to the decision to study at a university”.

7.6.5.4 Marketing

7.6.5.4.1 Online presence

To discover which universities offered the course they intended to do, 4 interviewees performed an online search and found UniA was one of the results, 3 of whom were SWNDDs. An example is given by Interview 03, a SWDD, used Google search and stated that

“[I] looked at ... different comparison websites for universities and also the Student Room because on there they had people talking about their experiences of being at the university, of the area, and stuff, and it was ... more real information from the student perspective.”

Whereas 3 interviewees, 2 of whom were SWDDs, stated that they used social media to search for uniA to attend and compare the compare options. Interviewee 07, a SWDD, commented that,

“I always find that you get more information on Facebook, the adverts are framed in quite a conversational way rather than a formal way”.

Interviewee 11, a SWNDD, used Twitter and followed different accounts.

The interviewees used different forms of social media, with the age variation seemingly being the reason for this, which aligns with Statista’s (2021) report on social media usage in the UK (sections 4.3.2.4.1.2; 8.2.1) Jan and Ammari (2016), Mogaji and Yoon (2019) and Zechariah (2019) all suggest that social media impacts the students’ decision-making when selecting a university.

7.6.5.4.2 Website

UniA’s website was mentioned by 6 interviews, with majoritively SWNDDs discussing the UniA website. All the SWNDDs found the website easy to use. Interviewees 01, 11, and 14 all stated that it was easy to navigate and find the information they sought. Interviewee 11 suggested that the UniA website was so informative that they did not need to attend an Open Day.

2 SWDDs stated that the website could be improved, with Interviewee 15 saying that,

“any good accessible website would have the option to be able to change font size ... but obviously that isn’t there; so, it makes it very difficult ... [adding the app] ...is not accessible ... I can’t access my timetable” (section 7.5.7)

Additionally, Interviewee 02 suggested that the imagery used was not representative of the whole student body because

“there isn’t any imagery showing any overtly disabled people” ... [and] ... “imagery should also reflect that not all disabilities are visible.”

7.6.5.4.3 Word of Mouth

According to Camilleri (2020), word of mouth, is a form of marketing, influenced 5 of interviewees in choosing a specific university, i.e. UniA. Of this 5 of interviewees, 4 were SWDDs. Interviewee 13 commented that before enrolling, current UniA students came to their place of work and spoke of their positive experience at UniA, which positively impacted the opinions of students at their school/college and led in part to them applying to study at UniA.

7.6.5.4.4 Open Days

The questionnaire demonstrated that 8 interviewees attended any HE open day prior to attending UniA; there were 5 SWDDs and 3 SWNDDs.

When asked whether they had attended open day at UniA, 10 Interviewees stated that they had. This was equally between SWDDs and SWNDDs. During the interviews, it was found that 7 Interviewees talked about the influence open day had on their decision to attend university. 4 were SWDDs and 3 were SWNDDs. 7 Interviewees did not attend any open day and 6 of them were SWNDDs. Interviewee 15 did not attend the open day, however, came to UniA for an interview and was shown around the campus. They expressed that

“people think that you apply to university, get accepted and move-in but if you have a disability, there is a lot more to be worried about, like whether the campus is accessible...”

Therefore, this study found that attendance at an open day is more common among SWDDs than among SWNDDs.

Interviewees 05, a SWDD, and 14, a SWNDD, commented that their attendance at a UniA open day was one of the factors in their choice of university. An example of this is provided by Interviewee 14, who stated that having attended five open days, UniA

“was good because you got to see the course and the accommodation”.

A further example was provided by Interviewee 05, who said that,

“...what really convinced me [to attend UniA] was because I went to the Open Day ... when you come you realise ... the facilities are very, very good; there is state-of-the-art technology here, especially for my course.”

Interviewee 10, a SWNDD, also mentioned that the quality of facilities available at the university played a role in the positive experience they had at the Open Day.

The atmosphere at the open day and the staff and students working at UniA influenced most interviewees.

Prospective students should have a positive experience at an open day because this was a factor in influencing the interviewees to attend the specific university. An example of this was when Interviewee 08, a SWNDD, said,

“I went to an open day at ... [a pre-1992] ... university and ... didn't like it, it didn't feel like it was for me. I felt very alien in the environment.”

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual open days became more mainstream. Winter (2018) and Mitchell and Ramsey (2019) suggest that universities should focus on open days as students claimed that they are the primary influencers in their decision-making process, similar to the findings in this study.

7.6.6 Influencers

This section deals with the people who influence the decision to attend university and the choice of a specific university. For this study, influencers include alumni, educational professionals, family, friends or acquaintances.

7.6.6.1 Alumni

During the interviews, 7 interviewees mentioned knowing a former student who had attended UniA. 6 of those who talked about alumni said they were influenced to attend or remain at UniA. From the 6 SWDDs, 5 had friends or family who had graduated from UniA, while the remainder knew alumni through their job, most of whom were SWNDDs. Interviewee 07 stated that they were

“aware that they [their friends] had really positive experiences, that they talked fondly about [UniA].”

All interviewees who knew UniA alumni opined that the alumnus had enjoyed their time at UniA. Gibbs and Knapp (2002) and Bhardwa (2017) state that alumni are one of the main influences that can guide students toward choosing a specific university.

7.6.6.2 Educational Professionals

According to Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram (2019), teachers are key influencers for students when deciding to go to university. Educational professionals can positively, neutrally or negatively influence a student's decision to go to or choose a specific university. 7 interviewees said that a teacher/lecturer influenced their decision to attend university, 4 of whom were SWDDs.

“I was going to not go to university ... [but the] ... college lecturers, particularly the ones that had gone to this university ... they said it would be a good career choice”.
(Interviewee 03, a SWDD).

Interviewee 13, a SWNDD, inferred that when they were at school, their teachers assumed that if university was a viable option for you, you would attend when they commented that,

“if you were hitting certain grades, then there was the expectation that you would ... go to university”.

Interviewee 04's, a SWDD schoolteacher's attitudes could be inferred as discouragement.

“When I came back after my G.C.S.E.'s to do A-levels ... I think that my teachers thought 'every day would be the day that I gave up', thinking 'she can't cope anymore, she'll give up today' and then when I didn't, they'd think it again the next day”.

7.6.6.2.1 Career advisors

Interviewee 12, a SWNDD, provides an example of somebody whose career advisors had a neutral influence over their decision to go to university, inferred by their inability to remember their exact influence, illustrated in the quote below,

“we must have had career-related talks possibly ... if I remember correctly, there would have been career-related talks and talks about different courses and sort of what our interests were as students and then what courses matched that, possibly encouraging us to go to open days and things like that”.

When asked about their communications with their career advisor, Interviewee 14, a SWNDD, stated that

“we did have one at sixth form, but they didn't really do a lot, and [the advice] was really quite general”.

Educational professionals influenced interviewees in different ways, some such as Interviewee 04 wanted to prove their teachers wrong while others such as Interviewee 13 attended university because of the strong influence from their teachers.

7.6.6.3 Family

This study defined family members using the interviewees' own terminology, bringing together several different relationships and addressing them collectively under the term family, which included parents, siblings, partners, offspring, and extended family members.

Family members were influential because, if they had attended university, they could provide the prospective student with firsthand insight into what university entails (Lami and Mele, 2014). Of the 15 interviewees, 12 mentioned that one or more family members influenced their decision to go to university and/or a specific university. Of these 12, 8 interviewees stated that parents were an influencer, and 6 of these were SWNDDs. Interviewee 09, a SWNDD, opined that their parents,

“just motivated me to go ahead and apply ...”

Interviewee 11's parents did not go to university but,

“can support me in other ways which they do whether that might be financially or just offering me some space in the house to do some work or something”

Of the 12 interviewees discussed above, 4 stated that a sibling had influenced their decision; all were SWNDDs.

Of the 12 interviewees, 3 stated that their partner was a key influencer because their partner worked or studied in the city where UniA is located, which was a prime reason for them to attend UniA. Interviewee 15, a SWDD, expressed this sentiment when they said that

“mainly, ... because my boyfriend was coming [to UniA].”

Of the 12 interviewees who said that family had influenced their decision, 3 specifically stated their offspring were a reason for choosing UniA. All interviewees were female, mature students with childcare commitments, 2 were SWDDs, and needed to study at a university in their local area. An example of this given by Interviewee 06, a SWDD, was,

“... I've got a young family. I need to still be a mum and be able to get to university from my home”.

It was inferred from conversations external to the interview that Interviewee 04, a SWDD, wanted to create aspirational capital for their two teenage children (Basit, 2012). They were successful in passing this form of capital down to their children when they said that they

“...registered my eldest son, he's joining [UniA] in September”.

Interviewee 08, a SWNDD, described having support from their mother, but not their father, and hence did not feel they were supported by him as seen in the following extract from their interview transcript,

“...my Dad didn't finish school himself, ... to him, education wasn't, it just wasn't part of his thinking”.

Although growing up in an environment where going to university was not the norm, Interviewee 08 had an intrinsic desire to attend university from an early age. They saw this as a way to escape from poverty, i.e.

“I can remember being about 9 years old, probably a bit younger and wanting to go to university and then once I, as soon as I could understand what university meant, probably around 13 or 14, that’s when I knew I wanted to do a PhD”.

Interviewee 08 wanted to have what they perceived as a better lifestyle by gaining an improved economic position (section 4.2.1.2.3) that they did not have due to the working-class environment they grew up in, which is illustrated by their statement,

“I knew that there was this thing called college. I knew that you could do something after that if you studied hard enough, and I needed to get out of poverty”.

Interview 08 chose a local university because their field (section 4.2.1.3) at that time was short, and when discussing universities, they demonstrated this when they stated,

“so, I didn’t even know what that word [university] meant; so, I don’t know how I became aware that universities exist”.

Their family's socio-economic status impacted the interviewees’ decisions to go to university (4.2.1.1). The following statement demonstrated this when they commented that,

“...my family were a working-class family, and my dad was in and out of work ... mum was working for, you know, pennies an hour ... I decided that if I tried hard enough, I could get out of that.”

In contrast to Interviewee 08, a SWNDD, Interviewee 05, a SWDD, grew up in an environment where going to university was the norm within their immediate family, as is demonstrated when they state,

“so, when I was thinking of going to university, my parents suggested to look at UniA. All my family ... [had] all gone and done a degree at [UniA]”.

Interviewee 05, a SWDD, felt that coming to university would assist them in attaining the career that they desired. Their chosen career is a result of their having received help from an individual within their chosen profession, as shown when they say they thought

“why don’t I try and become a [states profession] because the [names professional] who diagnosed me completely changed my life ... so I chose to go and do [states course] at university to start my journey through to becoming a [states profession]”.

Interviewees 05 and 08 both attended their local university but for different reasons, which is illustrated by,

“I need to be close to my family because it is scary going into hospital with you know [states condition]” (Interviewee 05).

7.6.6.3.1 Friends

Friends and acquaintances were influencers for 5 of the 15 interviewees; of these, 4 were SWNDDs. Interviewee 02, a SWDD, reported that,

“a lot of [my friends] went to uni; one came to this one, which did help influence my decision”.

Interviewee 01, a SWNDD, stated

“my job was all about getting sixth formers ready for uni and just giving them as much information as possible ...the outreach coordinator ... [was] ... someone that I contacted at [UniA]”,

over time, they became well acquainted, and the outreach coordinator influenced their decision.

7.6.7 Expectations and Experiences

All five second round interviewees discussed their general expectations before arriving at UniA. The first round of interviewees scored out of 10 on whether they would recommend the university, their course or both to a friend.

Interviewee 01E and Interviewee 13E, both SWNDDs, stated that they had few expectations since their course outcomes were inconsequential because the qualifications linked to the courses did not lead to career progression in their current field. One of the reasons they enrolled on their courses was that they wanted to gain new knowledge, which is demonstrated by Interviewee 01E when they say,

“... this course won't get you a better job, but it will get you thinking about what else you can do”.

Contrastingly, Interviewee 03E and Interviewee 07E, both SWDDs, had expectations of the university experience regarding making friends, as did Interviewee 02, a SWDD, and Interviewee 11, a SWNDD. Interviewee 03E showed that they had anticipated making a group of close friends when they commented that:

“I expected to come to university and to make a few, a close-knit group of friends”.

Interviewee 07, a SWDD, initially went to a collegiate system institution when they were 15 years old and struggled to make friends and inferred this when they commented that,

“.....even if you have one year removed [from school], ... that's enough to cut you off from networks of being social, that loss of new friends and experiences”.

Being able to socialise in an adult environment is an intrinsic part of university life.

Interviewee 11 also anticipated making new friends, as demonstrated in the following statement,

“I like, kind of, doing new things so meeting the people on my course and interacting with a new set of friends was one of the main things for me.”

However, any expectation of making friends fell short for Interviewee 02, as shown when answering a question about whether they had made friends; they said,

“it was all right, just kind of lonely, I suppose [living in student accommodation]”.

Zat'ková, Seberini and Tokovska (2025) suggests that students expect to make friends with the people they live with.

The expectations of making new friends align with other studies, for example, Phinney, Dennis and Osorio (2006), Hughes and Smail (2015), and LaVigne (2019).

Interviewee 07E, a SWDD, when describing their expectations of being a part-time student at the doctoral level

“thought it was going to be a bit more disjointed”.

Interviewee 07 had more time to interact with their course mates, which enabled them to make friends more easily than they expected to

When asked about any expectations relating to accessibility, Interviewee 15E, a SWDD, noted that they had anticipated the campus would be accessible and that the staff they interacted with would receive any necessary training concerning their needs because:

“I went from a residential college where it was specialised for my disability, so I guess that I had quite a high standard going in, in regard to accessibility and people understanding [my needs].”

7.6.7.1 General Experiences

From the fifteen interviews, 9 stated that they would recommend all aspects of UniA, of which 5 were SWNDDs. For example, Interviewee 05, a SWDD, asserted that:

“I've really enjoyed it; comparing my experience with [UniA] and the support with lots of my friends who have gone to other universities, it's just been phenomenal. I can't fault the support that I've had”.

Of the fifteen interviewees, 3 commented that they would recommend the university but not their course.

Interviewee 03, a SWDD, stated they would recommend the course but not the university because, for them, the university was secondary in importance when choosing which university to attend,

Interviewee 15, a SWDD, answered as follows,

“Interviewer: would you recommend [UniA] to a friend?

Interviewee 15: disabled or not?

Interviewer: not [disabled]?

Interviewee 15: yes

7.6.7.1.1 Wellbeing

Interviewees 03E and 15E, both SWDDs, commented on their experiences with the Wellbeing services that UniA delivers.

Interviewee 03E contacted Wellbeing Services and received support throughout their degree. However, they felt that the level of support received in their first and second years was better than in their final year as seen when they said,

“I have used [the support] less in my final year than I have in my first and second years. My first and second years it was quite well put together, ... it also seemed ... [there was not] ... like the same level of support ... [for] ... students ... the focus was maybe pulled away from them and put towards ... general student wellbeing initiatives...”

However, Interviewee 15E felt disappointed that the Wellbeing service did not contact them to ask if they needed further support as they progressed through their degree, as shown in the following statement:

“...the disability support services they didn’t have any interactions or any check-ups or anything like that. I mean, I wouldn’t even know that there was a disability support service apart from filling in one form at the beginning of my course.

7.6.7.1.2 Finance Department

Interviewees 01E and 13E, both SWNDDs, had different experiences with the finance department. Interviewee 13E felt disappointed by their interactions with the finance department regarding their PhD fees, which they voiced as follows;

“I often have a struggle trying to find out exactly how much I am supposed to pay on my fees, when I am supposed to pay it, how I am going to pay it ... I always get a response, but it takes a long time to sort out.”

In contrast to this, when discussing the finance department, Interviewee 01E stated:

“...they do get back to you if you have any questions. They have been really good.”

7.6.7.2 Course-Expectations

Of the second-round interviewees, 3 stated they had expectations regarding their course. Interviewees 07E, a SWDD, 13E, a SWNDD, and 15E, a SWDD, had some expectations met regarding their course.

Interviewees 07E and 13E were completing the same professional doctorate at UniA;

The course assessments felt inadequate by Interviewee 15 when they said that,

“I feel that it was too easy to pass ... when it is a medical degree technically ... you are never tested again on them specific things; you never have to know it in detail again ... you will still pass ... [the course] ... if you don’t know it”.

Interviewee 15, a SWDD, commented on accessibility within their course, which was a key concern for them, demonstrated by their statement that,

“...before I came here, I had an interview with the course leader in regard to what was going to be accessible and what wasn’t” (Interviewee 15).

Their expectations resulting from this meeting were not met by their experience, in their opinion, as seen in the following passage,

“... people don’t understand that screen sharing doesn’t mean that it becomes big on our screen, and lecturers’ have never understood that when you point on the screen with a laser or a mouse that, that is just not accessible at all. People need to learn how to use descriptive words”.

Interviewees 03 and 07, both SWDDs, conducted prior research into how their potential course was structured, and received advice from educational professionals (section 7.5.6.2). Before speaking with educational professionals, at their college, they did not intend to attend university to take their courses.

Interviewee 07E commented regarding the course structure,

“I remember feeling on my induction days for UniA courses I kind of already knew what was happening because the information was there ... it was thought about to the level of what would someone thinking about this course want to actually know”.

Interview 03E gained expectations of the facilities available at UniA by completing research online and conversing with their college lecturers who had previously attended UniA.

“The fact that they had the facilities as well, ... they told me what I should expect”

Interviewee 05, a SWDD, goes further when they say that after attending an open day, they felt,

“...that actually the facilities are very good; there is state-of-the-art technology here”.

This view is supported by Interviewee 11, a SWNDD, who inferred that UniA had the facilities for their course as it was the best place to complete it.

7.6.7.3 Course-Experience

Interviewees 03E and 07E, both SWDDs, had positive experiences with their respective courses at UniA; they liked the structure and content of their courses. When discussing this aspect of UniA, Interviewee 03E said:

“I really enjoyed ... the teaching, the lecturers, their attitude to teaching, as well as the course content, as well in the different ways that they help you in the final year as well.”

Interviewee 07E supports this argument because they liked the format of their course, as illustrated when they say that their course has:

“...a really good mix of academia and research but also professional skills and, you know, practitioner in context whereas a lot of the other courses were just one or the other”.

The positive views offered by Interviewees 03E and 07E, both male, to an extent, counter those made by female interviewees during the second round of interviews, who expressed opinions of disappointment with components of their courses.

Interviewees 03E and 07E, who have invisible disabilities, enjoyed being taught online, whereas Interview 15E, a SWDD with a visible disability, found Microsoft Teams to be inaccessible without a support worker being present. Moreover, the males felt they were part of a community whilst studying online, whereas all three females' second-round interviews indicated that studying online made them feel lonely or isolated.

Peimani and Kamalipour (2021) suggest that university students are digitally adept and hence find online teaching positive but prefer a blended learning approach. This study found something different, as 3 of the second-round interviewees preferred in-person teaching.

Furthermore, as noted by Interviewee 13E, if the supervisor had issues with the software used, then this impacted the learning experience when they commented:

“One of my supervisors hasn’t been able to do Teams because of [the] technology that she has got.”

Interviewees 01E and 13E discussed that they felt they were receiving less value for their money than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviewee 01E felt they had missed out on the supervision support from their course staff as they had not had contact with them for several months.

They discussed this when they say:

“management of [the course] ... hasn’t been very good, so I’m not getting feedback from my draft until it’s a couple of weeks before [the assignment] is due,”

Interviewees 01E, a SWNDD, and 15E, a SWDD, felt they could not obtain employment in the course area they studied. A view supported by Interviewee 15E, who felt modules previously learnt required revisiting as they were undertaking a form of medical degree, resulting in them stating,

“Sometimes there were some students who just didn’t know what something meant, which we learnt in the first year, but by the third year they just didn’t know it, and I just don’t know what that means ... I think that it is just ridiculous.”

Interviewee 15E remarked that several of their lecturers were supportive, which aligns with responses from Interviewees 02, a SWDD, 05, a SWDD, 12, a SWNDD, and 13/13E, a SWNDD, which is exemplified by Interviewee 13, who remarked:

“...my experience of the ... [teaching] team whilst completing my [states course] and now while doing my [states course] ... has generally been really good, and I have been really well supported.”

Of the interviewees who shared a similar sentiment, 3 were SWDDs.

Interviewee 14, a SWNDD with hindsight, felt a less specialised course would have been a better choice for them regarding their future career prospects;

Interviewee 08, a SWNDD, commented that they felt proud to attend UniA, i.e.,

“I think that I am a product of UniA doing what it does well – I think that if I had gone to another university, then I certainly wouldn’t be doing my PhD now.”

There was a noticeable shift in how interviewees answered, and the content of their responses was less favourable in the second round than in the first for all five interviewees. The first round of interviews took place in February/March 2021, and the second in June/July 2021 (table 7.23). This indicated that some interviewees had a less positive attitude towards their course as it progressed. This shift in opinion was seen by Interviewee 01, a SWNDD when they said:

“...so, actually I was really happy when it was online for this year; it works quite well.”

This positivity was noticeably no longer evident by the second round when Interviewee 01E stated that the management of the course

“hasn’t been very good ... I have not been as pleased with it this year.”

Interviewee 15E, a SWDD, discussed their course assessment process as they felt:

“too many people passed without knowing that much ... I feel that it was too easy to pass...you would never actually be tested in a clinical setting, so you could be really awful with clients”

This view is analogous to Sambell, McDowell and Brown (1997) study into whether students feel that how assessments occur is fair in an HE setting. They found that perceptions of fairness in student assessments affected their confidence when entering the workforce.

Of the second-round interviewees, 3 inferred that they felt isolated, of these 2 interviewees were SWNDDs. Interviewee 13E, a SWNDD, did this when they said:

“...obviously there comes a point where you just don’t see people anymore, and I know that they do try to organise events ... I think that a lot of it is the nature of the course.”

Interviewee 01E, a SWNDD, goes further when they state:

“I haven’t met with my supervisor much at all. I don’t think that I have seen anyone really since January, so we have just been very alone.”

The remaining 2 second-round interviewees had more positive experiences and were SWDDs. They enjoyed the online format of the teaching introduced because of the COVID-19 lockdowns, as shown when Interviewee 07E, a SWDD, stated:

“the other thing that is done really well is helping you to know who your peers are, ... course communities [on Microsoft Teams]; has done really well. I know that in the last six months or so ... since we were locked down when our sessions were moved online, it probably has been the students that have done the bulk of the work to keep in touch with each other, ... but I don’t think that that could have possibly have happened if it hadn’t have been set up that way from the start”.

When questioned about their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, Interviewee 07E, a SWDD, said:

“...they [the university] have handled it extremely well.”

Interviewees 03E and 07E, both SWDDs, created an atmosphere and used language during their interviews that felt more optimistic when discussing their futures than Interviewees 01E and 13E, both SWNDDs.

All three SWDDs in the second round of interviews found that their experience had somewhat exceeded their expectations before starting at university, which was evidenced by Interviewee 15E, a SWDD, who stated:

“I think for me it was learning about how to manage my studies and ... [identifying descriptor removed] ... there was a certain element of confidence; as well, in regard to kind of interacting with other people and I have learned how to teach other people about disabilities.”

Interviewee 07E, a SWDD, felt that at UniA they are treated as an individual rather than as one of many, unlike at the pre-1992 universities they had previously attended.

Interviewee 03E, a SWDD, commented that,

“I think that my actual experience has been quite different but in a good way, in that, you learn a lot more about how to be independent and stuff, and different skills of connecting with people, and there are more opportunities around than I initially thought.”

7.6.7.4 Improved Career Prospects

All participants in the second round of interviews agreed that, in addition to obtaining a degree whilst attending university, they gained transferable skills that would assist them in their future. Maringe and Fuller (2006) and Baker (2021) echo this statement.

Interview 03E, stated that,

“[it] definitely [gives you] access to a better-paid job”.

For some, their views about their future employability changed. Interviewee 15E, who like Interviewee 03E, commented that

“...my ... [disability] ... has changed since I got here, so I would say that my thoughts on what job I could get has changed since I started [my course].”

Interviewee 15E went on to say that coming to university has helped them juggle their studies with extracurricular activities and has helped to improve their confidence.

Interviewee 03E, a SWDD, also discussed that attending university is about more than just education.

A difference between these two SWDDs is that Interviewee 15E had a visible disability, whereas Interviewee 03E had an invisible disability.

Interviewees 01E, 12, and 13E all SWNDDs concur, albeit for different reasons, that their course had not given them a way into a better-paid job, as Interviewee 01E disclosed that they had initially thought that it would provide them with a path to a better-paid job in a different career when they explained that:

“...if I was doing it again, I think I would have told myself that this course won’t get you a better job ... I don’t think that [when] I have finished this course and, I am going to go and be a [states career] because I didn’t realise just how difficult it was to get into it.”

Interviewee 12, a SWNDD, stated that:

“...it was the bursary and the placement that attracted me in the first place.”

However, upon reflection, Interviewee 12 felt they should have entered the workplace after completing their Master’s.

An example of this is demonstrated by Interviewee 13E when they said:

“...I think that with me, the reasons for doing the course were not necessarily to do with changing my job”.

These views reflect those of Bachan (2014), who indicates that going to university does not always result in you obtaining a better-paid job after graduation.

7.6.8 Expectations Not Met

According to Hassel and Ridout (2018), some students have unrealistic expectations for teaching time, leading to unmet expectations.

In the first round of interviews, 11 interviewees stated that their experience at UniA did not meet some of their expectations; 6 of these were SWDDs. Some had multiple occasions when these expectations were not met, while others only drew on single incidences.

All second-round interviewees stated that their expectations were not met in all aspects of their experience at UniA.

7.6.8.1 Course

Of the 11 interviewees, 4 regretted their chosen course.

Interviewee 15, a SWDD, inferred that their expectations were unmet regarding accessibility on their course, shown when they said,

“lecturers’ have never understood that when you point on the screen with a laser or a mouse that, that is just not accessible at all”.

7.6.8.2 Accommodation

Of the 11 interviewees who felt their experience did not meet their expectations, 4 commented that their accommodation expectations did not align with reality, of whom 3 were SWDDs. 4 interviewees' expectations were unmet due to feeling of being overwhelmed when moving in with strangers.

Interviewee 09, a SWNDD, stated that they did not want to live in shared accommodation; they demonstrated this when they said,

“I don't like, to be honest, a shared house, a shared bathroom ... I prefer to live alone – to have my own space, my own house, my own kitchen [*small laugh*], so that is why I preferred to move from the university accommodation”.

When Interviewee 03, a SWDD, commented on the university accommodation, they said that there were,

“...too many people [in Halls of Residence, resulting] is a mental health issue.”

Whereas Interviewee 15E, a SWDD, felt that assessment criteria for living in university accommodation were needed to ensure safety for everyone, they divulged that,

“...there was no kind of assessment criteria to make sure that when you move in, everything is going to be safe for you, that you are going to be able to access everything, that you are just going to be able to look after yourself while you are there and that is not just from a disability point of view, that is from a mental health point of view or anything like that.”

They expanded on this when they said,

“There needs to be a way to make sure that people are going to keep themselves safe ... they are not going to learn until someone accidentally injures themselves to the point where they pass away, then they will suddenly start changing stuff, but it needs to be done way before that, but they don't seem to see that as a kind of urgent thing.”

Those who commented on their dissatisfaction with accommodation moved out of university accommodation.

7.6.8.3 Finance

Interviewees 01E and 13E, both SWNDDs, were unhappy with the cost of their course, with Interviewee 01E going as far as saying:

“I think perhaps for the money I have not been as pleased with it this year... there has definitely been a drop in the support that we have had ... I think that for every

other course that, it was really good value, but I think this year ... I don't think that I have really spoken to anyone. I don't know what I am getting for [my money] apart from access to software".

The second round of interviews took place during the UK national lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face teaching was limited to practical courses by the UK Government.

7.6.8.4 Accessibility

The accessibility of UniA was an unmet expectation for 4 of SWDD interviewees, and 2 of these participated in both rounds of interviews.

Interviewees 02 and 03E, cited problems with UniA's Students' Union. Interviewee 03E had experienced some negativity during their time at UniA with the Students' Union and how it managed its' societies, which was demonstrated when they said:

"I left all [clubs and societies], but it was mainly conflict between individuals and stuff, but I think that a lot of it comes out of the rules set out by the Students' Union."

They went on to say:

"I think things are very vague, and this can create conflict ... but what is ok with some people is not ok with other people, but there needs to be clearer rules about that."

When questioned about their first week at UniA and particularly the Clubs and Societies Fair, Interviewee 02 stated:

"...it was a lot [to deal with] luckily, I had my friend there with me to help, so that was alright, but it was a little bit much".

Madriaga, et al. (2010) discuss how students with specific disabilities find crowded spaces challenging, and that Students' Union events are among these.

Interviewees 05 and 15E stated that their experiences fell short due to unmet expectations regarding on-site physical access requirements.

Interviewee 15E had issues accessing all the kitchen appliances in the Halls of Residence safely. These issues were not apparent until after they had moved into university accommodation, as they noted,

"...when I came, there was no form of assessment to make sure that I could access everything, and then it could have been sorted beforehand, but it wasn't".

7.6.8.5 Key findings from the qualitative data

One of the key findings from the qualitative element of this study was that 12 interviewees were first-generation students. Of these, the SWDDs inferred that the location of UniA was more pivotal in their decision to attend UniA than SWDD interviewees. The key findings that indicated similarities between SWDD and SWNDD interviewees included why interviewees decided to come to university, one of the reasons being their future career. The second key finding was that SWDD and SWNDD interviewees chose to attend UniA for similar reasons; these include the types of courses provided by UniA and the support services offered. Another key finding was that the influencing factors discussed during the interviews elicited similar responses from SWDDs and SWNDDs, these included prospectuses and league tables. Finally, most of the influencers mentioned by interviewees had similar influence over the decision to go to university and the choice of a specific university, including educational professionals and offspring.

One of the key findings that reported a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs discussed parental advice; this was important to a substantially greater proportion of SWNDDs. The second key finding showing a difference was that siblings were reported as influencers by half of the SWNDD interviewees; no SWDD interviewees discussed a sibling. A noteworthy difference regarding SWDDs and SWNDDs attendance at open days was that discussion during interviews found that SWDDs are more likely to attend multiple open days at various universities as well as an open day at UniA. Another key finding that differed concerned the expectations held by SWDD and SWNDD interviewees, including the expectation of making friends whilst at UniA; 75% of those who discussed this expectation were SWDDs. During their interviews, SWDD interviewees discussed conducting research prior to attending UniA regarding the structure of their course, thereby providing them with realistic expectations, whilst no SWNDDs mentioned that they did.

7.7 Conclusion

To conclude, the findings reported in this chapter explored the decision-making process of why SWDDs and SWNDDs decided to go to university, how they made their final choice of a specific university and their influences on these choices and whether their expectations prior to enrolment were met. Overall, it was reported that there were more similarities than differences between SWDDs and SWNDD in their decisions to go to university and how they chose a specific university. However, differences were found in the expectation held by SWDDs and SWNDDs interviewees, with UniA meeting some expectations from many interviewees. The main reasons participants chose to attend UniA were the options 'Course', 'Location' and

'Career prospects', 'Course' and 'Career prospects' were more commonly selected by SWNDDs, while SWDDs selected the 'Location' option more frequently. Course and career prospects are interconnected because, for most participants, the reason for attending university is to complete a course within an area in which they wish to pursue a career (Lami and Mele, 2014). The group of students that selected this option in Q27 and discussed this in the interview were SWNDDs (sections 7.3.1; 7.5.4; 7.5.7).

Parents and siblings were the most influential family members who acted as influencers on the decision to go to university and why they attended UniA

This study found open days were an influencing factor that differed in responses from SWDDs and SWNDDs; this was because more SWDD interviewees were proportionately more likely to attend an open day and multiple open days (section 7.5.5.4.4). Also, SWDD participants attended an open day at UniA and were influenced more by this experience to attend UniA than SWNDDs (section 7.2.3.1), answering RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ5.

Another influencing factor that resulted in a difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs was the advice provided by their school/college. This study found that the majority of participants who were encouraged to go to university by their school/college were SWDDs, and the respondents who ranked the option of 'Advice from school/college' first or second were mainly SWDDs.

Overall, this study found more similarities regarding influencing factors answering RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ5. The expectation held by interviewees differed dependent on their life experiences prior to attending UniA. Some of the expectations were exceeded, others were met and some unmet by their experience at UniA (section 7.5.7).

The following chapter discusses and analyses the findings highlighted in this chapter. It does this in alignment with the research purpose of the primary and secondary data gathered for this study. The Literature Review – parts 1 and 2 (Chapter 3 and 4) provides an in-depth analysis of both policy and literature, primarily in the fields of participation and influences on applicants with HE in England.

Chapter 8: Analysis and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 provided a wealth of information and data from the empirical findings of this research project. To enable analysis and discussion, this chapter is broken down into two sections.

- Influences on student choice on participation in Higher Education
- Expectations of students prior to entering Higher Education

Throughout these two sections, the author continues to note differences and similarities between the two primary groups of participants in the study, SWDD and SWNDD, and how intersectional characteristics contribute to the decision-making process. thereby, answering the RQs (section 1.2.2). Furthermore, recurring themes, such as WP and massification of HE, are also reflected on.

The student choice process (deciding whether to participate in HE) is complex and multifaceted, influenced by a range of factors, including SES, cultural capital, prior HE educational experiences, and perceptions of institutional employability outcomes. Additionally, prospective students navigate a landscape of information sources, including advice from their school/college, familial guidance, institutional marketing, and digital media, all of which contribute to the decision-making process. Therefore, HE participation is not determined solely by policy or institutional availability, but also by the individual's decision-making strategy. This theme contributes to the existing literature by highlighting students' capacity while simultaneously acknowledging the structural barriers that shape their options.

The second theme investigates the expectations students hold prior to entering the HE sector and how these aspirations inform their participation in the student experience. Expectations prior to entering HE encompass both understanding and emotional dimensions, including social integration and future career prospects. Expectations are often shaped not only by previous educational experiences but also by society. Examining student expectations is critical to the HE sector because any discrepancy between expectations and their non-fulfilment can significantly influence satisfaction and retention. Understanding the expectations of prospective students is key to the HE sector, as this study addresses their perceived value of participation. Overall, these themes; influences on student choice, and the expectations prospective students hold offer a comprehensive framework for interpreting the Literature Review parts 1 and 2 (Chapters 3 and 4) and the Findings of this thesis (Chapter 7). They highlight the interactions between policy essentials, university structures, and individual decision-making, foregrounding the complex nature of modern HE.

8.2 Influences on student choice on participation in HE

8.2.1 Introduction

The concept of 'choice' occupies a central position within this thesis, underpinning all four research aims (section 1.2.1) and providing a critical lens through which participation in HE can be understood. At its most basic level, choice refers to the decision-making processes through which individuals elect to enter HE (Burke, 2017). However, such a definition risks oversimplification. Rather than representing a discrete or autonomous act, student choice is better conceptualised as a socially situated and structurally mediated process, shaped by the interaction of individual aspirations, institutional conditions, and broader socio-economic contexts.

Existing literature has conceptualised student choice through both economic and socio-cultural frameworks. Early economic models, such as those proposed by Chapman (1993) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987), frame participation as a rational process in which individuals weigh the costs and benefits of making a decision. These approaches align closely with HCT and RCT positioning students as utility-maximising actors who invest in education to secure future economic returns. While such models offer useful insight into the financial and instrumental dimensions of participation, they have been widely critiqued for reducing complex decision-making processes to individualised calculations, thereby neglecting the structural inequalities and social contexts that shape access to, and perceptions of, HE.

In contrast, socio-cultural approaches provide a more nuanced account of student choice. For example, Perna (2006) conceptualises choice as a multi-layered process influenced by habitus, social networks, institutional characteristics, and policy environments. This perspective aligns with the work of Bourdieu, whose concepts of habitus and capital highlight how dispositions towards HE are shaped by prior socialisation and access to cultural and social resources. However, while Bourdieusian theory offers a valuable framework for understanding patterns of inequalities in participation, it has been critiqued for its emphasis on social reproduction, which can understate the role of policy interventions such as WP initiatives and institutional practices in reshaping expectations and enabling new forms of engagement.

Indeed, policy developments have significantly reconfigured the landscape within which student choice operates. WP initiatives and the massification of HE have expanded access, positioning university attendance as an increasingly normative pathway for academically adept students. These policies function as redistributive mechanisms aimed at addressing historical exclusion within the sector. However, expansion does not equate to equity. As access has widened, participation has become characterised by what may be understood as conditional inclusion, whereby entry into HE remains contingent upon the possession of particular forms of capital,

prior attainment, and the capacity to navigate institutional systems. In this context, choice is not freely exercised but is structured by unequal opportunities and constraints.

Additional theoretical perspectives further complicate this understanding. SET frames participation as a negotiation between perceived costs and anticipated rewards, incorporating social and emotional considerations alongside economic ones. While this offers a broader lens than purely economic models, it continues to foreground individual evaluation processes and, as such, risks underestimating the extent to which choices are shaped and, in some cases, limited by structural and institutional inequalities. Similarly, while HCT and RCT foreground economic rationality, they fail to adequately account for the ways in which factors such as disability, age, and SES constrain the range of viable options available to prospective students. This limitation is particularly evident in relation to SWDDs for whom decision-making processes remain underexplored in the literature. While studies such as Phinney, Dennis and Osorio (2006) examine participation among ethnic minority students, and McCune, et al. (2010) explore differences between mature and younger learners, there remains a relative absence of research specifically addressing the motivations and constraints shaping HE participation among disabled students. This gap is significant, as it obscures how structural barriers, accessibility concerns, and anticipated labour market inequalities may fundamentally reshape the parameters within which choice is exercised.

Consequently, this study conceptualises student choice not as a singular or purely rational decision, but as a negotiated process embedded within a wider socio-institutional context. By drawing on, but also critically engaging with, HCT, RCT, SET, and Bourdieusian theory, the analysis adopts a multi-theoretical framework that recognises both the agency of prospective students and the structural conditions that delimit that agency. In doing so, it foregrounds how participation in HE reflects the intersection of institutional arrangements, identity formation, economic expectations, and social relations, thereby challenging reductive accounts of choice as simply a matter of individual preference or decision-making.

8.2.2 Choice

Choice, in terms of the title of this thesis, and responses from participants are interrelated to all four aims of this research (section 1.2.1). for the purpose of this study, choice necessitates the decision-making process (Burke, 2017). The concept of choice in HE has been written about through economic fields by authors such as Chapman (1981) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987), and socio-cultural models such as Perna (2006) who positioned student choice as a multifaceted decision with many types of influences. The pre-existing literature addresses student choice influences amongst all students, whereas literature regarding why SWDDs go

to university remains limited. However, the broader literature on why students from different minority groups attend university, including Phinney, Dennis and Osorio (2006), discuss why ethnic minority attend university. McCune, et al. (2010) discuss the reasons why mature and younger students attend university.

Policy interventions such as WP initiatives have adjusted the structural accessibility of the HE sector by enabling possibilities for non-traditional students. WP strategies operate as a redistributive mechanism intended to counteract historical elitism in the sector. Alongside the WP initiative, massification policies have expanded university spaces. Consequently, normalising university attendance as a standard of post-secondary route for academically adept students. Despite this, massification does not necessarily equate to equitable participation outcomes. The expansion of the HE sector may be expounded as conditional inclusion, whereby a university offers places contingent on pre-existing forms of capital and examination results. The theoretical interpretation of choice in this study drew upon several theories including Bourdieu's concept of habitus and capital provided the main sociological lens by molding dispositions toward education. Within his theory, HE participation decisions are understood as socially positioned practice instead of purely rational choices. HCT contributes an economic interpretation by drawing education as an investment for the future with an expectation to generate future employment. From a HCT perspective, students weigh up the opportunity costs of participation e.g. earnings lost against anticipated forecasted lifetime earnings and stable employment. However, RCT deploys a more individualised choice explanation by suggesting that students engage in utility maximisation processes when deciding to enter HE. Besides this theory providing understanding into decision making underestimate the influence of institutional inequality and socially embedded norms. SET complements the frameworks by formulating HE participation as a negotiation between perceived costs and anticipated rewards. Within this framework, social, emotional and economic yield collectively influence enrolment decisions. Overall, these theoretical perspectives underpinned the argument that student choice in HE is best understood through a multifaceted analytical lens. Student participation reflects the similarities of institutional conditions, identity development, economic expectations and social interactions.

8.2.3 Age Participation

This study ascertained a statistically significant association between age and disability status (section 7.2.1), exhibiting sectoral demographics showing that disabled students are more likely to venture into HE later in life. The statistical likelihood of a person acquiring a disability rises

with age, which can be attributed to this trend (ONS, 2023). Consequently, age operates not solely as a descriptive variable but as a determinant of when the student enters HE.

This clear distinction indicates that mature SWDDs must frequently adapt to their changing disabilities, while SWNDDs participated in HE for opportunity-driven progression.

Disclosure practices establish further complexity. Despite over four-fifths of SWDD respondents reporting disclosing their disability to UniA, interview data revealed inconsistency regarding when disclosure took place. This was because some interviewees had not received a formal diagnosis before enrolling at UniA. Thus, not being able to disclose at that stage. Responses categorised as 'It is personal' are noticeably foreboding of stigma, particularly referencing employment progression and being treated differently (Bishop, 2021), therefore disclosure must be understood within wider labour inequalities and societal perceptions of disability.

The Dearing (NCIHE) and Fryer (NAGCELL) (sections 3.2.6; 3.2.7) reports both emphasise lifelong learning, and the sample population aligns with the WP agenda. According to HESA (no date a) 22.4% of students in England were classed as mature in 1997/98. However, this study identified that 55.6% of SWDDs and 45% of SWNDDs were classed as mature. Bishop (2012) outlines that an estimated 4.4 million disabled people with a physical (ons.gov.uk, 2023) or mental health condition were in employment in the UK. However, she reports on a study that indicated that many disabled people hide their disability from their employers because 'one in three people see disabled people as being less productive than their non-disabled counterparts'. Consequently, although WP has widened access for non-traditional students, differential labour market positioning may hinder the SWDDs comparably; therefore, it could be argued that interviewees 05 and 15 were justified in their fears regarding entering employment. The 50% participation target, which was achieved in 2017/18 (Department for Education, 2019b) should be interpreted in the light of demographic decline amongst 18–24-year-olds (Statista, 2024) This means that universities must attract non-traditional students, including mature and disabled students. Expansion of the sector is dependent on these groups of students. Thereby, reinforcing the strategic importance of adult participation.

The age distribution in this study aligns with the UK's ageing population; the median age has steadily risen since 1985, from 34.3 to limit their choices, the data gathered for this study (for example, Interviewees 04, 05, and 14) suggest that, for some SWDDs, there are additional limitations to strategy, but instead reflects structural demographic transformation.

It was deemed that decision-making among mature SWDD interviewees demonstrated elements of RCT (Elster, 1989), particularly during the information-gathering stage when applying to university. This process also reflects on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, social reproduction, and HCT. The individual habitus informed whether social reproduction is carried

forward; this study found that the majority of interviewees were first-generation and therefore social reproduction is broken. HCT frames participation in HE as an investment in future economic capital.

While personal circumstances may limit the choice of university. Generally, SWDD participants often face additional constraints, contingent upon their type of disability and its interaction with future employment and family responsibilities. Furthermore, McCune, et al. (2010) note that their study found mature students were more likely to have caring obligations and therefore postponed entry into HE; this was consistent with findings from this study, e.g. Interviewee 04. Three-quarters of Interviewees were first-generation, thus suggesting that interviewees did not mainly inherit educational progression, was not inherited from their familial habitus.

Instead, parental attitude towards HE appears increasingly influential and thus reflects the societal shift that progression into HE has become normative, which has been produced by WP initiatives. Thus, indicating that an individual's habitus is not static but alert to the policy environment that can reshape observed educational prospects. Evident differences emerged between the influences of mature SWDDs and SWNDDs. Mature SWNDD respondents were coded as having aspirational capital while SWDDs respondents were coded predominantly as a career change or a change in circumstances. This contrast suggests that disability status may disrupt the job market sustainability, therefore necessitating a return to education. HE participation thus becomes a way for restructuring cultural, social, and economic capital. University decision-making processes support this interpretation. Traditional students are more likely to attend pre-1992 universities (Fleming, et al., 2009; (Kusumawati, Perera and Yanamandram, 2019), whereas post-1992 universities often attract non-traditional students who prefer their local universities, and these types of universities offer vocational courses. This aligns with the life-long learning initiative, emphasised by Dearing (1997) and Fryer (1997).

In summary, age and disability intersect to produce different HE participation rationality. Mature SWDDs decide to go to university via strategic realignment formed by labour market constraints, WP, and massification policy exposure, and accrue more economic capital readjustment. These interactions directly address the aim of this study by demonstrating that HE participation is not consistent but are negotiated by life circumstances and disability status within an expanding and ageing sector.

8.2.4 What I have always expected to do

The NCIHE committee's report proposed multiple recommendations, one of them being during compulsory education, academically adept people should be encouraged to aspire to go to university and cultivate the expectation that HE presents a normative progression. This policy corresponds with WP and the broader massification of the HE sector. First- generation

students, a type of non-traditional student group, were a primary part of the WP policy, and without their inclusion, the 50% target of 18-30-year-olds to progress into HE set by Blair's government would have been unachievable. Consequently, the massification of HE was not only demographic but also ideological, inserting university attendance within the expected educational path for a wider populace.

Despite the quantitative data findings, no statistical association between disability status and the respondent's personal expectation of going to university. The qualitative data (section 7.5.3) draws attention to responses provided in the questionnaire compared to answers given during the interview, thus indicating inconsistencies (Groves et al., 2011). This difference can be attributed to the period of time participants had between answering the questionnaire and participating in the interview, as well as the questionnaire asking respondents to rank 'What I have always expected to do', whereas the interviews broadened this topic to 'always expected to go'. This enabled interviewees to illustrate not merely their personal expectations but also the expectations held by society and people within their social surroundings, thereby demonstrating how the interviews provide the scope to be a more comprehensive view of interviewees' thoughts than a structured questionnaire (Saris and Gallhofer, 2014) (section 6.5.2.1). The disparity, therefore, uncovers how expectations of attending HE are socially facilitated instead of being solely individualised. The expectation of attending university may stem from the individual's familial habitus (Wacquant, 2014; Košutić, 2017), especially among second-generation students, as demonstrated by Interviewee 05 (section 7.5.6.3), however since the popularisation of WP initiatives and the massification of the sector, first-generation students can now develop similar expectations to second-generation students because of exposure to information regarding HE in schools and the emergence of parental aspirational capital (Basit, 2012). 12 of 15 Interviewees were first-generation, also indicating that Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction (Tzanakis, 2011) is not applied to most of the participants within this study. Thereby, raising questions about the degree to which Bourdieusian theory applies to contemporaneous level of participation within post-1992 universities such as UniA, which tend to enroll proportionately more non-traditional students (Fleming, 2009); however, aspects of Bourdieu's concept remain analytically valuable decision insofar as prospective students' decisions to attend university, such as habitus, capitals, and field theory as they continue to structure their perceptions of university as a potential route.

These findings challenge deficit-oriented models regarding disability, e.g., the Medical Model (Kasser and Lytle, 2005), by demonstrating that the desire to go to university is not diminished by their disability; instead were adjusted within the structural context, although SWNDDs may not face the same institutional barriers as SWDDs do, who often draw upon resilience, self-advocacy, and consequently develop strategic skills to overcome embedded institutional

barriers (Martin, 2020) and sustain their educational path, which substantially increases the concept of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005).

The concept of habitus further demonstrates the university's ongoing expectations for SWDDs and SWNDDs. Some second-generation interviewees were brought up with education and with a familial context of the natural progression after compulsory education being HE, and this being an indicator of success, and therefore the idea of going to university can be taken-for-granted and reflects a habitus formed by a wider educational field where HE is assembled as one of the main gateways to social mobility. For some SWDDs, structural inequalities within the HE sector may act as a variation of symbolic violence when aspirations encounter inaccessible practices. Therefore, universities should consolidate between students' aspiration to go to university and passing the course the student wishes to pursue by embedding inclusive practices that remove unnecessary barriers. Inclusive practices benefit both SWDDs and SWNDDs.

Consistent with Kennedy (1997), *Learning Works: WP in Further Education*, inclusive practices raise aspirations for all pupils from primary school. Consequently, it may be unnecessary for a university's marketing department to create marketing strategies solely to attract disabled students. The massification of the HE sector, emboldened by WP policy (sections 3.3; 3.2.4), which enables non-traditional students to develop aspirations that hitherto would have been unrealistic aspirations and converts them into realistic expectations (Marjoribanks, 1998, cited in Khattab, 2014). Interviewee 04 exemplifies this, as the aspiration to go to university existed from a young age, their circumstances prevented them from doing so at age 18; and WP initiatives subsequently provided a viable pathway. WP policy and the massification of the HE sector differed in its aims, but ultimately, the outcome was the same by contributing to a societal transformation and creating expectations of participating in HE amongst non-traditional students.

The qualitative findings of the study suggest that being a first-generation student and disability had a greater influence than being expected to go by both them and others. Therefore, this study indicates that intersectionality is pertinent for participants and decisions on when to go to university and the specific university they chose to attend.

8.2.5 Disclosure of Disability

Analysis of the quantitative findings indicated that over 80% of SWDDs reported disclosing their disability to UniA. However, during the interview, discrepancies became apparent considering the time of disclosure. Several interviewees, for instance, clarified that disclosure did not occur prior to initial enrolment; This was because of a lack of formal diagnosis, all because of societal stigma. Interviewee 03 suggested that their diagnosis occurred during their time at UniA,

thereby, precluding pre-enrolment. In contrast, some questionnaire respondents decided not to disclose their disability as they considered themselves capable of managing their symptoms independently and therefore, questions added the value of additional support provided by UniA. Some SWDD respondents who answered Q20 were coded as 'It is personal.' (section 7.4.2) may show the influence of stigma. According to Goffman's (1963) definition, stigma is a discrediting feature; disability can be covered to avoid societal labelling. Kravets (2006) identified fear of rejection during the university application process as a main reason for non-disclosure because of pervasive societal stigma. Recent research has suggested that nearly two-thirds of students with an invisible disability felt compelled to hide their disability at college. Despite the potential advantages of disclosure in accepting extra support for their academic study (Mamboleo, Dong, and Fais, 2019)

Institutional inconsistencies further complicate disclosure dynamics according to Eccles et al. (2018) who argue that although universities are obligated to comply with the Equality Act (2010) (section 3.2.12), the practical implementation of relevant policies can be inconsistent amongst staff, which can limit the efficacy of support measures illustrated by interviewee 15 (section 7.5.9.1). They note that early disclosure during the application process can facilitate more timely provision of tailored support packages, enhancing academic educational experiences.

8.2.6 Influencing factors on participation

As a subtheme of '*choice*', the factors influencing students' decisions to participate in HE is examined to address the aims of this study. The analysis focuses on key influences identified through both the literature (Chapters 3 and 4) and the study's findings (Chapter 7), namely: career, the location of UniA, university open days, perceived career prospects, and the characteristics of the course itself. These elements collectively shape how prospective students evaluate HE as a viable pathway.

WP may also be understood as an influential structural factor. As discussed in (section 3.3), WP policies have reframed societal perceptions of HE, positioning it as an attainable and legitimate option for academically adept students from non-traditional students. However, the factors shaping participation in HE are not straightforward across both student groups. Influencing factors affecting non-traditional students may differ from those affecting traditional entrants, particularly as policy interventions tend to focus on widening access rather than specifically attracting traditional students (O'Sullivan, Bird, Robson, and Winters, 2019).

This subtheme is interpreted through several complementary theoretical perspectives, including aspirational capital, Bourdieusian concepts of capital and habitus, choice models,

HCT, RCT, and SET. Combining these frameworks facilitates a critical examination of how structural conditions, social resources, and individual cost–benefit considerations shape students’ decisions to participate in HE.

8.2.6.1 Career

The enactment of WP policies has facilitated access to professions traditionally contingent on degree attainment for non-traditional students. Massification of HE, through the expansion of university places, has further enhanced career prospects by increasing the number of students able to enroll. SWDDs may prioritise ‘future career’ as an influencing factor, perceiving greater barriers to employment e.g., Interviewees 05 and 15 and thus seeking to improve their labour market competitiveness relative to their non-disabled peers. This aligns with national data that indicates 23% of working-age adults are disabled (Scope, n.d.), yet only half are employed, compared to over three-quarters of non-disabled people. The interviewee data indicate that students attend university to advance their careers concurring with Balloo, Pauli, and Worrell (2015) findings. This could be attributed to WP, indicating that students often pursue degrees as an investment in future financial and social capital. First-generation or mature students may also pursue HE to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Interviewee 08, who came to university to escape poverty or secure socioeconomic gains for dependents, e.g. Interviewee 04 (Andrew et al., 2021). While the quantitative analysis showed no significant association between disability status and ‘future career’ as an influence, qualitative interviews reveal nuanced decision-making. SWDDs explicitly prioritise employability to mitigate anticipated discrimination, reflecting the deployment of aspirational and cultural capital as strategic resilience (Yosso, 2005; Andrew et al., 2021).

These dynamics are interpretable through RCT, HCT, and SET, with most career-motivated students exhibiting RCT/HCT-informed decisions, e.g., Interviewee 03. WP and massification have broadened viable career pathways, converting cultural capital (degrees) into potential labour-market advantage (Bourdieu, 1986). However, massification also underscores structural tensions; credential acquisition does not uniformly translate into full-time employment (Universities UK, 2025; Scope, n.d.), particularly for SWDDs with visible disabilities facing persistent labour-market inequities.

The findings reveal that career-oriented decisions are not merely economic calculations but are shaped by systemic inequality and neoliberal framings of employability as individual responsibility (Tomlinson, 2017; Ball, 2022). While SWNDDs assume employability as an implicit outcome of going to university. SWDDs consciously strategise to navigate structural barriers, deploying aspirational capital defensively. WP and massification thus function as

double-edged mechanisms; they expand access and visibility but simultaneously reinforce neoliberal pressures by individualising accountability for overcoming structural exclusion.

In summary, both SWDDs and SWNDDs identified ‘future career’ as a key influencing factor, yet the sociological meaning differs. For SWNDDs, career aspirations are framed within assumed progression; for SWDDs, they constitute strategic responses to anticipated disadvantage.

The closer proportional representation of disabled people within HE than in the labour market may partly reflect the longer history of WP initiatives, which date back to the Robbins Report, compared with relatively recent disability equality legislation. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) introduced the requirement for reasonable adjustments in employment and education, although its cost-related limitations were later removed by the Disability Discrimination Act (2005). Subsequent legislation, including the Equality Act (2010), strengthened protections against discrimination. Nevertheless, concerns remain that employers may perceive disabled applicants as costly due to required adjustments (Scope, n.d.).

This study found no statistical association between disability status and mode of study, suggesting that the decision to go to university for SWDDs is not determined solely by employment configuration; rather, it is shaped by university context and the individual student’s approach.

Career-focused decision-making when going to university reflects constrained agency within unequal structures, with the promise of employability often operating as a neoliberal fiction that obscures systemic barriers while privileging individual investment over collective reform.

8.2.6.2 Location of UniA

The qualitative interview data indicated that SWDDs were more than twice as likely to have relocated compared with SWNDDs. This contrasts with the literature, e.g. Riddell et al. (2024), which suggests that SWDDs are less likely to move away from home to study. Both the questionnaire and interview data indicated a relatively high proportion of mature students, suggesting that age may influence the decision-making process of moving away from home differently than it does for younger counterparts. Indeed, table 7.25 showed that nearly two-thirds of interviewees commuted to or lived locally to UniA, suggesting that age-related factors such as prior employment, family responsibilities, and housing stability may outweigh disability status in shaping where participants reside.

These findings also develop in a different direction from the argument developed by Forber-Pratt et al. (2017), who suggest that students with invisible disabilities tend to behave more similarly to non-disabled peers than those with visible disabilities. In contrast, this study found

that three-quarters of SWDDs who relocated had visible disabilities, indicating that visibility of impairment did not necessarily constrain mobility (section 9.4). UniA context may partially explain this trend. As a post-1992 university, UniA is likely to attract a higher proportion of non-traditional students (Hoskins, 2023), potentially reducing observable differences in commuting habits between SWDDs and SWNDDs. Furthermore, compliance with the Equality Act 2010 may have increased the feasibility of independent study by providing reasonable adjustments, enabling more disabled students to attend university.

Age appears to be a particularly significant determinant. Mature students constituted two-thirds of interview participants, suggesting that residential decisions may be more strongly shaped by life-stage than by disability status alone. In the context of the UK's ageing population (ONS, 2023) and the increased likelihood of disability with age (ONS, 2020), universities may encounter an increasing number of mature entrants seeking career change or upskilling. This aligns with the lifelong learning agenda outlined by Fryer (1997), whereby individuals return to education in response to labour-market or health-related transitions. Strategically, this trend may present an opportunity for universities to differentiate themselves within the competitive HE sector by developing accommodation and support structures tailored to mature students and those with caring responsibilities.

8.2.6.3 Open Days

Open days are considered separately from broader marketing activities because they were the only marketing-related factor in which a significant association and difference emerged between SWDDs and SWNDDs. Within the literature, open days are widely recognised as influential in shaping both the decision to participate in HE and choosing a specific university (Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; Winter, 2018). The growing prominence of open days can also be linked to WP initiatives, as they provide prospective students, particularly those from non-traditional or first-generation backgrounds, with access to information and experiential knowledge that may not be available within their familial habitus. In this sense, open days serve as a mechanism for bridging gaps in informational and cultural capital.

Consistent with this interpretation, the questionnaire data revealed statistically significant relationships between disability status and three of the four questions on open days and marketing, and qualitative interviews also indicated discernible differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs. One plausible explanation is that SWDDs may place greater value on physically visiting campuses to assess accessibility, facilities, and support services prior to enrolment. For these students, the open day experience may serve not only as a source of information but

also as a means of evaluating the feasibility of studying at a particular university. In contrast, some SWNDDs may be less dependent on this form of pre-enrolment verification and therefore were less influenced by open day attendance.

Another explanation relates to differential messaging within students' social networks. SWDDs may receive both general encouragements to attend open days through school/college information and more targeted encouragement from parents and teachers who are aware of their additional needs. By contrast, some SWNDDs reported that open days were less influential because their university choice had already been predetermined by individualised contact from their course leader, which held greater salience (e.g., Interviewee 11). From a policy perspective, this may suggest that WP-associated messaging about the benefits of open days is being effectively communicated to SWDDs but may be less important for SWNDDs, suggesting that university marketing strategies could benefit from encouraging broader engagement among the latter group.

Interestingly, while no statistical relationship was identified between disability status and attendance at *any* university open day, a significant relationship was observed for attendance at an open day, specifically at UniA, and the extent to which that visit influenced the decision to enroll there. Location (section 8.3.2.3.2) was the second most frequently selected reason for SWDDs choosing UniA (after course), compared with the third most common factor among SWNDDs.

In summary, open days represent an important WP mechanism because they enable prospective students to experience university environments first-hand. For individuals from families without prior experience of HE, this exposure can compensate for the absence of informational resources within the familial habitus. Consequently, open days can play a critical role in reducing informational asymmetries and facilitating more informed HE participation decisions among prospective students.

8.2.6.4 Career and Course

Career prospects and course selection are intrinsically linked, as decisions about a future career shape the courses some prospective students choose (Lami and Mele, 2014). The expansion of the HE sector was partly driven by a shortfall in appropriately skilled workers, prompting New Labour's 50% participation target and contributing to the massification of HE in response to technological change within a post-industrial economy (Maringe and Fuller, 2007). To achieve this target, policies such as WP sought to engage non-traditional students, who constitute a significant proportion of the UK population. These initiatives enabled access to an increasingly professionalised labour market in which employers demand graduate-level skills,

while universities have simultaneously faced pressure to deliver courses associated with strong employability outcomes (Polianskaya, 2018, cited in Mogaji and Yoon, 2019). This instrumental view of HE is reflected in Interviewee 05's comment that they chose their course to 'start [their] journey through to becoming a [names career].

Quantitative and Qualitative findings from this study indicate no relationship between disability status and the level of influence that career aspirations or course choice had on participants' decision-making. Alongside the attainment of the HE participation target among 18–30-year-olds, this may suggest a weakening of social reproduction among non-traditional students. Participation in HE can represent a difference from familial habitus, as illustrated by Interviewee 08, a first-generation interviewee who attended UniA to escape poverty and pursue improved career prospects (section 7.5.6.3)

Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a useful framework for interpreting these findings. Habitus is not static but evolves in response to external influences and changing social contexts (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). Furthermore, it may shift depending on the field in which individuals are positioned (Hilgers and Mangez, 2014). Entry into HE therefore has the potential to reshape aspirations and future career pathways, particularly for students from non-traditional backgrounds. This finding aligns with Basit's (2012) argument that many young people attend university to secure a desired career, reflecting the role of aspirational capital. In accordance with this view, nearly three-quarters of the interviewees in this study inferred that the university was a pathway to employment rather than a means to an end. However, the specificity of some degree programmes may constrain long-term flexibility. Interviewee 14 expressed regret that their course was overly specialised, while Kandiko and Mawer (2013) suggest that the benefits of a degree may not always justify the financial and time costs of completing it. Consequently, courses that offer broader career trajectories may offer advantages by signalling transferable skills to employers in an uncertain labour market, as suggested by Interviewee 11.

Previous research has suggested that disabled young people may face additional challenges when making educational and career decisions. Shah (2005), cited in Abbott (2010), argues that reliance on parental decision-making can limit the development of independent career planning. However, this study did not find differences between SWDDs and SWNDDs in the importance attributed to a future career. Additional factors may also shape employment outcomes; some SWDDs may prioritise continued study, either due to financial considerations associated with student status, e.g., Interviewee 06 or a preference for independent learning, such as Interviewee 04. Others may return to education following unsuccessful job applications to enhance their employability, e.g., Interviewee 15. Such perceptions of labour market barriers are consistent with Burchardt's (2005) finding that almost one-third of young disabled people believe their disability may negatively affect their employment prospects. However, this study

does not support the conclusions of Shah (2005) or Burchardt (2005) regarding a direct association between disability status and a future career. Increased awareness of initiatives such as Access to Work could further mitigate perceived barriers by providing financial support for workplace adjustments, thereby improving the attractiveness of disabled graduates to go to university and ultimately pursue careers.

Overall, WP policies have enabled greater access to HE for non-traditional students and have contributed to expanding aspirations for professional employment. Among interviewees who expected university to lead to improved career prospects, three-quarters were young SWDDs. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that further efforts are needed to encourage all students to pursue graduate-level employment, as only around one-quarter of interviewees explicitly discussed applying for graduate roles. While participation in HE among disabled students has increased, some SWDDs continue to perceive barriers to employment. This indicates a need for clearer dissemination of information on support during employment, including access to work. Strengthening awareness of such initiatives may facilitate smoother transitions from HE to graduate employment, contributing to a more inclusive labour market that benefits individuals, society, and the wider economy.

8.2.7 Influencers on Participation

8.2.7.1 Parents

Parental influence on HE participation varies according to family background, parental education, and disability status. Parents may actively encourage university attendance either to cultivate aspirational capital in their children or because they recognise the benefits of HE from their own experience (Basit, 2012). In this way, parental expectations can reinforce children's ambitions and contribute to the intergenerational transmission of aspirational capital (Basit, 2012; Andrew et al., 2021).

Across all data collection rounds, parents emerged as key influencers, particularly among SWNDDs. Research suggests that parental involvement typically reduces as individuals gain independence in adulthood (Lackman and Lanasa, 1993). This trend was evident in Interviewee 06, a SWDD aged 35–44, who reported no parental influence on their decision to attend university.

Educational decision-making was rarely shaped by a single component. Instead, participants frequently drew on multiple sources of advice, suggesting that decisions were formed through a process of social consultation. From an RC perspective, individuals weigh the costs against

the benefits (Lahno, 2007), an example regarding going to university is the time taken to complete the degree, while a benefit is obtaining a better job.

The predominance of first-generation students in this study also complicates traditional accounts of social reproduction. While Bourdieusian theory suggests that HE participation is often reproduced within families possessing cultural capital, many participants entered university without parental experience of HE. This pattern likely reflects the expansion and massification of HE since the 1990s, alongside WP policies that have broadened access. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this may represent a form of hysteresis, in which a time lag occurs between the social environment and people's dispositions.

Differences between SWDD and SWNDDs may also reflect variation in parental expectations. Parents of non-disabled children tend to hold more conventional academic aspirations, whereas parents of disabled children hold lower expectations of educational attainment (Chatzitheochari and Platt, 2018). As a result, some disabled students may seek advice from people outside their familial habitus, including medical professionals, social workers, and specialist support staff who guide accessibility and support arrangements (Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). Interviewees 03 and 05, for instance, highlighted the importance of advice from people outside their familial habitus in their decision-making when Interviewee 03 said,

“I first heard about [UniA] from actually my college lecturers they had gone to [UniA] and they have had all of the experience ... they recommended it “.

As a result, SWDDs may rely less exclusively on parental guidance than SWNDDs.

These findings have implications for WP policy. While parental encouragement appears to support university participation among non-disabled students, greater efforts may be needed to ensure that parents of disabled students are aware of HE opportunities and available support (Scope, n.d.). Strengthening parental awareness may enhance their capacity to support informed educational decision-making concerning going to university.

Expanding participation among both disabled and non-disabled students also has broader social benefits. HE participation is associated with improved labour market outcomes, reduced likelihood of criminal activity, and positive intergenerational educational effects (BIS, 2013). At the macro level, WP has contributed to economic growth; between 1994 and 2005, over one-third of the increase in UK labour productivity was attributed to the expansion of HE and the growth of the graduate workforce (Holland et al., 2013). Therefore, it can be posited that going to university has many benefits for society.

Within this study, the higher proportion of second-generation SWNDD respondents may partly explain the statistically significant association identified in the questionnaire data, as these students were more likely to receive direct guidance from parents with university experience.

8.2.7.2 Siblings

Interview data revealed a clear difference in the roles siblings play in the decision to go to university. Most SWNDD interviewees described siblings as influential in their decision to attend university, whereas no SWNDD interviewees reported siblings as having similar influence.

Siblings may provide an important source of experiential knowledge, particularly for first-generation students whose parents lack experience of HE. In such cases, siblings who have attended university can act as a role model, shaping educational aspirations and normalising university participation within the family (McHale, Updegraff, and Whiteman, 2012). Interviewee 11, for example, described having a brother who had previously attended university as “a massive help”.

The absence of similar accounts among SWDD interviewees may reflect several factors. Disabled individuals are statistically more likely to be only children, meaning that siblings have no influence (ONS, 2023). In addition, the extent of sibling influence often depends on the quality of sibling relationships (McHale, Updegraff, and Whiteman, 2012).

Differences in lived experience may also limit the perceived relevance of sibling advice. Disabled students may feel that non-disabled siblings cannot fully understand the additional barriers associated with studying at university with a disability, such as accessibility needs or health management (Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). Consequently, sibling guidance may carry less weight in their decision-making.

Overall, siblings can transmit aspirational capital by modelling educational success and shaping expectations about HE. However, within this study, such influence was evident only among SWNDD interviewees, highlighting how family dynamics interact with disability status to shape pathways into HE.

8.2.7.3 Teachers

Teachers influence prospective students’ decisions to attend university by providing information that enables informed choices (Moogan, Baron and Harris, 1999; Ryan et al., 2019). WP policies have extended this influence on non-traditional students, promoting inclusive access across diverse groups.

This study found that teachers exerted similar influence on SWDDs and SWNDDs in the quantitative data, suggesting inclusive practices within schools and colleges. However, qualitative interviews indicated that SWDDs were encouraged more by teachers than SWNDDs (section 7.5.6.2). This may reflect the legacy of the Dearing Report (1997) (section 3.2.6), which advocated proactive guidance for all academically adept pupils, potentially resulting in positive discrimination toward underrepresented groups. Such teacher-driven influence of HE has contributed to the broader societal norm of university attendance, reinforced by successive policy frameworks, including the Robbins Report (1963) and the massification policies of the 1990s (section 3.2.1.1).

The greater teacher influence for SWDDs may also be explained by lower parental academic expectations for disabled children compared with non-disabled children (Chatzitheochari and Platt, 2018). Consequently, SWDDs may rely more on teachers as external sources of guidance, enabling them to transcend familial habitus and, in some cases, become first-generation students. This pathway illustrates how teachers can help students challenge social reproduction.

The prevalence of SWDDs in HE also reflects broader shifts away from the medical model of disability toward the social model, supported by legislation such as the Equality Act (2010), which mandates inclusive practices in education (section 3.2.12). Several interviewees cited teacher encouragement as pivotal in their decision to attend university, indicating that inclusive policies are effectively shaping HE access.

Finally, New Labour's 50% participation target and WP initiatives aimed not only at students but also at their influencers, including teachers, highlight the strategic role of educators in widening access. Nevertheless, the type of university promoted pre- or post-1992 may still reflect local school demographics and socio-economic context (Boliver, 2013).

8.2.8 Conclusion

This theme has demonstrated that participation in HE is not a singular or purely rational decision but a complex, socially embedded process of social norms, individual choice, and subjectivity. Focusing on the most noteworthy subthemes, these being: choice, age participation, expectations, influencing factors, and key influencers. The findings of this study show that students navigate HE through forms of bounded autonomy, navigated by disability status, the age at which the individual decides to attend university, and how they inherit or accrue different forms of capital. The analysis of choice of university established that decisions to enter HE are best understood through a multi-theoretical lens, combining Bourdieusian concepts of habitus and capital with HCT, RCT, and SET. While economic models frame

participation as investment-driven, the findings reveal that decisions are socially bound by design, particularly within the context of WP and massification. Although these policies have expanded access and normalised university attendance, they operate as forms of conditional inclusion, where participation remains shaped by pre-existing inequalities.

The importance of the age at which the individual decided to enter HE highlights how HE is temporally differentiated. Mature students, particularly SWDDs, engage with HE as a form of strategic realignment, often in response to labour market disruption, health changes, or caring responsibilities. In contrast, SWNDDs more frequently frame HE participation through aspirational development. This demonstrates that participation is not uniform but contingent on whether the prospective student is in life, e.g., a mature student returning to HE to gain qualifications and accrue social and cultural capital to enter a new career, reinforcing the significance of lifelong learning within an ageing population.

The subtheme 'what I have always expected to do' illustrates how expectations of HE are socially constructed and normalised through policy and educational environments. The prominence of first-generation students suggests a partial disruption of social reproduction; however, rather than its decline, this reflects a reconfiguration of habitus shaped by WP initiatives and the massification of the sector. Importantly, for SWDDs, despite aspirations that persist, they must adapt to fit around structural constraints, thereby challenging deficit-oriented models of disability.

Key influencing factors, particularly career and course, reveal that while influences to attend HE are broadly similar across both groups, aspirations persist, yet are actively reconfigured in response to disability type, i.e., visible or invisible. For SWNDDs, career progression is often assumed, whereas for SWDDs it is a strategic response to anticipated labour market disadvantage. This highlights how employability operates within a context of structural inequality, where students, especially SWDDs, deploy aspirational capital to navigate uncertain outcomes.

Overall, the findings position open days as a differentiated but strategically significant mechanism within the remit of why students go to university, operating less as a universal influence and more as a targeted form of asset acquisition for SWDDs. Their heightened importance for these students reflects both practical considerations, such as assessing accessibility, and structural inequalities in access to information. The contrast with SWNDDs, who may rely more on pre-existing networks or personalised academic contact, emphasises the uneven distribution of decision-making supports. Consequently, while open days appear effective in mitigating informational asymmetries for SWDDs, their more limited importance among SWNDDs suggests a need for more diversified engagement strategies. This highlights

the importance of aligning institutional outreach with the distinct informational needs and decision-making pathways of different student groups.

Finally, influencers, particularly teachers and parents, demonstrate that participation decisions are socially mediated rather than individually determined. Teachers play a crucial role in molding HE as a pathway, especially for SWDDs who may have lower parental expectations or limited familial experience regarding attending university. This underscores the continued importance of institutional agents in both enabling access and challenging social reproduction. Overall, this theme shows that HE participation is intersectionally structured and differentially experienced. While WP and massification have broadened access, they have not eliminated inequality, instead shifting responsibility onto individuals to navigate structural barriers. Consequently, student choice should be understood not as a discrete decision but as a negotiated process shaped by life circumstances, social context, and university conditions, with particularly distinct implications for SWDDs.

8.3 Expectations of students prior to entering HE

8.3.1 Introduction

Expectations of HE are not formed at the point of entry but are produced through a complex interplay of socio-cultural narratives, policy frameworks, institutional representations, and individual trajectories. Prospective students construct anticipatory understandings of university life through prior educational experiences, WP initiatives, family influence, and exposure to institutional marketing. Collectively, these influences position HE as both a site of personal transformation and a mechanism for socio-economic mobility (Reay et al., 2005). As such, expectations are neither neutral nor purely individual but are socially produced, reflecting dominant assumptions about what HE is, and who it is for.

Within contemporary policy contexts, these expectations are increasingly shaped by market-oriented discourses that frame participation in HE as a matter of individual aspiration, choice, and investment. The expansion of HE, alongside the introduction of tuition fees, has contributed to the construction of students as self-regulating actors responsible for navigating institutional options and maximising returns on their educational investment (Brown, 2015). In this sense, expectations are frequently aligned with the logics of HCT and RCT, which conceptualise participation as the outcome of rational decision-making oriented towards future economic gain. However, such frameworks are analytically limited. They reduce expectations to calculative processes of cost–benefit analysis and overlook the ways in which anticipatory orientations are

shaped by unequal access to resources, information, and institutional familiarity. Moreover, they assume a level of agency and foresight that is not equally available to all students.

While Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital offer a more sociologically grounded account of how expectations are patterned by prior socialisation, they too are insufficient in fully accounting for the dynamics observed here. Bourdieu's framework privileges the reproduction of inequality through internalised dispositions, yet it underplays the active role of institutions and policy discourses in producing and circulating particular expectations of HE in the present. Institutions are oriented around normative assumptions that shape who can readily imagine themselves as belonging, suggesting that expectations are not only inherited but also institutionally structured and differentially enabled.

Consequently, expectations of HE are better understood as relational, contingent, and institutionally mediated rather than as purely rational calculations or products of embodied dispositions. This perspective foregrounds how anticipatory understandings are shaped through the interaction between individual positioning and structural conditions, highlighting how expectations themselves may reproduce, but also reveal, underlying inequalities in access to and participation within HE.

8.3.2 General Expectations

Expectations of HE prior to entry are shaped by personal aspirations, societal narratives, university marketing, and policy agendas such as WP. These influences create complex, sometimes contradictory expectations, reflecting both the transformative potential of HE and its role as a pathway to employment. This inevitably creates a conundrum for students pursuing HE with the intrinsic desire to acquire cultural capital through a qualification, versus those entering HE for future employment. Disabled and non-disabled students often hold different expectations. This study found that students with invisible disabilities may struggle with disclosure due to stigma, weighing pros and cons before revealing their condition, e.g. Interviewee 03 who suggested that they struggled for some time before disclosing their disability and agrees with Grimes, Southgate, Scevak, and Buchanan (2018; section 9.4). Misunderstandings about entitlement to support can exacerbate anxiety. Eccles et al. (2018) highlighted that some students were unaware they were entitled to additional support, and that clearer questions should be asked during enrolment. Ryan (2018) concludes that universities need to do more to minimise anxiety stemming from the fear of stigmatisation.

University accommodation is an area where many students have clear expectations. Marketing portrays it as a steppingstone to independence and social integration, yet disabled students may anticipate additional administrative and social scrutiny, unlike non-disabled peers who

experience a more straightforward process. Assumptions about modern facilities, safety, and vibrant social spaces reflect idealised expectations, sometimes obscuring the practical challenges of relocation.

According to the OfS (2025b), disabled students are entitled to reasonable adjustments, formalised through a learning support agreement or plan, which all academic and support staff are required to implement. The type of disability may also determine eligibility for DSA, which can be accessed via Student Finance England. The availability of such support mechanisms reflects the institutional responsibility to mitigate barriers to learning and ensure equitable access to HE.

Support services within universities play a critical role in shaping the student experience, providing both academic guidance and pastoral care. These services, encompassing disability support, mental health provision, and academic skills, not only facilitate compliance with statutory obligations but also influence student retention, engagement, and satisfaction. By embedding personalised support within the academic journey, institutions can help students navigate the complexities of HE and align their expectations with achievable outcomes. This study agrees with the findings from Money et al. (2017)

HE is widely conceptualised as a vehicle for social mobility, with students often expecting that university attendance will secure access to high-skilled employment (Bathmaker et al., 2016). Such instrumental influencing factors are tempered by labour market realities, including saturation in specific graduate sectors. The introduction of tuition fees has further reshaped these dynamic, reframing students as consumers of education rather than passive recipients (LaVigne, 2019). Consequently, expectations are no longer solely academic but also transactional, encompassing value for financial investment.

Beyond instrumental outcomes, students anticipate substantial personal growth, including independence, identity development, and engagement in social activities (section 4.2.3). University marketing, media representations, and societal discourse collectively construct a normative image of the student experience as both academically enriching and socially expansive. Prospective students, therefore, enter HE with assumptions of forming friendships, participating in diverse social events (LaVigne, 2019), and achieving a sense of belonging within the institutional community (Pedler, Willis, and Nieuwoudt, 2021). Interviewees 02, 03 and 11 all came to UniA with this in mind. Thus, suggesting the expectations of making is a reason why students go to university.

These expectations constitute a framework through which prospective students interpret their initial experiences in HE. Understanding and managing these anticipatory constructs is essential for universities to facilitate successful transitions, mitigate dissonance between expectation and reality, and support both academic and psychosocial development.

8.3.3 General expectations of the course and career at university

Expectations of HE among disabled and non-disabled students intersect around core developmental and instrumental goals: intellectual growth, acquisition of knowledge, and the enhancement of future career prospects. This study found that both groups anticipate that their courses will provide subject-specific expertise, opportunities for placement, and access to professional networks, e.g. Interviewee 03. These expectations align with established understandings of HE as a mechanism for expanding career pathways and enhancing employability (Balloo, Pauli, and Worrell, 2015). Moreover, university participation serves as a site for the accumulation of both cultural and social capital; credentials confer legitimacy and status, while engagement with peers and industry actors facilitates network building (Bourdieu, 1997).

Despite this shared framework, important differences emerged in how these expectations are constructed and experienced. For SWDDs, expectations are moderated by university culture and the extent to which inclusion is actioned. Anticipatory concerns frequently centre on whether academic staff will recognise and implement learning support agreements, and whether physical and digital infrastructures will enable full participation. In contrast, non-disabled students often take such inclusion for granted. This distinction reflects a fundamental asymmetry, whereas non-disabled students assume access, disabled students must actively seek and secure it.

Administrative processes further exemplify this disparity. Disabled students are required to engage in additional bureaucratic labour, such as applying for DSA, to obtain equitable learning conditions (Weale, 2022). As Interviewee 02 noted, the protracted nature of this process stands in stark contrast to the experiences of their non-disabled peers. This requirement introduces temporal and emotional burdens that shape students' engagement with their course from the outset.

Differences are also evident in expectations regarding post-university trajectories. Non-disabled students frequently envisage a relatively linear transition into employment, contingent primarily on academic performance. Despite disabled people understanding that there is a discrepancy between the proportion of the disability employability rate (Department for Work and Pensions, 2023). Some SWDDs articulated a more complex and uncertain outlook, shaped by prior experiences of discrimination and anticipated barriers within the labour market. For instance, Interviewee 05 highlighted the difficulty of securing employment in environments perceived as accommodating, while Interviewee 15's experience of dismissal from an apprenticeship due to disability had a lasting impact on confidence and future aspirations. These accounts illustrate how past encounters with exclusion can recalibrate expectations,

leading to heightened caution in career planning and were a reason why Interviewee 15 continued into post-graduate education.

Consequently, some disabled students engage in a form of cost-benefit analysis (Redmond, 2005), when considering their futures, weighing the potential risks of discrimination, the implications of disclosing a disability, and the adequacy of workplace adjustments. For certain individuals, this extends to ambivalence towards entering or re-entering the workforce, whether due to a desire to retain benefits or a preference for the relative security of educational environments. This is not simply a binary distinction between optimism and pessimism; rather, it reflects the need for disabled students to navigate intersecting structural constraints while pursuing academic and professional ambitions.

Nevertheless, both SWDDs and SWNDDs expressed a shared desire for independence, belonging, and personal achievement. The difference lies in the additional structural and institutional barriers that disabled students must negotiate to realise these goals. This underscores the critical role of universities in shaping not only academic experiences but also future labour market outcomes.

Embedding inclusion within course design, rather than treating it as a retrospective adjustment, is central to addressing these disparities. When disabled individuals are actively involved in curricula design and engagement with industry networks, the perceived gap between aspiration and attainment can be reduced. Such practices have the potential to transform disabled students' employment expectations from uncertain to attainable, thereby fostering a more equitable educational and professional landscape.

8.3.3.1 Expectations of the course and career at UniA

Expectations surrounding course engagement and obtaining future careers constitute a central motivation for participation in HE. As noted by Balloo, Pauli, and Worrell, anticipated employability outcomes are a key driver of university enrolment. However, such expectations are not uniform; rather, they are multi-layered, shaped by prior educational trajectories, social positioning, and disciplinary pathways. While SWDDs and SWNDDs in this study articulate broadly, similar aspirations centered on knowledge acquisition, progression, and career advancement, their accounts reveal significant difference in how these expectations are formed, negotiated and realised.

A dominant theme among non-disabled interviewees is the assumption of a linear educational and occupational trajectory: entry into HE, successful course competition, and transition into graduate employment. This narrative reflects an underlying confidence in institutional accessibility and labour market integration. Disruptions to this trajectory, such as those caused

by the COVID-19 pandemic, are framed as external and contingent rather than structural. For instance, Interviewee 14's account

"My grad job got cancelled because of COVID,"

which then led to an unplanned continuation into postgraduate study, indicating adaptability within an otherwise stable expectation framework. Similarly, Interviewee 01's description of themselves as a 'low risk' entrant beginning with a short certificate course suggests that engagement with HE can be exploratory, underpinned by an implicit assumption of institutional inclusivity. The absence of anticipated barriers enables a perception of HE as both accessible and reversible.

Contrary to this, disabled students' expectations are characterised by a heightened reflexivity, shaped by the need to evaluate institutional inclusivity prior to and during engagement. Course expectations extend beyond curriculum content to encompass accessibility, support structures, and the responsiveness of academic staff. Interviewee 15 arranged an interview with their course leader regarding what would and would not be accessible illustrates the necessity of assessing institutional capacity for inclusion. This aligns with the social model of disability, wherein exclusion is produced through environmental and organisational barriers rather than individual impairment. Consequently, disabled students' expectations are not solely aspirational but also precautionary, reflecting an awareness of potential exclusion embedded within institutional practices.

Pathways into HE further complicates these expectations. Several disabled students describe undertaking foundation or access courses as transitional mechanisms. While initially perceived as indicative of a deficit, Interviewee 10 associated a foundation year with not being 'clever enough.' Retrospective accounts reframe these experiences as enabling progression and academic confidence. This temporal shift in perception highlights how expectations evolve through engagement with supportive structures. Moreover, the role of WP initiatives and educational intermediaries is significant; expectations are co-constructed through institutional encouragement rather than being entirely self-determined. Interviewee 10's account of lecturers actively promoting progression to university underscores the relational dimension of expectation formation.

Differences also emerge in the degree of agency perceived in course selection. Non-disabled students frequently frame their choices in terms of personal interest or professional development, suggesting alignment between aspiration and opportunity. By contrast, disabled students often articulate constrained choice, shaped by anticipated or experienced inaccessibility within particular fields. Interviewee 15's account of being unable to pursue a desired course due to their disability, instead selecting the 'nearest' alternative, illustrates how structural barriers recalibrate both educational and occupational aspirations. This dynamic

reflects how broader assumptions about societal and professional inaccessibility can pre-emptively narrow career trajectories.

For some disabled students, career expectations are further reoriented towards socially driven goals rather than the accumulation of economic capital (sections 4.2.1.3; 4.3.2.3.3) Interviewee 05's aspiration to address stigma within clinical contexts, inspired by personal diagnostic experiences, exemplifies this shift. HE is conceptualised as a means of contributing to social change rather than solely facilitating labour market entry. This perspective aligns with the social model of disability (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare, 2010), which foregrounds structural transformation, in contrast to the individualising tendencies of the medical model (Kasser and Lytle, 2005).

Expectations are also shaped by social networks and normative influences. Family, peers, and broader societal expectations contribute to the construction of career aspirations; however, when mediated through disability, these expectations may be attenuated (Chatzitheochari and Platt, 2018). Variability in familial support further complicates this landscape. For example, Interviewee 04's limited familial encouragement contrasts with Interviewee 13E's recognition of postgraduate study as a pathway to higher earnings, albeit tempered by practical considerations such as parenting responsibilities. These accounts illustrate the intersection of disability with other social roles, producing complex negotiations between aspiration and feasibility.

Disabled students' expectations of their course are closely linked to experiences of inclusion and belonging. Positive evaluations of teaching quality and peer interaction, such as those described by Interviewee 0E, demonstrate the significance of relatively small but intentional practices such as establishing communication networks in fostering inclusive learning environments. The reference to a simple WhatsApp group as instrumental in building community emphasises how inclusion can be embedded through low-cost, anticipatory design, consistent with the principles of the Equality Act (2010). Such practices contrast with institutional cultures that marginalize disabled students, instead illustrating how belonging can be actively constructed. Interviewee 07E's reflection on not feeling like 'one in a massive her' highlights the extent to which inclusive pedagogical approaches can meet, and potentially exceed, expectations of participation and recognition.

Overall, expectations of course and career at UniA are shaped by a complex interplay of structural conditions, institutional practices, and individual experiences. While non-disabled students tend to operate within a framework of assumed accessibility and linear progression, disabled students engage in a more negotiated and contingent process, balancing aspiration and societal barriers. This highlights the importance of embedding inclusive practices within HE,

not only to support participation but also to expand the horizon of what students perceive as attainable.

8.3.4 General expectations of university accommodation

University accommodation is framed by a narrative constructed through marketing, societal discourse, and media representations, which shape general expectations regarding its operation. The Equality Act 2010 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016; section 3.2.12) mandates reasonable adjustments to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, can access accommodation equitably, removing structural and procedural barriers (Scope, n.d). Disabled students anticipate that the design of facilities, such as bathrooms and kitchens, will accommodate a heterogeneous student population rather than merely fulfilling legal compliance.

While all prospective students engage with application processes, disabled students face additional administrative and emotional labour. Disclosure of disability, provision of medical evidence, and negotiation with accommodation departments to secure reasonable adjustments create burdens absent for non-disabled peers (Disability Rights UK, 2025; Getzel and Thoma, 2008). Although universities are expected to facilitate these processes, there remains an implicit reliance on students to navigate most of the administrative requirements. This dynamic emphasises that the university's responsibility is to ensure inclusive policies for implementing them, as well as for individuals taking responsibility for disclosing their disability to the appropriate departments. Therefore, expectations of university accommodation operate at two levels: structural and student-centered. Accommodation infrastructure is often designed primarily for non-disabled students or those with invisible disabilities. For students with visible or mobility-related impairments, such as interviewees 05 and 15 who highlighted the difficulty of navigating "heavy doors," the failure to provide accessible environments constitutes a significant barrier, undermining the equity principles enshrined in the Equality Act (2010). Beyond individual reasonable adjustments, universities are implicitly expected to maintain organisational capacity, accountability, and a culturally embedded commitment to inclusive education. While evidence suggests opportunities for disabled students have expanded (Zhou, 2024), persistent structural and procedural barriers indicate that institutional rhetoric frequently outpaces practical implementation, reinforcing disparities in access and engagement.

8.3.4.1 Expectations of UniA's accommodation

The data reveal a marked difference between SWDDs and SWNDD expectations of UniA's accommodation, shaped by considerations of safety, autonomy, and the built environment. SWNDDs generally assume that accommodation design meets their needs, prioritising aesthetics, social spaces, and modern facilities, as illustrated by Interviewee 14, who highlighted the superior quality of recently refurbished halls. In contrast, SWDDs' expectations extend beyond normative design to encompass accessibility, risk mitigation, and institutional accountability, reflecting the compounded challenges they navigate daily (Brown and Leigh, 2020).

Disabled students' experiences expose structural and procedural shortcomings. Interviewee 15, for example, articulated a preference for on-campus living contingent on improvements to accessibility, noting how barriers such as inadequately marked ovens compromise independence and safety. Such deficiencies directly undermine the principles of equity outlined in the Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act, 2010) and demonstrate that compliance-focused design is insufficient for genuine inclusivity (Scope, no date a). Similarly, Interviewee 03 linked inadequate accommodation provision to the management of mental health, emphasising how space and autonomy are integral to wellbeing.

The research highlights that SWDDs must perform additional administrative and emotional labour, including disclosure of disability and negotiation for reasonable adjustments, whereas SWNDDs face no (Disability Rights UK, 2025; Getzel and Thoma, 2008). This aligns with literature, e.g., Bass (1999), Shakespeare (2013), and TASO (n.d.), indicating that SWDDs develop adaptive strategies by self-advocating because of certain environments that routinely fail to meet their needs. Safety emerges as a critical differentiator. SWNDDs, safety is often assumed; for SWDDs, past experiences shape heightened vigilance, as Interviewee 15E emphasised,

"There was no kind of assessment criteria to make sure that when you move in, everything is going to be safe for you... There needs to be way more to make sure that people are going to keep themselves safe."

Based on the quote from Interviewee 15E, it highlights a significant gap in ensuring personal safety, emphasising that there is currently no formal assessment or set of criteria to guarantee that environments are safe for all students when they move in. It underscores the need for individualised consideration, as generic measures fail to address the unique vulnerabilities and needs of each person. Interviewee 15E stresses that proactive, preventive measures are essential, suggesting that both systemic safeguards and guidance for individuals are necessary to maintain safety. Overall, the statement reflects frustration with existing practices and calls

for stronger, more structured protocols to protect people and empower them to keep themselves safe.

Accessibility deficits extend to fundamental living facilities, including bathrooms, kitchens, and tactile signage, which impede disabled students' autonomy and daily functioning (Jackson, 2018; Lindsay et al., 2024). Interviewee 15's experience with unmarked hobs underscores the limitations of reactive accommodations and the expectation that students self-advocate to resolve hazards; a practice inconsistent with UCAS guidance on reasonable adjustments (UCAS, n.d.).

Ultimately, these findings suggest that the concept of "student expectations" is not homogeneous. While SWNDDs' unmet expectations typically result in minor inconvenience or dissatisfaction, SWDDs' unmet expectations can compromise independence, safety, and equitable participation. As Whitburn and Riffo-Salgado (2025) argue, accessibility must be a prerequisite for inclusion, not an optional enhancement. Accommodation, therefore, functions as a site where institutional structures either facilitate or constrain identity negotiation, emotional well-being, and self-directed living.

8.3.5 General expectations of university support services

Expectations of university support services vary considerably, but they cannot be reduced solely to disability status. While disability is an important structuring factor, expectations are more accurately understood as socially and institutionally produced through prior educational experiences, policy environments, and individual interpretations of responsibility and entitlement (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Fuller et al., 2009). Consequently, expectations emerge relationally rather than as fixed attributes of particular student groups.

For disabled students, expectations are often shaped by prior engagement with formalised support systems in compulsory education, including the Equality Act 2010 (section 3.2.12). These experiences may foster an assumption of continuity in support provision across educational transitions (Hubble and Bolton, 2021). However, this assumption should not be overstated. Research indicates that transitions into HE frequently involve a shift from structured, institution-led provision to models requiring greater individual responsibility and self-disclosure (Madriaga et al., 2016). As such, expectations of continuity may reflect not entitlement alone but a misalignment between policy discourse and institutional practice. While policy frameworks and WP agendas position support as a right, it is important to critically interrogate this claim. A purely rights-based interpretation risks overlooking how access to support is mediated by institutional processes, resource constraints, and student capacity to navigate complex systems (Goodley, 2014). In this sense, expectations are not simply

“systemically grounded” but are contingent and unevenly realised. In contrast, non-disabled students are often characterised as having limited expectations of support due to a lack of prior engagement. However, this distinction can be overstated. Many non-disabled students interact with support structures (e.g. pastoral care, academic guidance) before HE, and their expectations are also shaped by institutional narratives and socio-cultural norms (Briggs et al., 2012). The framing of support as “supplementary” reflects dominant discourses of independence within HE rather than an absence of expectation per se.

These differing orientations are frequently interpreted through individualistic frameworks such as RCT or HCT, which suggest that students engage with support services based on calculated costs and benefits. However, such approaches are limited in explaining the complexity of student expectations. They assume rational, informed decision-making and overlook structural inequalities, institutional opacity, and emotional dimensions such as anxiety and uncertainty. Similarly, SET frames support as a transactional relationship, yet this fails to account for the normative and rights-based expectations expressed by many disabled students.

From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital offer some insight into how prior experiences shape expectations. However, even this framework has limitations. While habitus may explain the internalization of expectations based on previous institutional environments, it risks reproducing deficit interpretations of disabled students by positioning them as misaligned with HE norms. This overlooks the possibility that institutional structures themselves are exclusionary and require adaption.

Expectations surrounding independence and self-advocacy further illustrate these tensions. Disabled students are often expected to take on increased responsibility for navigating support systems, yet this expectation reflects institutional design rather than inherent student capacity (Brown and Leigh, 2018). The framing of independence as a universal norm marginalizes those who require more coordinated or anticipatory support. Conversely, non-disabled students may appear to embody institutional ideals of autonomy, but this is partly because systems are already aligned with their needs, rendering support invisible rather than unnecessary.

Jalal, (2013) and Wilson and Martin (2017) suggest that support services play a role in university decision-making, particularly for disabled students. However, the claim that disabled students hold more “specific and concrete” expectations should be treated cautiously. While some students articulate detailed expectations regarding accessibility, others report uncertainty or lack of awareness, particularly where information is unclear or inaccessible (Gibson, 2012). Anticipatory anxiety, often noted among disabled students, reflects not only prior experiences of inconsistent support but also the broader uncertainty embedded within HE transitions.

In contrast, non-disabled students are often described as having generalized expectations focused on academic and social judgement. Yet this distinction risks oversimplification. Their

expectations are underpinned by an implicit alignment between institutional structures and their needs, which reduces the necessity of engaging explicitly with support services. This alignment should not be interpreted as absence of need but rather as an effect of normative institutional design. Overall, differences in expectations do not simply reflect individual characteristics but highlight structural inequalities in how support is conceptualised and delivered. Rather than framing disabled students as uniquely “dependent” on support, it is more accurate to recognise that all students rely on institutional infrastructures, albeit in different ways. This challenges dominant assumptions embedded in theories such as HCT and RCT, which privilege individual agency over structural conditions.

These findings underline the importance of clear institutional communication, transparency, and proactive engagement strategies. Aligning expectations with practice requires not only informing students about available services but also critically examining how support systems are structured, accessed, and experienced. Without such alignment, disparities in ‘student experience’ are likely to persist.

8.3.5.1 Expectations of UniA’s support services

Expectations of support services at UniA are shaped through an interplay of prior educational experiences, institutional communication, and ongoing engagement with support systems. These expectations are neither fixed nor homogeneous but evolve in response to lived experiences within the university context. For some disabled students, particularly those transitioning from specialist educational settings, expectations are informed by prior exposure to intensive, individualised, and proactive support. Interviewee 15E’s account reflects a perceived absence of visibility in UniA’s provision, where disability support appeared limited to an initial administrative interaction. This perception highlights a shift from embedded, anticipatory support to a model reliant on student initiation. Rather than indicating a failure of expectation, this may point to a structural transformation in how support is organised within HE. Other accounts frame support in more functional terms. Interviewee 02’s emphasis on deadline extensions suggests an understanding of support discrete and outcome oriented. This aligns with broader institutional tendencies to operationalise support through individual adjustments rather than systemic change. However, these framing risks reinforcing a deficit model, where support is seen as compensatory rather than enabling full participation.

Conversely, positive expectations were evident where institutional communication was clear. Interviewee 05’s engagement during open days contributed to a perception of transparency and integration, demonstrating the role of experiences prior to enrolment in shaping expectations (Briggs et al., 2012). In such cases, support is not perceived as an add-on but as

embedded within the academic environment. Importantly, expectations are subject to change. Interviewee 03's experience illustrates how institutional restructuring can disrupt previously positive perceptions of support (section 7.5.7.1.1). The shift towards more generalised wellbeing services may reflect broader sectoral pressures, including financial constraints and post-pandemic restructuring. However, this transition raises critical questions about the sustainability of specialist provision and the potential dilution of disability-focused support.

These passages suggest that expectations of UniA are relational and contingent. Where support is visible, coordinated, and embedded, expectations are more likely to align with positive experiences. Where provision appears fragmented, expectations are challenged, reinforcing perceptions of conditional accessibility. This variability cannot be fully explained through individual-level theories such as RCT or SET which overlook institutional complexity. Instead, expectations should be understood as co-produced through interactions between students and institutional structures. Ultimately, the findings highlight the importance of coherence, continuity, and transparency in support provision. Universities must move beyond reactive models of support towards more integrated approaches that reduce reliance on individual self-advocacy. Doing so is critical not only for meeting expectations but for shaping equitable and inclusive student experiences.

8.3.6 General Expectations of the student experience

According to the data, SWDDs and SWNDDs had disparate expectations regarding the 'student experience' prior to enrolment. Similar expectations arose from societal norms, while the differences stem from previous educational experiences and their conceptions of autonomy, belonging, and institutional responsibility. These expectations indicate larger socio-educational narratives about what university life is supposed to represent and for whom it is intended; they are not just personal preferences. However, first-generation students had fewer expectations, partly due to people within their habitus having not attended university; as they did not inherit as much capital.

Mogaji and Yoon (2019) suggest that 'student experience' is a crucial part of university marketing strategy. HE structural norms impacted the expectations that both disabled and non-disabled students have of their time at university, and the disruptions caused by COVID-19 further adjusted these expectations. Before the pandemic, disabled students frequently arrived at university with an increased understanding of potential obstacles, expecting the need to negotiate access within systems that were traditionally built around normative ideas of what it meant to be a student. UCAS (n.d.) indicates that in one academic year, the number of students disclosing a mental health condition rose by 63.6% and 125% since 2019. Borkin (2021)

claimed that COVID-19 had an adverse effect on disabled students because they had anticipated a 'normal' transition to university. As a result, disabled students often anticipate that their participation in HE will be contingent upon the institution's capacity to offer prompt, dependable, and fair accommodations. In comparison, non-disabled students usually expect a much smoother transition to university life. The prevailing cultural perspectives that portray HE as a place of independence, immersion, and opportunity impact their expectations (Thomas, 2011). Non-disabled students typically view support services as supplemental rather than necessary because they have little experience navigating official systems of support and believe that social and academic involvement will happen naturally.

Many disabled students view their educational experience through the prisms of accessibility, continuity, and contingent participation. Their expectations are frequently impacted by past interactions with support systems, whether they are highly structured or supplied inconsistently. As a result, they perceive university life as dependent on the quality of the accommodations and services that are offered to them. Disabled students often view the educational experience as a privilege that needs to be facilitated rather than taken for granted. They frequently anticipate that involvement would necessitate negotiating bureaucratic procedures, learning environments, physical spaces, and human relationships.

This analysis found similarities between disabled and non-disabled students regarding social belonging; they also wanted to integrate socially within the university; as shown by Interviewee 02, who stated,

"I expected to feel like I belonged to [UniA] ... that's what I was told by my lecturers."

Some people envision the 'student experience' as an environment that offers empowerment and camaraderie, while others feel overwhelmed with anxiety about being understood, fitting in, or fully participating without stigma. Interviewee 02 inferred from their body language that they were anxious when discussing their student experience. In contrast, non-disabled students, usually assume that social integration happens naturally through common interests, accommodations, and general student life. They seldom consider the possibility that participation may be caused by structural hurdles or unfair treatment.

Overall, disabled and non-disabled students have quite different ideas about what a university education will involve. University is supposed to be a place of independence, development, and mostly unbroken engagement for non-disabled students. While the same is true for disabled students, it is dependent on how accessible the environments and processes they come across are. These differences in expectations demonstrate the long-lasting impact of cultural narratives and physical accessibility on students' anticipatory orientations, suggesting that the 'student experience' is not the same for both groups or universal construct but rather one that

is greatly influenced by the intersection of institutional design, disability, and societal assumptions about who universities are intended to serve.

8.3.6.1 Expectations of the UniA student experience

Across the dataset, both disabled and non-disabled students articulated expectations of university life centered on social integration, personal development, and engagement beyond the formal curriculum. These expectations are often framed within dominant HE narratives that construct the 'student experience' as inherently transformative, emphasising identity formation, independence, and social mobility. However, such accounts risk overstating the universality of these experiences and underplaying the extent to which they are structured by institutional and social inequalities.

Narratives from SWNDD interviewees frequently assume the accessibility of these opportunities. For instance, Interviewee 11 described university as a new expansive possibility, highlighting the ability to 'join clubs', meet new people, and have access to a variety of experiences. This reflects a normative construction of HE participation aligned with policy and institutional discourses that frame engagement as a matter of individual influence and choice. Such assumptions closely mirror the logic of HCT and RCT, which posit that students act as rational agents maximising benefits through participation. However, these frameworks are insufficient here. They neglect how participation is not simply a matter of individual decision-making but is shaped by unequal access to resources, support, and inclusive environments. Institutions themselves are not neutral spaces but are constrained by particular bodies and norms, making participation easier for some than others.

Similarly, while Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus are often used to explain differential engagement, they do not fully account for the immediacy of institutional barriers described here. Bourdieu's framework tends to emphasise the reproduction of inequality through internalised dispositions, yet the data suggest that exclusion is not only reproduced culturally but actively produced through organisational practices such as unclear governance, inconsistent rules, and inadequate support structures. In this sense, institutional design rather than solely embodied capital plays a more direct role in shaping access to the student experience.

Disabled students' accounts illustrate this more explicitly. Interviewee 03's experience of joining and leaving multiple student groups demonstrates that participation is contingent on the clarity and stability of institutional environments. The absence of clear guidelines and conflict resolution mechanisms within Students' Union spaces contributed to disengagement, with the assertion that 'there needs to be clearer rules' emphasising the importance of structured governance. This challenges SET, which assumes that individuals withdraw from interactions based on calculated costs and rewards. Instead, withdrawal here reflects not a rational

calculation but an uneven distribution of institutional risk, where ambiguity disproportionately affects those already navigating accessibility challenges.

The findings of this study suggest that SWDDs often depend more heavily on structured, transparent systems to facilitate engagement. Where such systems are absent, the burden of navigating uncertainty intensifies, increasing the likelihood of disengagement. This aligns with critiques within disability studies that emphasise the role of disabling environments rather than individual deficits (Oliver, 1990). From this perspective, exclusion from the 'student experience' is not incidental but produced through the Students' Union structure that fail to account for diverse needs.

The emotional and spatial dimensions of university life further complicate these expectations. Interviewee 02's description of accommodation as "just kind of lonely" highlights the disjuncture between anticipated and lived experiences of belonging. While loneliness is a widespread phenomenon in HE (HEPI, 2025), its implications are uneven. For disabled students, anticipated barriers to social integration may heighten the impact of unmet expectations, particularly in environments lacking structured opportunities for interaction. This challenges the assumption implicit in both institutional narratives and theories.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that expectations of the student experience at UniA are shaped by dominant cultural narratives but realised unevenly in practice. Non-disabled students are more likely to assume continuity and accessibility, reflecting institutional discourses that obscure structural constraints. Disabled students, by contrast, approach these expectations more cautiously, recognising the potential for organisational and interpersonal barriers. This difference highlighted that the student experience is not a neutral or universally accessible construct. Rather than being adequately explained by Bourdieu's reproduction thesis or economic models such as HCT and RCT, the data point to the need for a more institutionally grounded and relational understanding one that foregrounds how governance, clarity, and inclusive design actively produce (or inhibit) participation.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has advanced a critical, theoretically grounded analysis of the influences student choice and expectations within HE, demonstrating that it is neither a singular act of individual choice nor a wholly determined outcome of structural forces. Rather, participation emerges as a relational, intersectional, and temporally situated process, shaped through the interaction of social position, institutional conditions, and policy frameworks. By synthesising the key themes of intersectionality, the multifaceted and conditional nature of choice, the reconfiguration of habitus, and the social reproduction of expectations, this chapter argues that HE participation

is best understood as a negotiated practice, in which agency is exercised within, and often constrained by, unequal structures.

A central contribution of this analysis lies in foregrounding intersectionality as a critical lens for understanding participation. The findings demonstrate that disability status does not operate as an isolated variable but intersects with age, SES, familial background, and life-course positioning to produce differentiated pathways into HE. These intersections are not merely additive but mutually constitutive, shaping both the opportunities available to individuals and the meanings they attach to students attending HE. For example, mature SWDDs frequently engage with HE as a form of strategic change, prompted by a deterioration in their health, or a change in their personal circumstances. In contrast, younger SWNDDs are more likely to experience HE as a normative progression embedded within dominant educational trajectories. This difference highlights how participation is structured by unequal starting points and differentiated constraints, reinforcing the need to move beyond homogenised rationale of 'the student body toward a more nuanced understanding of how multiple identities shape educational engagement.

Within this intersectional framework, the concept of choice emerges as fundamentally multifaceted and conditional. While dominant policy, e.g. WP and economic discourses frame participation as the outcome of rational, effective decision-making when going to university, the findings of this study challenge this assumption by demonstrating that choice is deeply embedded within social relations and institutional contexts. Drawing on Bourdieusian theory alongside HCT, RCT, and SET, the analysis reveals that decision-making regarding going to university cannot be reduced to calculative processes of analysing the costs against the perceived benefits. Instead, it reflects a complex negotiation between perceived opportunities, structural constraints, and socially conditioned dispositions.

Importantly, the expansion of HE through WP initiatives and massification has not transformed choice into an unbounded freedom. Rather, it has produced a form of conditional choice, in which access is widened but remains contingent upon the possession and mobilisation of specific forms of capital. Students are required to navigate institutional systems, interpret information, and align their aspirations with perceived opportunities, often without equal access to the resources necessary to do so effectively. For SWDDs in particular, choice is further constrained by considerations of accessibility, health, and anticipated discrimination within both educational and employment contexts. As such, participation decisions reflect bounded autonomy, where individuals exercise agency within limits imposed by structural inequality.

This conditionality also underscores the importance of habitus and its reconfiguration within contemporary HE landscapes. While Bourdieu's concept of habitus traditionally emphasises the reproduction of social inequalities through internalised dispositions, the findings of this

study suggest a more dynamic process. The prevalence of first-generation students indicates that participation in HE increasingly involves a disruption or transformation of inherited habitus, rather than its straightforward reproduction. Exposure to WP initiatives, educational messaging, and institutional outreach enables individuals to develop aspirations that may not align with their familial or social backgrounds. In this sense, habitus is not static but responsive to shifting structural conditions, reflecting what may be understood as a process of reorientation or recalibration.

However, this reconfiguration is neither consistent nor unrestrained. For many participants within this study, particularly SWDDs, aligning aspirations with institutional realities involves ongoing negotiation and adaptation. Structural barriers within HE, including issues of accessibility, disclosure, and support provision, can produce forms of symbolic violence when institutional practices fail to accommodate diverse needs. Consequently, the reconfiguration of habitus is not simply an emancipatory process but one that is shaped by tensions between aspiration and feasibility. Students must continuously adjust their expectations and strategies in response to institutional feedback, highlighting the iterative and contingent nature of educational trajectories.

The theme of expectations further extends this analysis by illustrating how anticipatory orientations toward HE is socially and institutionally produced. Expectations are not formed in isolation but emerge through the interplay of policy discourses, previous educational experiences, and familial influences. The normalisation of HE participation, driven by WP and massification, has embedded university attendance within dominant cultural narratives as a desirable and often expected pathway. However, the findings reveal that these expectations are differentially constructed and experienced, reflecting underlying inequalities in access to information, resources, and institutional familiarity.

For SWNDDs, expectations often align with dominant narratives of linear progression, personal development, and seamless transition into graduate employment. These assumptions reflect an implicit alignment between individual trajectories and institutional structures, enabling participation to be taken for granted. In contrast, SWDDs frequently articulate more complex and contingent expectations, shaped by prior experiences of exclusion and the need to assess institutional inclusivity. Their anticipatory orientations extend beyond academic outcomes to encompass accessibility, support systems, and the practicalities of navigating university environments. This distinction highlights a fundamental asymmetry: while non-disabled students can assume access, disabled students must actively review and evaluate it.

Expectations also operate as a mechanism through which broader structural inequalities are both reproduced and contested. However, they reflect dominant discourses that position HE as a vehicle for social mobility (Bathmaker et al., 2015) and economic advancement, often

aligned with neoliberal framings of individual responsibility. However, they reveal the limits of these narratives, as students encounter discrepancies between anticipated and actual experiences. For SWDDs, unmet expectations can have profound implications, affecting not only academic outcomes but also experiences of belonging, independence, and well-being. This underscores the importance of understanding expectations as relational and contingent, rather than fixed or purely individual constructs.

Across these themes, the findings highlight the enduring influence of policy frameworks, particularly WP and massification, in shaping participation. These interventions have undoubtedly expanded access and diversified the student population, contributing to a broader cultural shift in which HE is increasingly viewed as attainable. However, they have also introduced new forms of stratification, as institutions compete within marketised environments and students view themselves as consumers (LaVigne, 2019) responsible for maximising their educational investment. This market-oriented context reinforces the conditional nature of participation, as individuals must navigate complex systems and make strategic decisions within unequal conditions.

Crucially, the analysis demonstrates that participation in HE cannot be fully understood through any single theoretical framework. While economic models provide insight into the instrumental dimensions of decision-making, they overlook the social and cultural factors that shape aspirations and opportunities. Similarly, while Bourdieusian theory offers a powerful account of how inequality is reproduced, it requires adaptation to account for the dynamic and policy-driven transformations observed in contemporary HE. By integrating multiple perspectives, this chapter has developed a more comprehensive understanding of participation as a multi-layered and context-dependent process.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that student choice within HE is characterised by complexity, contingency, and inequality. Intersectionality shapes who participate and how; choice is multifaceted and conditional rather than freely determined; habitus is reconfigured in response to changing structural conditions; and expectations are socially produced and differentially realised. Overall, these insights challenge simplistic narratives of meritocracy and individual agency, highlighting the need for more nuanced and equitable approaches to understanding and supporting student participation.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that while access to HE has expanded, the conditions under which participation occurs remain uneven. Addressing these disparities requires not only continued policy intervention but also a critical re-examination of institutional practices and assumptions. By recognising participation as a negotiated and intersectionally structured process, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities underpinning

contemporary HE and provides a foundation for developing more inclusive and responsive educational systems.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter synthesises the principal findings of this research, drawing together the theoretical, empirical, and methodological strands developed throughout the thesis. The study set out to explore the factors influencing the choices made by university SWDDs and SWNDDs, and to examine whether their expectations of HE was met within the context of a single institutional case study i.e. UniA. In doing so, it responds to a recognised gap within the literature, where student choice, student expectations, and disability have often been examined in isolation rather than as interconnected processes.

The significance of this research is situated within the broader transformation of HE in the UK characterised by expansion, massification, and marketisation. Since the Robbins Report (1963) (section 3.2.1.1), HE has evolved from an elite to a mass system (Trow, 1974) with WP policies seeking to diversify the student population and increase access for underrepresented groups. However, while such policies have expanded opportunities, they have also intensified competition between institutions and reinforced the positioning of students as active decision-makers navigating a complex marketplace (Maringe and Fuller, 2007; Boliver et al., 2017). Within this context, understanding how students make decisions about participation and institutional choice is critical, particularly for some groups such as SWDDs, who have historically been underrepresented within HE discourse.

This study contributes to this field by offering a comparative analysis between SWDDs and SWNDDs. Rather than adopting a deficit-based perspective, the research situates disability within a broader framework of student decision-making, recognising that disability is only one component of identity (Riddell and Weedon, 2014). This approach aligns with critiques of homogenous representations of disabled students and supports a more nuanced understanding of how identity, context, and structural factors intersect to shape educational choices. The research was guided by a set of interrelated questions exploring why students choose to attend university, how they select a specific institution, the role of influencers and influencing factors, and whether expectations differ between SWDDs and SWNDDs, as well as whether these expectations were ultimately met. To address these questions, a MMR approach (section 6.5) was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative data within an SED (section 6.5.3). This approach is widely recognised as effective for investigating complex social phenomena, enabling researchers to capture both breadth and depth of understanding (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011). As argued by Mertens (2015), MMR is particularly suited to educational research contexts where multifaceted issues require integrated analytical approaches.

A central finding of this study is the predominance of similarity over difference between SWDDs and SWNDDs in their decision-making processes. Both groups were influenced by a shared set of factors, including career prospects, course and the location of UniA. This finding challenges assumptions within the literature that disability status fundamentally alters decision-making behaviour. Instead, it suggests that broader structural and socio-cultural influences may play a more significant role. For instance, the importance of career prospects reflects the instrumental view of HE as a pathway to employment, consistent with previous research highlighting the relationship between the course and future career outcomes (Maringe and Fuller, 2007; Lami and Mele, 2014).

However, while similarities dominate, noteworthy differences were identified in how decisions are made and which factors are prioritised. SWDDs were more likely to engage directly with university environments through open days, reflecting a need to assess accessibility and support provision on offer. This finding highlights the role of informational resources in decision-making and supports the argument that open days can reduce informational asymmetric, particularly for students lacking prior exposure to HE (Maringe and Fuller, 2007).

In contrast, SWNDDs were more likely to report parental influence, aligning with Basit's (2012) assertion that family background and aspirational capital play a crucial role in shaping educational trajectories. The role of social influence within decision-making can be further understood through SET (section 4.2.4), which conceptualises decision-making as a process of weighing costs against the perceived benefits (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2007). Within this framework, attending university involves evaluating the potential returns, such as improved career prospects, against associated costs such as tuition fees. This study demonstrates how such evaluations are mediated by social relationships, including parents, peers, and educational professionals (sections 7.2.2; 7.5.6.2 7.5.6.3; 7.5.6.3.1), reinforcing the notion that decision-making is both individual and a social norm.

In addition to social influences, the findings highlight the importance of habitus in shaping student choices. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus (section 4.2.1.1) can be understood as a system of dispositions that influence how individuals perceive and respond to opportunities (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014; Hilgers and Mangez, 2014). Participation in HE has the potential to disrupt and transform habitus, particularly for students from non-traditional backgrounds, enabling new aspirations and trajectories. This was evident in the study, where some participants viewed university as a means of escaping socio-economic disadvantage and accessing improved life chances (section 7.5.6.3). Age (section 7.2.1) also emerged as a significant factor influencing decision-making, often outweighing disability status. This finding reinforces the importance of considering student heterogeneity beyond binary classifications and aligns with critiques of reductionist approaches within HE research. As noted in the

findings, mature students often demonstrated greater independence in their decision-making, with reduced reliance on parental influence, consistent with existing literature on life-course transitions (Lackman and Lanasa, 1993).

The research further highlights the complexity of disability as a category, challenging the notion of singular disabled 'student experience'. Variations in disability type, visibility, and disclosure were found to influence both decision-making processes and university experiences. This supports the argument that disability should be understood as a dynamic and context-dependent construct, shaped by both individual and societal factors (Riddell and Weedon, 2014; Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). In particular, the findings suggest that non-disclosure may limit access to support services, thereby influencing students' expectations and experiences in ways that are not always captured within institutional frameworks. Expectations emerged as a critical dimension of the study, revealing both alignment and dissonance between anticipated and actual experiences. While many expectations relating to academic provision and career outcomes were met, gaps were identified in areas such as accommodation, support services, and aspects of the broader 'student experience'. These findings reflect wider concerns within the literature regarding the discrepancy between institutional representations and lived experiences, particularly within a marketised HE environment.

The conceptual framework developed in this study, represented through the 'Hand' model, provides a valuable lens for understanding these findings. By conceptualizing decision-making as an interconnected process involving multiple influencing factors, the framework captures the complexity and fluidity of student choice. This aligns with Maxwell's (1996) assertion that conceptual frameworks (section 5.3) are essential for understanding relationships between key variables, as well as Moseholm and Feters' (2017) view that visual representations can enhance the interpretation of complex phenomena. The integration of Bourdieu's theory within this framework further strengthens its explanatory power, positioning social capital (section 4.2.1.2.2) cultural capital (section 4.2.1.2.1) and student choice (section 4.3) as central to the decision-making process.

This chapter builds upon these insights by first articulating the study's contribution to knowledge before addressing the research aims and objectives. It then outlines recommendations for future research, reflects on the limitations of the study, and concludes with a synthesis of its broader implications for theory, policy, and practice within HE. In doing so, this chapter moves beyond a simple summary of findings to provide a critical reflection on the significance of the research within contemporary debates around access, equity, and 'student experience in HE. It emphasises the need for more nuanced and inclusive approaches that recognise the diversity of student experiences while challenging assumptions about difference. Ultimately, this

research contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to reframe HE as a space that is not only inclusive but also responsive to the varied needs and aspirations of all students.

9.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a substantive and original contribution to knowledge within the field of HE, particularly in relation to student choice, disability, and the intersection between pre-entry decision-making and post-entry experience. While existing literature has examined these areas independently, this research advances understanding by integrating them within a single analytical framework, thereby addressing a significant gap in the academic discourse.

9.2.1 Integration of student choice, expectations and experience

A significant contribution of this study lies in its integration of student choice, expectations, and lived experience within a single analytical framework. Existing research within HE has traditionally examined these dimensions in isolation. Studies on student choice have largely focused on decision-making processes prior to university entry, often framed through economic or sociological models (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006), while research on student experience has tended to concentrate on satisfaction, retention, and outcomes once students are enrolled (Thomas, 2012). This separation has resulted in a fragmented understanding of the student journey, limiting the ability to capture how early decisions shape later experiences fully. This study addresses this gap by explicitly linking pre-enrolment decision-making with interviewees' experiences after they enroll, demonstrating that the two are not discrete stages but part of a continuous and interconnected process. The findings show that expectations formed during the decision-making phase, shaped by sources such as open days, institutional marketing, and social networks, play a critical role in how students interpret and evaluate their subsequent university experiences. Where expectations are met, students report a sense of alignment and satisfaction; where discrepancies occur, this can lead to disillusionment, particularly in areas such as accommodation, support services, and aspects of the wider student experience.

By establishing this connection, the research advances understanding of the temporal dimension of student experience, highlighting how perceptions evolve over time. This aligns with Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka's (2006) argument that student choice is increasingly influenced by marketing and branding within a competitive HE marketplace but extends this work by demonstrating the longer-term implications of such influences. The study shows that institutional representations not only shape initial decisions but also contribute to the formation of expectations that continue to influence student perceptions after enrolment.

Furthermore, this contribution is particularly important in the context of marketised HE, where students are positioned as consumers and universities are expected to deliver on the promises they communicate. The findings suggest that mismatches between expectations and reality are not confined to a single group but are experienced across both SWDDs and SWNDDs. This indicates that expectation management is a systemic issue rather than one limited to specific demographics. The integration of these three elements: choice, expectations and experience, also strengthens the conceptual coherence of the study. It supports the development of a more holistic student lifecycle model, where decision-making is understood as the starting point of an ongoing process rather than an isolated event. This has important implications for both theory and practice, suggesting that institutions must consider how their pre-entry engagement strategies align with the realities of the student experience they provide.

In summary, this study contributes to knowledge by bridging a critical gap in the literature, offering a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of student engagement with HE. It moves beyond static or stage-based models, instead presenting student choice and experience as interconnected processes that unfold over time.

9.2.2 Comparative Insight into Disabled and Non-disabled students

A central contribution of this research is its comparative analysis of SWDDs and SWNDDs, an area that has been relatively underexplored within HE literature. Existing research on disability in HE has predominantly focused on barriers to access, support provision, and student experiences after enrolment (Fuller et al., 2004; Madriaga et al., 2010). While valuable, such studies often position disabled students as a distinct and homogenous group, reinforcing deficit-based narratives and limiting opportunities for comparison with the broader student population. This study challenges this approach by placing SWDDs and SWNDDs within the same analytical framework, enabling a direct comparison of their decision-making processes. One of the most significant findings is that similarities between the two groups outweigh differences, particularly regarding the key components influencing university choice. Both groups prioritised career prospects, the course, and location, suggesting that the fundamental reasons for attending university are shared across student populations.

This finding makes an important contribution to existing knowledge by challenging assumptions of inherent difference. It suggests that disability status alone does not fundamentally alter the core drivers of student decision-making, thereby supporting a more inclusive understanding of student behaviour. This aligns with Riddell and Weedon's (2014) argument that disabled students should not be viewed solely through the lens of their disability, but rather as individuals with diverse identities and influences. However, the contribution of this study lies not only in

identifying similarities but also in uncovering subtle yet meaningful differences in how decisions are made. For example, SWDDs were more likely to engage directly with institutional environments through open days, reflecting a need to assess inclusion and support services. In contrast, SWNDDs were more influenced by familial networks, particularly parents and siblings, highlighting the role of social capital (section 4.2.1.2.2) in shaping decision-making (Basit, 2012). These findings demonstrate that while influencing factors may be shared, the processes through which they are navigated differ, adding nuance to existing models of student choice. This dual emphasis on similarity and difference represents a significant advancement in the literature. It moves beyond binary or deficit-based comparisons, instead offering a balanced and evidence-based perspective that recognises both commonality and diversity within the student population.

This approach contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of inclusion in HE, suggesting that policies and practices should not be based solely on assumptions of difference but should also recognise shared experiences. Furthermore, this contribution has important implications for WP initiatives. By demonstrating that SWDDs share many of the same aspirations and influences as their peers, the study reinforces the need for inclusive strategies that address the needs of all students while also accommodating specific requirements where necessary. In summary, this research contributes to knowledge by providing one of the few empirical comparisons of SWDDs and SWNDDs in relation to student choice, offering new insights that challenge dominant narratives and support a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of student decision-making in HE.

9.2.3 Extension of Bourdieusian theory to disability in HE

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by extending the application of Bourdieusian concepts habitus (section 4.2.1.1) capitals (section 4.2.1.2) and field (section 4.2.1.3) to the context of disability HE. While Bourdieu's framework has been widely used to examine issues of social class, inequality, and educational participation (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay et al., 2005), its application to disability remains relatively underdeveloped. This research addresses this gap by demonstrating how disability intersects with social and cultural structures to shape student decision-making. The findings illustrate that student choice cannot be understood solely through rational or individualistic models but must be situated within a broader social context. Habitus, as a system of dispositions shaped by past experiences and social positioning, plays a critical role in influencing how students perceive and respond to opportunities in HE (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). For example, students' career ambitions

and sense of belonging within HE are shaped by their prior experiences, family background, and exposure to educational environments.

By incorporating disability into this framework, the study demonstrates that disabled students' decision-making is influenced not only by their disability but also by their access to different forms of capital. For instance, social capital manifested through relationships with family, peers, and educators can either facilitate or constrain access to information and support. Similarly, cultural capital, such as familiarity with academic norms and expectations, influences students' ability to navigate the decision-making process. Importantly, the research shows that SWDDs often adopt strategic approaches to compensate for potential barriers, such as attending open days to assess accessibility or seeking detailed information about support services. This can be interpreted as a form of capital mobilisation, where students actively deploy available resources to mitigate structural disadvantages. This finding extends Bourdieu's theory by highlighting how individuals exercise agency within structural constraints, rather than being passively shaped by them.

The study also contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that disability is not a fixed or constantly category but is experienced differently depending on context. This aligns with Riddell and Weedon's (2014) argument that disability should be understood as a socially constructed and dynamic phenomenon. By integrating this perspective with Bourdieusian theory, the research provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding inequality in HE. Furthermore, the concept of field, the structured social space in which interactions occur, is particularly relevant in the context of HE, which operates as a competitive and stratified environment. The findings suggest that students' positions within this field are influenced by a combination of factors, including disability, socio-economic background, and prior educational experiences. This reinforces the idea that access to HE is shaped by broader structural inequalities, even within a system that promotes widening participation. In summary, this study advances theoretical understanding by extending Bourdieusian concepts to include disability as a key dimension of analysis. It demonstrates how habitus, capital, and field interact to shape student decision-making, offering a more nuanced and inclusive framework for understanding participation in HE.

9.2.4 Development of the 'Hand' Conceptual Framework

One of the most original contributions of this study is the development of the 'Hand' (section 5.3) conceptual framework, which provides a novel way of understanding student decision-making in HE. Existing models of student choice, such as those proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Perna (2006), often present decision-making as a linear or stage-based

process. While these models have been influential, they can oversimplify the complexity of real-world decision-making, particularly in relation to diverse student populations. The Hand model addresses this limitation by conceptualising decision-making as an interconnected and dynamic process, where multiple factors operate simultaneously rather than sequentially. Each 'finger' of the hand represents a different component to assist in answering the aims of this research (section 1.2.1) such as 'Choice' and 'Influencers' while the 'palm' symbolises the individual student at the centre of the decision-making process. This metaphor captures the idea that these factors are not independent but are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. This framework contributes to knowledge by providing more holistic and flexible representation of decision-making, aligning with Maxwell's (1996) assertion that conceptual frameworks should illustrate relationships between key variables. It also reflects Moseholm and Fetter's (2017) argument that visual models can enhance understanding by making complex relationships more accessible. Importantly, 'the Hand' model integrates multiple theoretical perspectives, including Bourdieusian theory, SET, and IDM, within a single framework. This interdisciplinary approach strengthens its explanatory power, enabling it to account for both individual agency and structural influences. For example, SET is reflected in the evaluation of costs and benefits, while Bourdieu's concepts are embedded to incorporate the entire hand, therefore it was moved to the blood flowing in the veins. The framework is also adaptable, allowing for the inclusion of additional factors or variations depending on context. This makes it a valuable tool not only for academic research but also for institutional practice, where understanding student decision-making is essential for effective recruitment and support strategies. In summary, 'the Hand' model represents a significant conceptual innovation, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of student choice in HE.

9.2.5 Identification of Age as a more significant factor than disability

A further important contribution of this study is the identification of age and where the prospective student is in life as more significant factors than disability status in shaping student decision-making. This finding challenges the tendency within HE research to categorise students primarily based on disability, suggesting instead that, broader demographic and experiential factors may play a more influential role. The findings demonstrate that mature students often exhibit greater independence in their decision-making, relying less on parental influence and more on personal experience. This contrasts with younger students, who are more likely to be influenced by family and social networks. This aligns with existing research

on developmental stage transitions, which emphasises the role of age and experience in shaping educational trajectories (Lackman and Lanasa, 1993).

By highlighting the importance of age, this study contributes to a more intersectional understanding of student identity, recognising that individuals cannot be fully understood through a single characteristic such as disability. Instead, decision-making is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors, including age, socio-economic background, and prior educational experiences. This finding also has important implications for policy and practice, suggesting that support strategies should be tailored not only to disability status but also to the diverse needs associated with different life stages. In summary, this contribution challenges reductive categorisations and supports a more nuanced and inclusive approach to understanding student decision-making in HE.

9.3 Addressing the aims and objectives

This section evaluates how effectively the aims and objectives of this thesis (section 1.2.1) have been achieved. Through a comparative approach, the research has successfully addressed each of these areas, providing a coherent and comprehensive understanding of student choice in HE.

The first aim was to discover why disabled and non-disabled students decided to go to university and whether there was a difference between the two groups. The findings indicate that reasons are largely shared, with both groups identifying career prospects and always expecting to go to university as key influences. This supports existing models of student choice (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006), while also demonstrates that disability does not fundamentally alter these motivations. Although minor differences in how students articulated their reasons were observed, these did not constitute a distinct difference between groups. As such, this aim has been achieved by highlighting both commonality and limited variation in reasons for deciding to go to university.

The second aim focused on understanding why students chose to attend UniA and whether this differed between disabled and non-disabled students. The research shows that institutional choice is influenced by similar factors across both groups, including course, location, and the student experience. However, the study also identified subtle differences in how these factors were evaluated. Disabled students were more likely to engage directly with the institution, for example, through open days, to assess accessibility and support provision. This suggests that while decision-making criteria are broadly consistent, the processes through which choices are made may vary. This aim has therefore been met through both confirmation and extension of existing knowledge (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

The third aim was to establish a comprehensive understanding of the influencers and influencing factors shaping students' decisions. The findings demonstrate that both disabled and non-disabled students are influenced by a combination of interpersonal and institutional factors, including family, peers, and university communications. Parental and sibling influence was particularly significant, especially among non-disabled students. However, disabled students often relied more on institutional sources to evaluate support structures. It was also found that open days were significantly more influential on disabled participants. This indicates that while key influences are shared, their relative importance differs between groups. This aim has been achieved by providing a nuanced and comparative account of influence within the decision-making process.

The final aim examined whether students' expectations differed, and whether they were met by their experience at UniA. The findings reveal that expectations were broadly similar across both groups and were shaped by engagement from UniA prior to enrolment, e.g. open days and educational professionals. However, some mismatches between expectations and lived experience were identified, particularly in relation to the wider student experience. These discrepancies were not limited to one group, suggesting systemic challenges within HE (Thomas, 2012). This aim has therefore been fulfilled through a detailed assessment of both expectation formation and outcomes.

Overall, all objectives of the study have been successfully met. The research provides a comparative and integrated understanding of student decision-making, confirming key aspects of existing literature while offering new insights into the similarities and differences between disabled and non-disabled students.

9.4 Recommendations for future research

9.4.1 Longitudinal studies of student decision-making and experience

A key recommendation for future research is the adoption of longitudinal study designs to explore how student decision-making, expectations, and experiences evolve. This study has demonstrated that decision-making is not a singular event but part of a broader, ongoing process that begins before university entry and continues throughout the student lifecycle. However, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits the ability to fully capture how participants' perceptions and experiences change over time.

Future research should therefore track students from the point of initial decision-making, through application and enrolment, and into their academic and post-graduation experiences. Such an approach would provide deeper insight into how expectations are formed, how they shift in response to lived experiences, and how these changes influence outcomes such as

satisfaction, retention, and progression. This is particularly important in relation to expectation fulfilment, which this study identified as a critical factor affecting student experience. By following the same cohort over time, researchers could examine how initial influences such as family, institutional marketing, and social networks continue to shape or diminish in importance as students progress through their studies.

Furthermore, longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in exploring the experiences of SWDDs. This study found that while influences on the decision to go to university are broadly similar across groups, differences emerge in how decisions are navigated and how expectations are evaluated. A longitudinal design would enable researchers to examine how these differences develop over time, particularly in relation to access to support, sense of belonging, and academic outcomes. In addition, such studies could incorporate key transition points, including entry into university, progression between academic years, and transition into employment. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the student journey as a dynamic and evolving process, rather than a series of discrete stages.

Overall, longitudinal research would significantly enhance understanding of student decision-making by capturing its complexity and fluidity. It would build on the findings of this study by providing deeper insight into how influencers, influencing factors, and expectations interact over time, thereby offering valuable contributions to both theory and practice in HE.

9.4.2 Expanding comparative research across multiple institutions

This study focused on a single institutional case study i.e. UniA, which provided rich, context-specific insights into student decision-making. However, a key recommendation for future research is to extend this comparative approach across multiple institutions in order to enhance the generalisability of findings. Universities differ substantially in terms of their size, reputation, location, resources, and student demographics. These variations can influence both the decision-making process and the 'student experience'. Future research should therefore examine whether the trends identified in this study, particularly the similarities and differences between disabled and non-disabled students are consistent across different institutional contexts. For example, research could compare students attending pre-1992 and post-1992 universities and specialist providers to explore how institutional approaches to accessibility and inclusion influence the choices and experiences of disabled students.

In addition, expanding the scope of research would allow for the examination of regional and cultural differences within HE systems. Factors such as local labour markets, transport infrastructure, and socio-economic conditions may influence students' decisions to attend university and their choice of institution. By incorporating multiple sites, researchers can

develop a more comprehensive understanding of how these contextual factors interact with individual decision-making processes. This recommendation is particularly important given the increasing diversity of the student population. As participation in HE continues to widen, it is essential that research reflects this diversity and avoids over-reliance on single-institution studies.

Ultimately, multi-institutional research would strengthen the evidence base by identifying patterns that are either context-specific or broadly applicable. It would build on the findings of this study by testing their relevance across different settings, thereby contributing to a more robust and generalisable understanding of student decision-making.

9.4.3 Intersectional approaches to student identity

A further recommendation for future research is the adoption of intersectional approaches to better understand the complexity of student identity and its influence on decision-making. This study identified that factors such as age may, in some cases, have a greater influence on decision-making than disability status alone. This highlights the limitations of analysing students through a single characteristic and underscores the need for more nuanced approaches. Future research should therefore examine how disability intersects with other aspects of identity, including SES status, ethnicity, gender, and age. Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how multiple identities interact to shape experiences and opportunities. This approach would build on the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Reay et al. (2005) by considering how different forms of capital are distributed and mobilised across diverse student groups.

For example, research could explore how SES status influences the ability of disabled students to access resources such as open days, campus visits, and support services. Similarly, studies could examine how cultural expectations and family dynamics shape decision-making among students from different ethnic backgrounds. An intersectional approach would also be valuable in exploring issues of equity and inclusion within HE. By recognising that students' experiences are shaped by multiple, overlapping factors, researchers can move beyond simplistic or homogenising categories and develop a more accurate representation of student diversity.

Furthermore, this approach has practical implications for policy and practice. Insights from intersectional research could inform the development of targeted support strategies that address the specific needs of different student groups, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. In summary, future research that incorporates intersectionality would provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of student decision-making. It would extend the

findings of this study by situating disability within a broader framework of identity, thereby contributing to more inclusive and equitable approaches within HE.

9.4.4 The role of digital influences and social media

Another important area for future research is the exploration of digital influences and social media in shaping student decision-making. While this study identified institutional communications and open days as key sources of information, the rapidly evolving digital landscape suggests that online platforms are playing an increasingly significant role in how students gather information and form expectations. Future studies should investigate how prospective students engage with university websites, and social media platforms when making decisions about HE. This is particularly relevant given the increasing emphasis on digital marketing within the sector (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Understanding how digital content shapes perceptions of institutions, courses, and student life would provide valuable insights into contemporary decision-making processes.

In addition, research should examine how digital platforms influence expectation formation and management. For example, curated representations of student life on social media may contribute to unrealistic expectations, which can later result in dissatisfaction. This aligns with the findings of this study, which identified mismatches between expectations and interviewees' experiences at UniA. The role of digital accessibility is also a critical consideration, particularly for disabled students. Future research could explore how accessible online information is and how this impacts the ability of students to make informed decisions. This would extend current understanding of accessibility beyond physical environments to include digital spaces. Moreover, studies could investigate differences in how disabled and non-disabled students utilise digital resources. For instance, disabled students may rely more heavily on detailed online information to assess support services, while non-disabled students may focus more on social aspects of university life.

Moreover, studies could investigate differences in how disabled and non-disabled students utilise digital resources. For instance, disabled students may rely more heavily on detailed online information to assess support services, while non-disabled students may focus more on social aspects of university life. Overall, research into digital influences would provide timely and relevant insights into the evolving nature of student decision-making. It would build on the findings of this study by incorporating contemporary modes of communication and information exchange, thereby enhancing understanding of how students navigate the increasingly digitalised HE landscape.

9.5 Evaluation of institutional support and policy effectiveness

The final recommendation for future research is to examine the effectiveness of institutional support systems and policies, particularly in relation to disabled students. While this study identified that support provision is a consideration in decision-making, it did not evaluate the effectiveness of these services in practice. Future research should therefore investigate how well institutional support structures meet the needs of students, and whether they contribute to positive academic and social outcomes. This could include an evaluation of services such as disability support, academic accommodations, and well-being provision.

Such research would be particularly valuable in assessing whether the expectations identified in this study are being met. By examining the alignment between promised and delivered support, researchers can identify gaps and areas for improvement. This aligns with Thomas (2012), who emphasises the importance of institutional practices in shaping 'student experience' and success. In addition, future studies could explore how institutional policies are implemented and experienced by students. This would provide insight into the lived reality of policy, moving beyond formal documentation to consider how policies operate in practice.

Comparative research across universities would also be beneficial in identifying best practices and areas of innovation. By examining different approaches to support provision, researchers can contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive strategies. Furthermore, this area of research has significant implications for policy development at both institutional and sector levels. Findings could inform the design of more responsive and student-centered support systems, ultimately enhancing the overall student experience.

In conclusion, evaluating institutional support and policy effectiveness would build on the findings of this study by addressing an important gap in the literature. It would provide valuable insights into how universities can better support diverse student populations, thereby contributing to improved outcomes and greater inclusivity.

9.6 Limitations and Reflections

As with all empirical research, this study is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged to situate its findings alongside existing literature. Engaging critically with these limitations does not diminish the value of the research; rather, it strengthens the credibility of the claims and demonstrates the researcher's reflexive awareness.

9.6.1 Impact of COVID-19

Conducting this research during a global pandemic introduced a range of practical, methodological, and personal challenges that fundamentally shaped the study's trajectory. The instability and uncertainty generated by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated repeated departures from previously carefully planned procedures. The requirement to adapt research decisions at short notice was initially unsettling and, at times, destabilising. However, this enforced flexibility became a formative element of my doctoral development, contributing to a more reflexive and responsive research practice.

The original research design was premised on predominantly face-to-face engagement. The questionnaire was intended to be administered through Qualtrics but distributed on campus via QR codes displayed at the Welcome Fair at the beginning of the academic year, facilitating opportunistic recruitment through direct interaction with students. In addition, approval had been secured to recruit disabled students through the university's wellbeing and disability support service, whose manager had agreed to circulate a study invitation on my behalf. The introduction of a national lockdown on 23 March 2020 necessitated an immediate and substantial reconfiguration of these arrangements. Data collection shifted entirely to remote modalities, with participant recruitment conducted through social media platforms, online circulation, and subsequently, informal recruitment within university accommodation. This represented a significant departure from the initially envisaged place-based and relational recruitment strategy.

Similar adaptations were required across both phases of the interview study. In-person interviews had been planned to support rapport-building and deepen engagement. Instead, all interviews were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams. This shift altered the interactional dynamics of the interviews: non-verbal cues were less accessible, silences were experienced differently, and the conventional rhythms of face-to-face qualitative interviewing were disrupted. Nonetheless, these constraints did not preclude the production of rich and meaningful data. In some instances, participants appeared more willing to engage openly from the familiarity and perceived safety of their own environments.

In retrospect, the disruptions generated by the pandemic became integral to the research process rather than obstacles to overcome. They required a more flexible, pragmatic methodological stance than initially anticipated, foregrounding the importance of responsiveness to context as a core component of qualitative research practice. Ultimately, these challenges strengthened the study by fostering methodological creativity, sharpening sensitivity to contextual influences, and deepening my understanding of the inherent contingencies of doctoral research.

While this context presented a limitation, it also reflects the realities of contemporary HE and highlights the adaptability of student decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. The findings, therefore, offer insight into how students negotiate choice in times of disruption, a consideration that may remain relevant in an increasingly volatile sector.

9.6.2 Sample size and Representation

A second limitation relates to the sample size and composition of the study. While the research successfully included both SWDDs and SWNDDs, the number of respondents was necessarily limited due to the qualitative nature of the study. Although this allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences, it may not fully capture the diversity within each group.

In particular, the category of disability is highly heterogeneous, encompassing a wide range of physical, sensory, learning, and mental health conditions. Each of these may shape student decision-making in different ways. The study, however, did not disaggregate findings based on specific types of disability, meaning that nuanced differences within the SWDD group may not have been fully explored. As a result, the findings present a more generalised understanding of disabled students, which may overlook important variations in experience.

Similarly, other aspects of student identity, such as socio-economic background, ethnicity, and prior educational experience, were not the primary focus of this research. These factors may intersect with disability and influence decision-making in complex ways. The limited representation of these intersecting identities further constrains the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Despite these limitations, the sample was sufficient to achieve data saturation within the scope of the study, ensuring that key themes and patterns were identified. However, the findings should be interpreted as illustrative rather than exhaustive. Future research could address this limitation by adopting a larger and more diverse sample, potentially incorporating quantitative elements to complement qualitative insights. This would enable a more detailed examination of variation within and between student groups, thereby enhancing the robustness and inclusivity of the findings.

9.6.3 Reliance on Self-Reported Data

The reliance on self-reported data represents another limitation of this study. Respondents were asked to reflect on their decision-making processes, influences, and expectations, often retrospectively. While this approach provides valuable insight into students' decision-making influences and expectations, it is inherently subject to issues of recall bias and subjective

interpretation. Participants may not accurately remember the factors that influenced their decisions, particularly if these decisions were made several years before the study. In some cases, individuals may reconstruct their narratives in ways that align with their current experiences or perspectives. For example, a student who is satisfied with their university experience may retrospectively emphasise positive aspects of their decision-making process, while a dissatisfied student may focus on perceived shortcomings.

Additionally, self-reported data is influenced by social desirability bias, where participants may present their decisions in a way that is perceived as rational or socially acceptable. This is particularly relevant in the context of HE, where attending university is often associated with notions of success and aspirations. As a result, participants may underreport uncertainty or external pressures that influenced their choices. Despite these challenges, self-reported data remains a valuable tool in qualitative research, particularly when exploring subjective experiences and meanings. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations through the use of semi-structured interviews, which allowed for probing and clarification of responses.

Nevertheless, future research could strengthen findings by incorporating triangulation, such as combining self-reported data with institutional records, or longitudinal tracking. This would provide a more comprehensive and objective understanding of student decision-making processes.

9.6.4 Cross-sectional research design

This study employed a cross-sectional research design, collecting data at a single point in time. While this approach was effective in capturing participants' reflections on their decision-making processes and experiences, it limits the ability to examine how these evolve. Student decision-making is inherently dynamic, influenced by changing intrinsic and extrinsic circumstances, experiences, and perspectives. The cross-sectional nature of this study means that it captures a snapshot rather than a continuous narrative. As a result, it is not possible to fully understand how initial influences and expectations develop, adapt, or diminish throughout the student journey. For example, the study identified that expectations are formed prior to university entry and may not always align with lived experience. However, without longitudinal data, it is difficult to assess how students respond to these discrepancies over time, or how their perceptions of their decisions change as they progress through their studies. This limitation is particularly relevant in relation to SWDDs whose experiences may evolve as they engage with support services and navigate different aspects of university life. A longitudinal approach would provide deeper insight into these processes, capturing transitions and changes that cannot be observed within a single time frame.

Despite this limitation, the cross-sectional design was appropriate for the scope of this research, providing a detailed exploration of participants' perspectives at a particular moment. However, future research would benefit from adopting longitudinal methodologies, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the temporal dimensions of student decision-making and experience.

9.6.5 Scope and conceptual focus

A final limitation relates to the scope of the conceptual focus adopted in this study. While the study aimed to provide a holistic understanding of student decision-making, it necessarily prioritised certain dimensions, namely why SWDDs and SWNDDs got to university, the choice of a specific university, influencers, influencing factors, and whether their expectations were met. As a result, other potentially significant factors were not explored in depth. For example, the roles of policy frameworks, institutional funding structures, and broader socio-political contexts were not central to the study. These factors can shape both institutional practices and student experiences, influencing access to HE and the availability of support services. Similarly, the impact of digital environments, such as social media and online information sources, was not examined in detail, despite their growing importance in contemporary decision-making processes.

In addition, while the study drew on theoretical frameworks such as Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field, there is scope for further theoretical integration. Alternative perspectives, such as intersectionality or critical disability theory, could provide additional layers of analysis and deepen understanding of the complexities involved. This limitation reflects the need to balance depth and breadth within a single study. While it is not possible to address all relevant factors within one thesis, acknowledging these omissions highlights opportunities for future research. Overall, while the conceptual focus of this study provided a strong foundation for analysis, expanding this scope in future work would enable a more comprehensive exploration of the structural and contextual influences shaping student decision-making.

9.6.6 Reflections

Reflecting on the research process, this thesis represents a significant intellectual and methodological journey. One of the most important reflections concerns the value of adopting a comparative approach. By examining the experiences of both disabled and non-disabled students within the same framework, the study was able to challenge assumptions of difference

and highlight areas of similarity. This not only contributed to the findings but also influenced the researcher's own understanding of inclusion within HE.

A further reflection relates to the complexity of student decision-making. At the outset of the research, decision-making may have appeared as a relatively linear process; however, the findings revealed it to be far more dynamic, interconnected, and context dependent. This reinforced the importance of adopting flexible and iterative research methods, allowing themes to emerge organically rather than being constrained by predetermined models. The development of the conceptual framework within this thesis also represents a key point of reflection. Translating complex qualitative data into a coherent and meaningful model required careful consideration and ongoing refinement. This process highlighted the importance of balancing theoretical insight with empirical evidence, ensuring that the framework remained grounded in participants' experiences while contributing to broader academic discourse.

Reflexivity played a central role throughout the research. As with all qualitative studies, the researcher's perspectives and experiences inevitably shaped the research process, from the formulation of questions to the interpretation of data. Maintaining an awareness of this influence was essential in ensuring that the analysis remained rigorous and transparent. At the same time, this subjectivity enabled a deeper engagement with the data, allowing for more nuanced and meaningful interpretations.

Another key reflection concerns the challenges associated with researching sensitive and potentially personal topics, particularly in relation to disability. Ensuring that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences required careful ethical consideration and the development of a respectful and supportive research environment. This emphasised the importance of ethical practice not only as a procedural requirement but as an integral aspect of high-quality research.

Finally, this research highlights the importance of ongoing inquiry. While the study has addressed its aims and objectives, it has also generated new questions and areas for exploration. This is reflective of the iterative nature of academic research, where each study contributes to a broader and continually evolving body of knowledge. In conclusion, the reflections presented here underscore both the strengths and challenges of the research process. They demonstrate a critical engagement with the study, reinforcing its credibility while acknowledging the complexities inherent in researching student decision-making in HE.

9.6.7 Concluding Remarks

This study set out to explore and critically examine the decision-making processes of disabled and non-disabled students within HE with a particular focus on the influences for going to

university, how they chose a specific university i.e., UniA, influencers, influencing factors, and whether their expectations were met. Through the adoption of a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, the research has provided both breadth and depth of understanding, combining quantitative data to identify the broad trends with qualitative insights to explain and contextualise those trends. In doing so, the study has developed a comprehensive and nuanced account of student decision-making, contributing meaningfully to both theory and practice in HE research. One of the central conclusions of this study is that disabled and non-disabled students are more similar than different in their reasons for going to university and attending a specific university. Across both groups, the top three reasons were career progression, the course, and location emerged as dominant influencing factors. These findings align with established models of student choice (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006), reinforcing the idea that perceived long-term benefits largely shape participation in HE. However, the study extends this body of knowledge by demonstrating that disability status does not fundamentally alter these core reasons. This challenges deficit-based narratives, e.g., the medical model of disability (Kasser and Lytle, 2005), often associated with disabled students, instead supporting a more inclusive understanding of student expectations that recognises shared goals and ambitions across diverse student populations.

Simultaneously, the research highlights that while the reasons may be similar, the processes through which decisions are navigated can differ in subtle but important ways. In particular, SWDDs were found to gather and engage with more information, especially in relation to accessibility and support services. This suggests that decision-making for these students involves an additional evaluative dimension, reflecting the need to assess whether the university they ultimately choose can adequately meet their individual needs. This does not indicate a fundamentally different decision-making process, but rather an adaptation of shared processes to accommodate specific considerations.

In relation to university choice, the findings confirm that course, location, and career prospects remain central factors influencing decision-making for both disabled and non-disabled students. These findings are consistent with existing literature on university choice (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), further validating the continued relevance of these factors within an increasingly marketised HE environment. However, this study contributes additional insight by demonstrating how these factors are interpreted and prioritised in practice. For example, while both groups valued open days, SWDDs often used these opportunities to assess accessibility and support provision, whereas non-disabled students were more likely to focus on social and environmental aspects of university life. This highlights the importance of understanding not only what influences student choice, but also how those influences are experienced and evaluated. The exploration of influencers within the decision-making process further reinforces

the complexity of student choice. The study identifies a network of influences, including family, peers, and schools, all of which play a role in shaping decisions. Parental influence remains significant, especially among younger students, supporting previous research (Basit, 2012). However, the findings also indicate that SWDDs may rely more heavily on medical professionals, reflecting a need to make informed decisions about support and accessibility. This nuanced understanding of influence challenges simplistic models of decision-making and emphasises the importance of considering both the presence and the relative weight of different influences. A further key conclusion relates to the role of expectations in shaping student experience. The study demonstrates that expectations are formed prior to university enrolment through a combination of marketing materials, open days, and social interactions. While these expectations were broadly similar across both groups, the research identified instances where they were not fully met. These discrepancies were particularly evident in relation to aspects of the wider student experience, such as making friends. Importantly, these mismatches were not limited to disabled students but were experienced across both groups suggesting that challenges in expectation management are systemic rather than demographic specific. This finding has important implications for the HE sector, highlighting the need for greater transparency and alignment between institutional representations and lived realities.

The use of a sequential explanatory mixed methods design has been instrumental in achieving the aims of this research. The quantitative phase provided an overarching view, enabling the identification of key similarities and differences between groups. The subsequent qualitative phases allowed for a deeper exploration of these findings, uncovering the meanings and experiences underlying the observed patterns. This integration of methods has strengthened the validity and robustness of the study, ensuring that conclusions are both empirically grounded and contextually rich. Moreover, it has enabled the research to move beyond surface-level analysis, offering a more holistic understanding of student decision-making as a complex and dynamic process.

This study also makes an important conceptual contribution by reinforcing the idea that student decision-making should be understood as an interconnected and ongoing process, rather than a series of discrete stages. Deciding when to go, choosing a specific university, influencing factors, and factors are not isolated elements but are deeply interconnected, shaping and reshaping one another over time. This perspective aligns with and extends existing theoretical frameworks, including those informed by Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, capital, and field (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, David, and Ball, 2005), by illustrating how individual agency operates within broader structural contexts.

In reflecting on the overall contribution of this research, the study advances understanding in several keyways. It challenges assumptions of difference between disabled and non-disabled

students, highlights the importance of nuanced and context-sensitive analysis, and demonstrates the value of integrating MMR approaches. At the same time, it underscores the need for universities to adopt more inclusive and holistic practices, recognising both the shared experiences of students and the diverse ways in which they engage with the decision-making process.

In conclusion, this study has successfully addressed its aims and objectives, providing a comprehensive exploration of student decision-making within HE. While the study is situated within a specific institutional context, the insights generated have broader relevance, offering valuable implications for research, policy, and practice. Ultimately, this work contributes to an evolving understanding of student choice, emphasising its complexity, dynamism, and significance within the contemporary HE landscape.

Figure A 2 the Hand and the Wrist

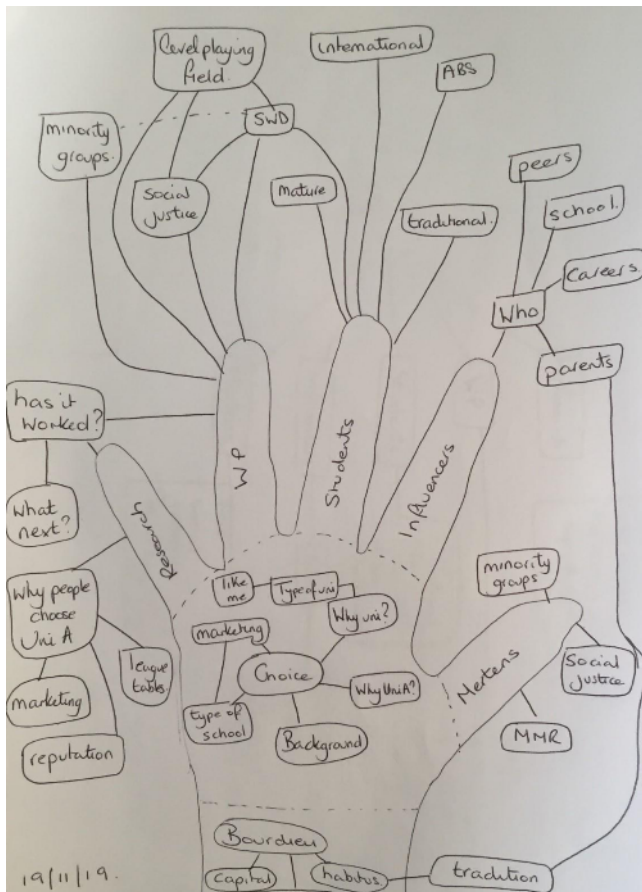


Figure A 2 the Hand and the Wrist

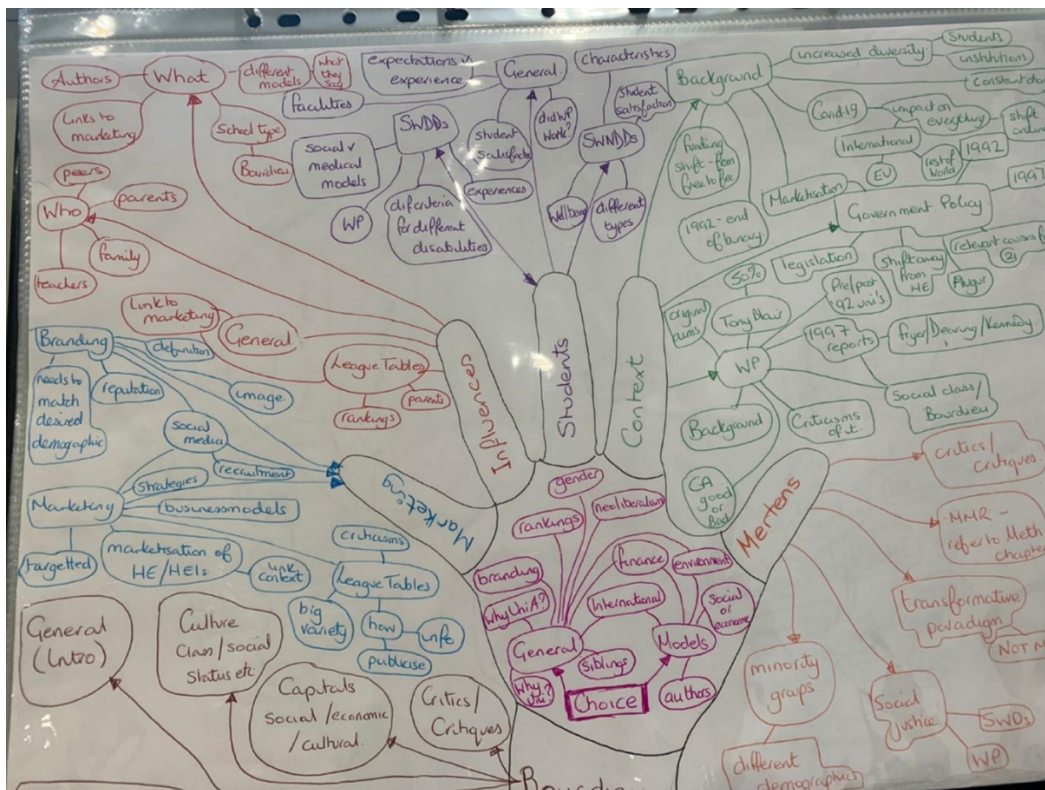


Figure A 3 the Hand showing choice influences

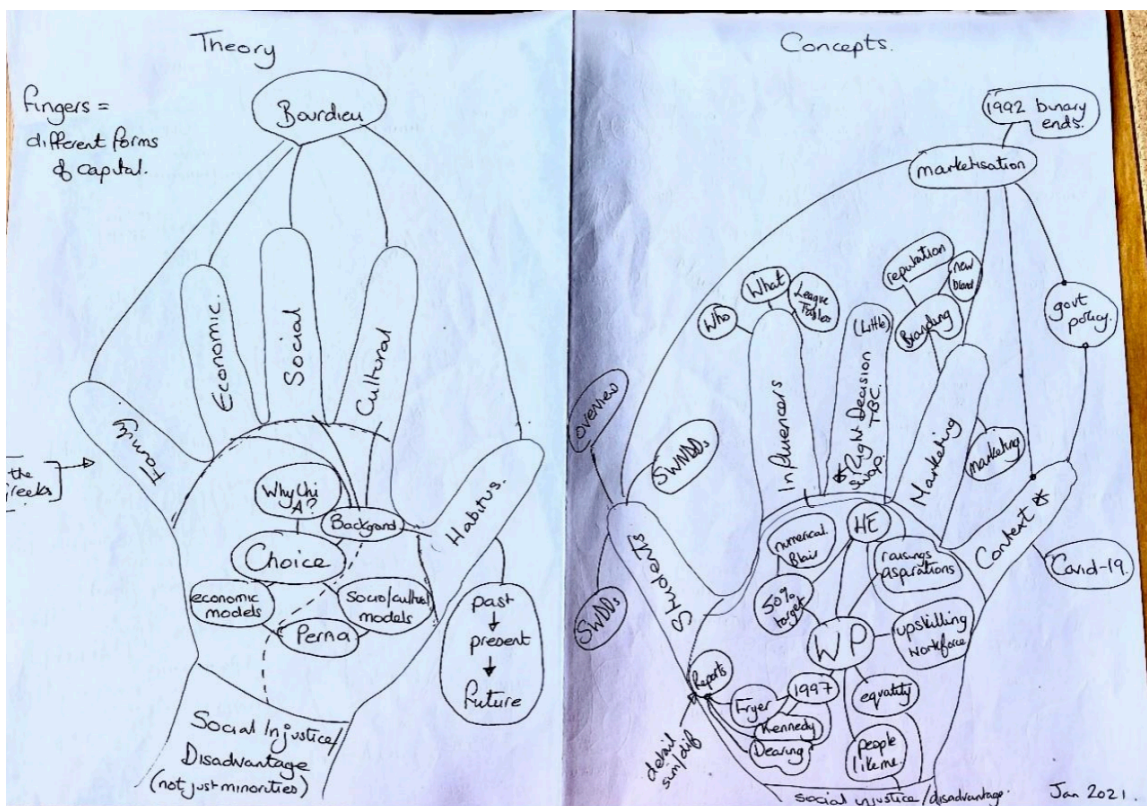


Figure A 4 the theoretical and structural Hands

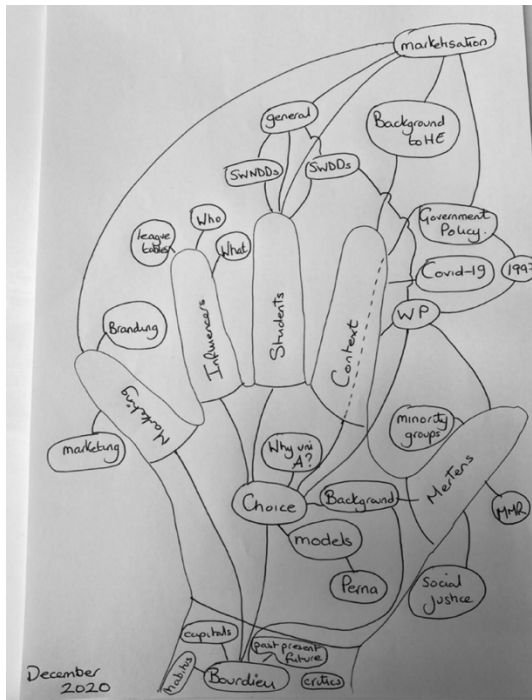


Figure A 5 Hand showing student choice in HE

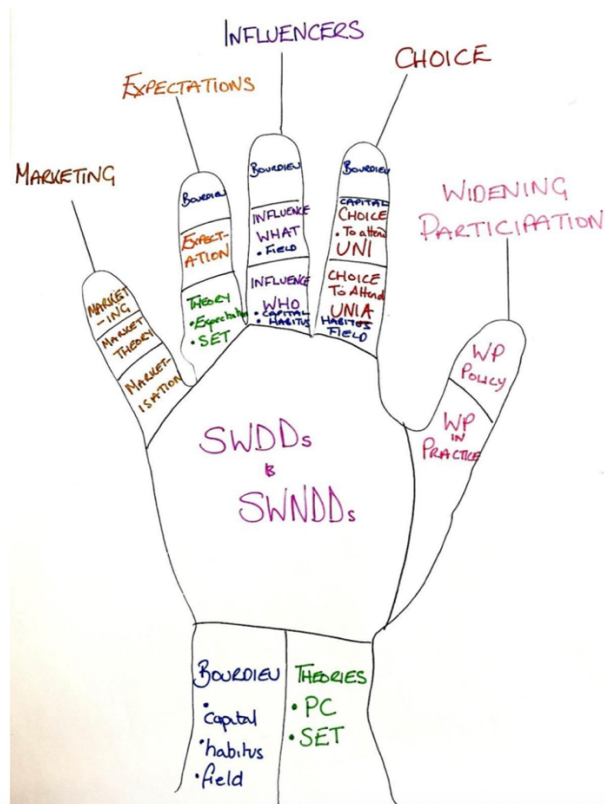


Figure A 6 Hand showing the complex nature of student choice in HE

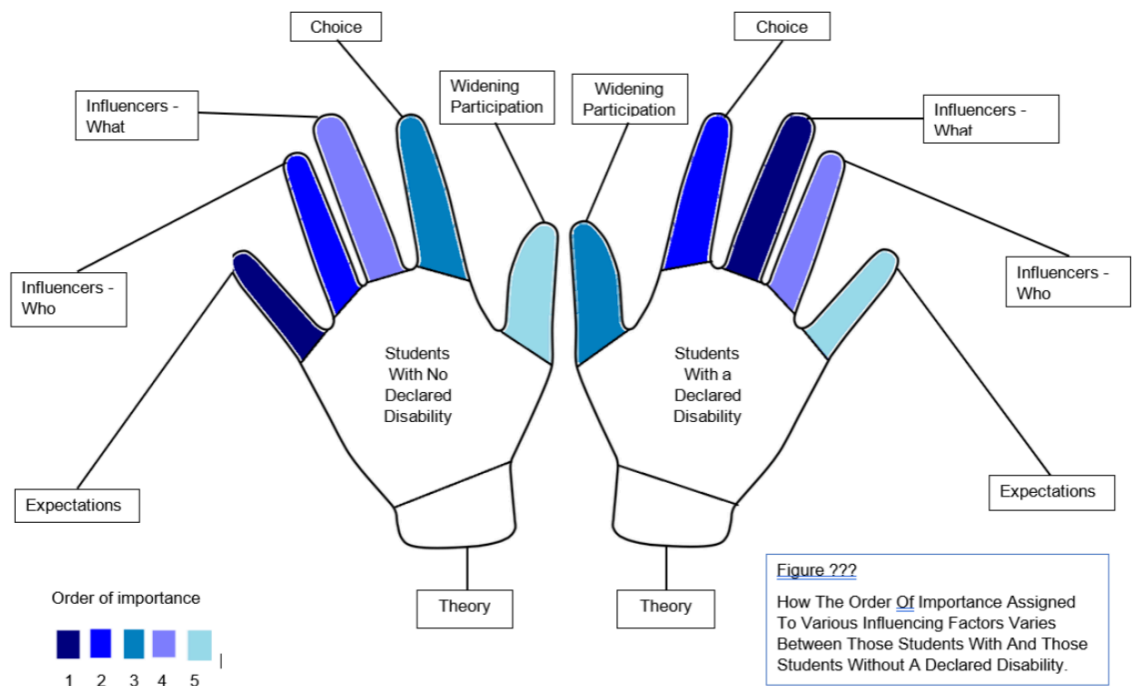


Figure A 7 Pair of Hands showing the choice process with color

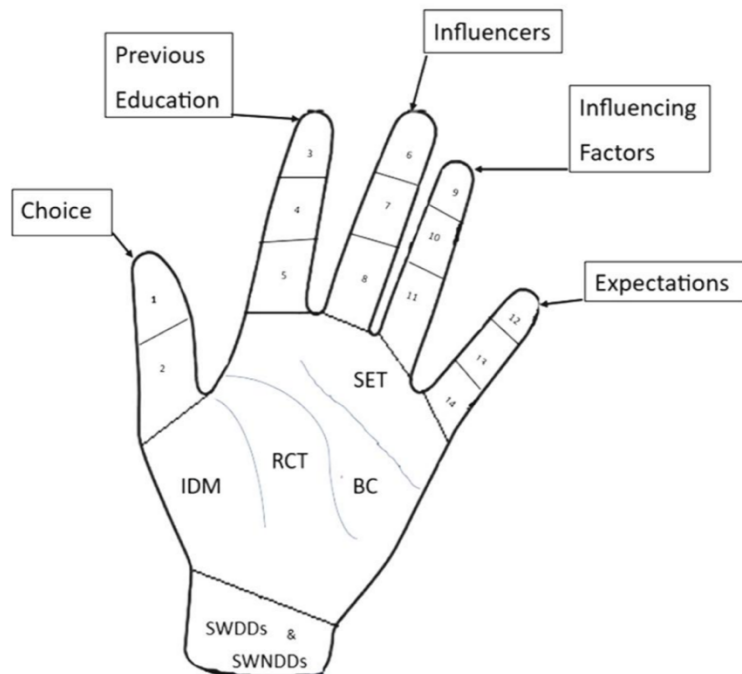


Figure A 8 the Hand showing the importance of the different theories in the palm

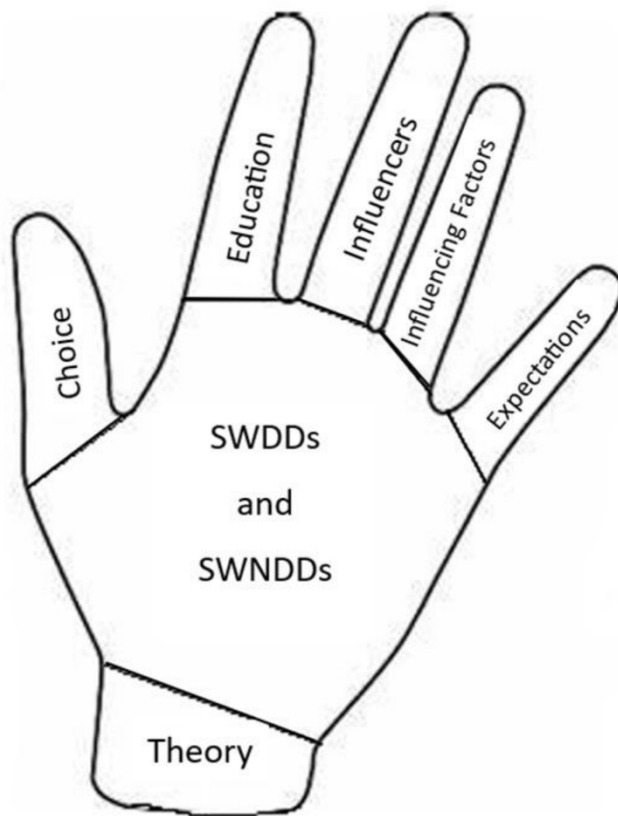
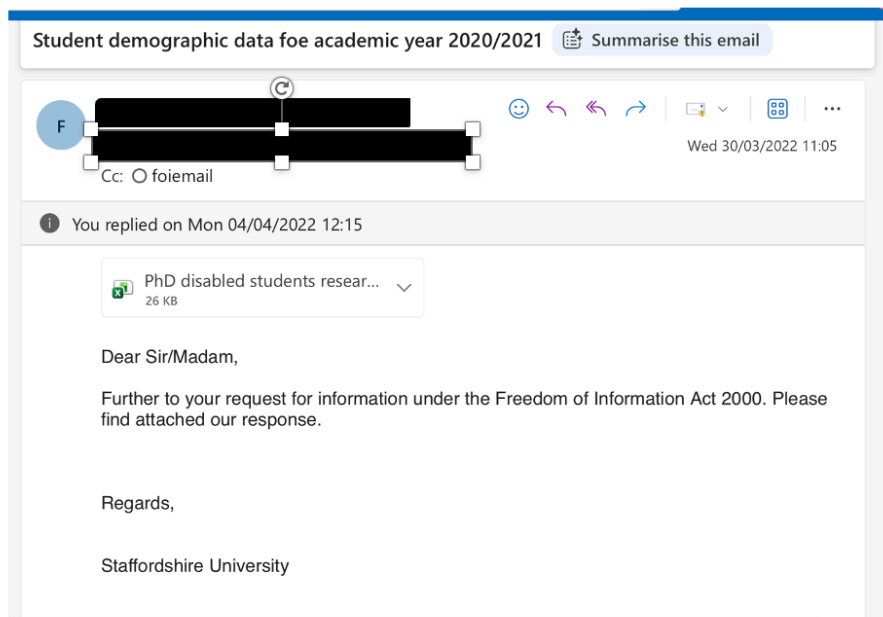


Figure A 9 the simplified Hand

Appendix B: FOI Approval



WHY ARE YOU HERE?

Are you a student at UniA?

Why did you decide to come to UniA?

Are you prepared to answer an online survey
about your decision making process?

If the answer to these questions is YES then my
PhD study into the reasons why students choose
this University needs you.

To participate please follow the link below or
use the QR code.

If you would like further information about my research please
contact me via email

Thank you

Bal Deol

PhD Research Student LSE



http://unia.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_IDX1Q6xPYLXBixylv

Appendix D: Bio of Interviewees

The interviewee in Interview 01 & Interview 01E are the same individual.

The interviewee in Interview 03 & Interview 03E are the same individual.

The interviewee in Interview 07 & Interview 07E are the same individual.

The interviewee in Interview 13 & Interview 13E are the same individual.

The interviewee in Interview 15 & Interview 15E are the same individual.

The two interviews took place on different days, so the interviews were each given their code although the interviewee was the same individual.

The Interviewee 01 self-identified as female and is studying at the post-graduate level in Life Science and Education Department (LSE) and falls in the 25-34 age group. She was studying part-time and commutes to UniA for this purpose. She went to a mainstream secondary school and does not have a disability. She was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 02 self-identified as being non-binary. They were studying an under-graduate course and are in Design, Technology, and Arts (DTA) school. They were in the age group 18-24 and are studying full-time, have moved away from home, and were living on campus. They went to a mainstream secondary school, and they identify as having a disability. They were a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 03 self-identified as being a male undergraduate in DTA school who fell in the 18-24 age group. He was studying full-time, had moved away from home, and was living on campus. He identified as having a disability. He was not a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 04 self-identified as being a female. She was studying full-time in LSE and was in the age group 25-34. She commuted to UniA to study. She attended a mainstream secondary school. She identified as having a disability and was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 05 self-identified as being a female studying at the undergraduate level in LSE. She fell in the 18-24 age group. She was studying full-time and had moved away from her parent's residence. She attended a mainstream school and was identified as having a disability. She was not a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 06 self-identified as being a female. She was studying at the under-graduate level in LSE, and she fell into the age group of 35-44. She was studying full-time and lives locally. She attended a mainstream school and identified as having a disability and was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 07 self-identified as being a male researcher undertaking his doctorate in LSE. He fell into the age group of 25 -34. He was studying part-time and commuted to study at UniA. He attended a mainstream secondary school and identified as having a disability and was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 08 self-identified as being female. She was a researcher undertaking her doctorate studying in Law Policing and Forensics. She fell into the age group of 35 - 44 and studied full-time. She lived locally and did not identify as having a disability. She was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 09 self-identified as being female. She was an international researcher undertaking her doctorate in LSE. She was in the age group 25 -34. She was conducting studies full-time and has moved away from home to do so, she lives on campus/close to UniA. She attended a mainstream school and did not identify as having a disability. She was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 10 self-identified as being male. He was studying for his undergraduate degree at LSE. He was in the age group of 25-34 and was studying full-time. He lived locally to the university and attended a mainstream secondary school. He did not identify as being disabled. He was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 11 self-identified as being male. He was an undergraduate student studying full-time at LSE. He was in the age group 35-44 and commuted to university to study. He attended a mainstream school and did not identify as having a disability. He was a first-generation student.

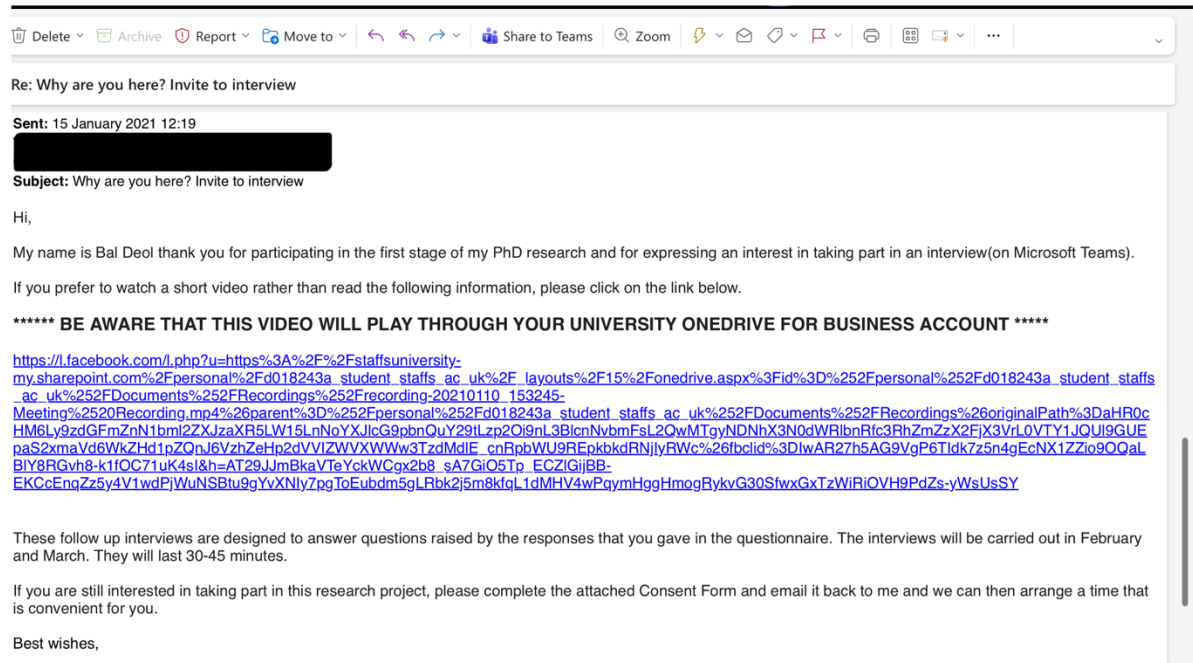
The Interviewee 12 self-identified as being female. She was a female researcher undertaking her doctorate in LSE. She fell into the age bracket of 25 - 34. She was a full-time student and commuted to UniA. She attended a mainstream secondary school and did not identify as having a disability. She was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 13 self-identified as being a female. She was a researcher who was undertaking her doctorate at LSE, and she was in the age bracket of 35 – 44. She was studying part-time and lived locally. She attended a mainstream school and does not identify as having a disability. She was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 14 self-identified as being male. He was a postgraduate student in DTA. He was in the age range of 18-24, was studying full-time, and had moved away from home to do so. He attended a mainstream school. He did not identify as having a disability, and he was a first-generation student.

The Interviewee 15 self-identified as being female. She was an undergraduate student studying full-time at LSE. She had moved away from home after attending a mainstream school and then attended a specialist college, as she identified as having a disability. She was in the age group 18 – 24. She was a first-generation student

Appendix E: 'Email invitation to interview'



Disability Status and Copy of the Questionnaire

Why are you here?

Start of Block: INFORMATION SHEET

Q1 Why are you here?

Exploring factors that influence the choices made by university applicants with or without a disability and their subsequent experiences as students. A case study at one Higher Education Institution.

Q2 INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS *Project Reference Number: [insert once provided by the university ethics committee]* **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS** *Project Reference Number: [insert once provided by the university ethics committee]* I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my MPhil/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?** The research is being carried to investigate whether there is a difference between the decision of why students with disabilities and students with no disclosed disability choose to attend Staffordshire University. **Why have I been invited to take part?** You have been invited to take part because you are currently a student at Staffordshire University. **What will happen if I take part?** You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, questions will include general information, your education prior to attending University, if you identify as having a disability and finally why you chose to attend Staffordshire University. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes. During the questionnaire you will be asked to create a unique ID, this is to protect your anonymity and if you wish to withdraw you will need to provide this ID so I can remove your data from the report. To create your unique ID, you will be asked for your place of birth and the last 3 digits of your mobile number. You may also wish to agree to a follow-up interview; if you wish to do so you will be required to provide your email address so that I can contact you to arrange an interview next year. If you wish to proceed to the interview stage you are welcome to have someone with you. Interviews will be conducted in January 2021. The interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes and you will be asked more detailed questions regarding your reason behind choosing Staffordshire University. The interview will be recorded digitally and will be stored in a safe location. **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?** In some cases participation in this study may cause you (the participant) some emotional distress and anxiety, however you are able to withdraw at any stage if you require additional support as a result of participation in this research it can be accessed via this hyperlink https://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/sos/index.jsp **What are the possible benefits of taking part?** The benefits include helping the University market and attract the right type of student and help them succeed at University. **Data handling and confidentiality** Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR). During the

interview stage I will be bringing my support worker, both of us have undergone confidentiality training as well as GDPR training. Any audio recordings will be stored on digital recording device and this will be kept in a safe when not in use and the completed questionnaires will be stored on a password protected database as will transcripts and notes taken in interviews. Any handwritten documentation will be stored in a safe.

Data Protection Statement The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University. 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 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 Staffordshire University 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 questionnaire study up until 4th January 2021 after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible due to the fact that the anonymized data will start the process of aggregation and will be included as a part of a preliminary report for my dissertation. With regards to the interview stage you will be able to withdraw from the study until 4th May 2021. To do this please email me with your unique ID. If you choose to withdraw from the study, we will not retain any information that you have provided us as a part of this study.

What will happen to the results of the study? If you wish to receive a copy of the report, simply click the box at the end of the survey and leave a email address so I can send a copy of the final report to you. The final report will be published in the British Library.

Who should I contact for further information? If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following contact details: Research Ethics Committee - ethics@staffs.ac.uk Dr Lynn Machin; Principal Supervisor – l.b.machin@staffs.ac.uk Dr Jim Pugh; Supervisor – j.pugh@staffs.ac.uk Baljeevan Deol; Researcher - d018243a@research.staffs.ac.uk

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong? If this 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 Staffordshire University Ethics Committee for further advice and information: **Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.**

- ☐ I have read this Information Sheet (1)

End of Block: INFORMATION SHEET

Start of Block: CONSENT FORM

Q3 Participant Consent Form Please read each statement and, if you agree with them, check the box confirming this below.

I have read the participant information sheet and the nature and purpose of the research has been explained to me.

I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary, and that if I change my mind, I can withdraw up until the data has been aggregated for analysis purposes. I can do this without prejudice and without giving a reason.

I understand that I do not have to answer every question if I do not wish to and I do not have to give any explanation.

I understand that confidentiality will be maintained throughout this project, and that I will not be identified in the final report.

I confirm that quotations may be used in the report, provided that the quotations are anonymized and do not reveal my identity. I confirm I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation in it.

I understand that my data will be securely stored in accordance with Staffordshire University protocols and current data protection guidelines. I understand that the data I provide will be used being used in the researchers thesis and that the data might also be used in research publications, conference/seminar presentations, teaching etc.

I confirm that I agree to take part in this research project

I agree that any interview that I take part in may be recorded.

- ☐ I have read and agree to all of the above statements (1)

End of Block: CONSENT FORM

Start of Block: GENERAL INFORMATION

Q4

To create your unique ID please provide your place of birth and the final 3 digits of your

phone number. This is done in order to protect your anonymity.

Q5 Are you currently enrolled as a student at Staffordshire University?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)

Q6 Did you have any assistance when completing this survey?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)
- o Prefer not to say (3)

Q7 What type of student are you?

- o Apprentice (4)
- o Undergraduate (1)
- o Postgraduate (2)
- o Doctoral (3)

Q8 Which School are you enrolled in?

- o Digital, Technologies and Arts (8)
- o Health and Social Care (4)
- o Law, Policing and Forensics (5)
- o Life Sciences and Education (6)

- o Staffordshire Business School (7)
- o I do not know (9)
- o Prefer not to say (3)

Q9 Do you self-identify as being:

- o Male (1)
- o Female (2)
- o Non-binary (3)
- o Trans (4)
- o Other (5)
- o Prefer not to say (6)

Q10 What is your age?

- o 17 (1)
- o 18-24 (2)
- o 25 - 34 (3)
- o 35 - 44 (4)
- o 45 + (5)
- o Prefer not to say (6)

Q11 Are you a Full-time or Part-time student?

- o Full-time (1)
- o Part-time (2)
- o Prefer not to say (3)

Q12 Have you moved away from home to attend Staffordshire University?

- o Yes (1)

- o [No](#) (2)
- o Prefer not to [say](#) (3)

End of Block: GENERAL INFORMATION

Start of Block: Education

Q13 What type of secondary school did you attend?

- o [Mainstream](#) (1)
- o [Private](#) (2)
- o [Special school](#) (3)
- o [Other](#) (4)
- o Prefer not to [say](#) (5)

Q14 If you answered Other to the previous [question](#) please detail [you](#) answer in the box below.

Q15 Did your school/college promote Higher Education to you as the number one option after completion of Further Education?

- o [Yes](#) (1)
- o [No](#) (2)
- o Unable to [remember](#) (3)

Q16 Did this impact [on](#) your decision to apply to universities?

- o [Definitely](#) (1)
- o [Probably](#) (2)
- o [Maybe](#) (3)
- o Not at [all](#) (4)

- o Prefer not to [say](#) (5)

Q17 Did Staffordshire University visit your school/college?

- o [Yes](#) (1)
- o [No](#) (2)
- o Unable to [remember](#) (3)

End of Block: Education

Start of Block: DISABILITY

Q18

Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition.

- o [Yes](#) (1)
- o [No](#) (2)

Q19 What type of disability do you have? Please tick all that apply

- ☐ [Physical](#) (1)
- ☐ [Sensory](#) (2)
- ☐ Mental [health](#) (3)
- ☐ [Learning](#) (4)
- ☐ [Other](#) (5)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (6)

Q20 Have you disclosed your disability/mental health condition to Staffordshire University?

- ☐ [Yes](#) (1)
- ☐ [No](#) (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (3)

Q21 If you have not, what was your reason for not doing so?

Q22 If you are a mature student (age 25 or above) with a [disability](#) was your disability a factor in deciding to attend University? Why?

End of Block: DISABILITY

Start of Block: WHY STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY?

Q23

Why did you decide to attend University? Please rank the answers with 1 being the most important & 7 the least by moving the options up or down the list.

- ____ Future career (1)
- ____ Advice from parents (3)
- ____ Advice from school (2)
- ____ Friends going (4)
- ____ What I have always expected to do (5)
- ____ Covid-19 (6)
- ____ Other (7)

Q24 Please specify what Other meant for you when ranking the responses in the previous question

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Please indicate the level of influence these factors had by sliding the marker. ALL sliders must be moved.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
A 0

Parents ()	
Teachers ()	
Friends ()	
Siblings ()	
Other family members ()	
School/College ()	
Careers advisor ()	
Other ()	

Q26 Please specify what Other meant for you when completing the previous question

Q27 Why did you choose to attend Staffordshire University? Please tick all that apply

☐ Accommodation (15)

- ☐ [Amenities](#) (6)
- ☐ Career [prospects](#) (4)
- ☐ [Clearing](#) (12)
- ☐ Communication [links](#) (8)
- ☐ [Course](#) (1)
- ☐ League [tables](#) (2)
- ☐ [Location](#) (3)
- ☐ [Nightlife](#) (7)
- ☐ Open [Day](#) (5)
- ☐ Social [Media](#) (11)
- ☐ [Prospectus](#) (9)
- ☐ Website etc. (10)
- ☐ [Other](#) (13)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (14)

Q28 If you answered Other to the previous [question](#) please specify below

Q29 Did anyone influence your decision specifically to apply to Staffordshire University?

- ☐ [Yes](#) (1)
- ☐ [No](#) (2)
- ☐ Unable to [remember](#) (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (4)

Q30 If you answered yes to the previous [question](#) please specify who they were below

Q31 Can you recall when you first decided that you wanted to go to university?

Q32 What do you hope to gain from having attended University?

Q33 Prior to attending Staffordshire University did you know anyone who came or intended to come here?

- ☐ [Yes](#) (1)
- ☐ [No](#) (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (3)

Q34 Did this influence your choice to attend this University?

- ☐ [Yes](#) (1)
- ☐ [No](#) (2)
- ☐ [Unsure](#) (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (4)

Q35 How did you decide which universities to apply to on UCAS?

Q36 How did you draw up your shortlist for UCAS?

Q37 Have/do any of your immediate family attend(ed) university?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (3)

Q38 If you answered yes to the previous question please specify their relationship to you below

Q39 Did Staffordshire University marketing activity influence your decision to apply to Staffordshire University?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Maybe (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (4)

Q40 If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question please specify what element that was

Q41 Did you attend any Open Days/Virtual Open Days?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (3)

Q42 Did you attend an Open Day at Staffordshire University?

- ☐ Yes, Virtual (4)
- ☐ Yes, Face to face (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (3)

Q43 Did this influence your decision to come here?

- ☐ [Yes](#) (1)
- ☐ [No](#) (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (3)

Q44 How did you first hear about Staffordshire University?

Q45 Which elements of Staffordshire University marketing policy influenced your decision to attend? Please indicate the level of influence each of the following factors had by sliding the marker. ALL sliders must be moved.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Open Day ()	
Website ()	
Prospectus ()	
Advertisements ()	
Social media ()	
Outreach visit by Staffordshire University to your school/college ()	

Other ()	

Q46

If you gave a value to Other to the previous question please specify below to what you were referring.

Q47 Click to write the question text

- ☐ Click to write Choice [1](#) (1)
- ☐ Click to write Choice [2](#) (2)
- ☐ Click to write Choice [3](#) (3)

Q48 Has your decision to attend Staffordshire University been influenced by the current pandemic?

- ☐ [Yes](#) (4)
- ☐ [No](#) (5)
- ☐ Prefer not to [say](#) (6)

Q49 If you answered the previous question please could you explain in what way below.

End of Block: WHY STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY?

Start of Block: CONTACT DETAILS

Q50 If you wish to be considered for participation in the interview stage of this research project or receive a copy of reports that result from this research please tick the appropriate box below. and add your email address in the box provided.

- ☐ I wish to be considered for the interview stage of this research project (1)
- ☐ I would like to receive a copy of any reports resulting from this research (2)

Q51 My email address is ...

End of Block: CONTACT DETAILS

Appendix G: Ethics Approval Form



Life Sciences and Education

ETHICAL APPROVAL FEEDBACK

Researcher name:	Baljeevan Kaur Deol
Title of Study:	Exploring factors that influence the choices made by university applicants with or without a disability and their subsequent experiences as students. A case study at one Higher Education Institution.
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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Naemi".

Signed: Prof. Roozbeh Naemi

Date: 17.03.2020

Ethics Coordinator
School of Life Sciences and Education

Appendix H: SPSS tables

Q7: What type of student are you?					
Level of study	SWDDs		SWNDDs		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Apprentice	1	0.5	0	0.0	1
Undergraduate	72	50.3	71	48.6	143
Postgraduate	18	48.6	19	51.4	37
Doctoral	4	25.0	12	75.0	16
Total	95	48.2	102	51.8	197

Table H 1 Q7 Proportion of SWDDs and SWNDDs

Q9 Do you self-identify as <u>being</u> :				
	Male	Female	Non-Binary	Total
Q18 Do you identify as Yes	29	69	3	101
having a disability? No	33	69	1	103
Total	62	138	4	204

Table H 2 SPSS table for Q9 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? * Q11 Are you a Full-time or Part-time student?

		Q11 Are you a Full-time or Part-time student?		
		Full-time	Part-time	Total
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition.	Yes	89	12	101
	No	92	11	103
Total		181	23	204

Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.074 ^a	1	.786	
Continuity Correction ^b	.002	1	.960	
Likelihood Ratio	.074	1	.786	
Fisher's Exact Test			.828	.480
Linear-by-Linear Association	.073	1	.787	
N of Valid Cases	204			

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.39.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 3 SPSS table for Q11 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? *Q12 Have you moved away from home to attend UniA?

		Q12 Have you moved away from home to attend UniA?		Total
		Yes	No	
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition.	Yes	46	55	101
	No	50	53	103
Total		96	108	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.184 ^a	1	.668		
Continuity Correction ^b	.083	1	.773		
Likelihood Ratio	.184	1	.668		
Fisher's Exact Test				.677	.386
Linear-by-Linear Association	.183	1	.669		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 47.53.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 4 SPSS table for Q12 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability* Q15 Did your school/college promote HE to you as the number one option after completion of FE

Count

		Q15 Did your school/college promote HE to you as the number one option after completion of FE		Total
		Yes	No	
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability	Yes	63	38	101
	No	77	26	103
Total		140	64	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.631 ^a	1	.057		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.078	1	.079		
Likelihood Ratio	3.646	1	.056		
Fisher's Exact Test				.070	.039
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.613	1	.057		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.69.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 5 SPSS table for Q15 and Q18

Q23 Why did you decide to attend University?		
Q24 Please specify what Other meant for you when ranking the responses in the previous question		
Coding categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Personal growth	26	23
Career prospects	19	21
Family	12	23
Recommendations	12	2
Health	10	0
Location	7	10
Experience	5	14
Course	3	12
Timing	3	2

Table H 6 SPSS table for Q23 and Q24

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q29 Did anyone influence your decision specifically to apply to UniA

		Q29 Did anyone influence your decision specifically to apply to UniA?		Total
		Yes	No	
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	23	61	84
	No	23	63	86
Total		46	124	170

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.009 ^a	1	.926		
Continuity Correction ^b	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.009	1	.926		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.531
Linear-by-Linear Association	.009	1	.926		
N of Valid Cases	170				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.73.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 7 SPSS table for Q29 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? Q33 Prior to attending UniA did you know anyone who came or intended to come here?

Q33 Prior to attending UniA did you know anyone who came or intended to come here?

		Yes	No	Total
Q18 do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	33	53	86
	No	37	55	92
Total		70	108	178

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.063 ^a	1	.801		
Continuity Correction ^b	.010	1	.922		
Likelihood Ratio	.063	1	.801		
Fisher's Exact Test				.878	.461
Linear-by-Linear Association	.063	1	.802		
N of Valid Cases	178				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 33.82.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 8 SPSS table for Q33 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? * Q34 Did this (Q33) influence your choice to attend this university?

Q34 Did this (Q33) influence your choice to attend this university?

		Yes	No	Total
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	20	66	86
	No	18	69	87
Total		38	135	173

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.166 ^a	1	.684		
Continuity Correction ^b	.050	1	.823		
Likelihood Ratio	.166	1	.684		
Fisher's Exact Test				.716	.411
Linear-by-Linear Association	.165	1	.684		
N of Valid Cases	173				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.89.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 9 SPSS table for Q34 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?* Q37 Have/do any of your immediate family attend(ed) university?

Count

		Q37 Have/do any of your immediate family attend(ed) university?		
		Yes	No	Total
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	45	39	84
	No	41	49	90
Total		86	88	174

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.117 ^a	1	.291		
Continuity Correction ^b	.819	1	.365		
Likelihood Ratio	1.118	1	.290		
Fisher's Exact Test				.363	.183
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.110	1	.292		
N of Valid Cases	174				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 41.52.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 10 SPSS table for Q37 and Q18

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q41 Did you attend any Open Days/Virtual Open Days?

		Q41 Did you attend any Open Days/Virtual Open Days?		
		Yes	No	Total
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	59	26	85
	No	52	40	92
Total		111	66	177

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.139 ^a	1	.076		
Continuity Correction ^b	2.612	1	.106		
Likelihood Ratio	3.157	1	.076		
Fisher's Exact Test				.088	.053
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.121	1	.077		
N of Valid Cases	177				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.69.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 11 SPSS table for Q41 and Q18

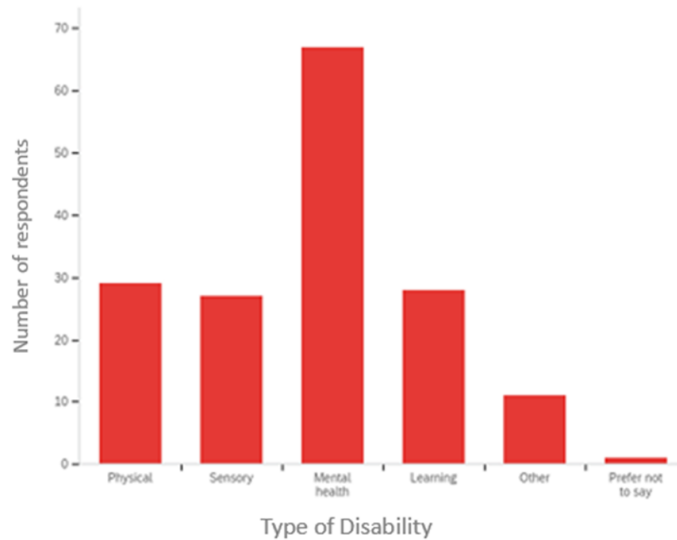


Table H 12 Distribution of SWDDs respondents by type of disability

Q9 Do you self-identify as <u>being</u> :				
	Male	Female	Non-Binary	Total
Q18 Do you identify asYes	29	69	3	101
having a disability? No	33	69	1	103
Total	62	138	4	204

Table H 13 SPSS table for Q9 and Q18

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q23 Why did you decide to attend University? Friends going

Crosstabulation

Count

		Q23 Friends going		Total
		1 st or 2 nd	3 rd – 7 th	
Q18 Do you self-identify as	Yes	6	95	101
having a disability?	No	8	95	103
Total		14	190	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.266 ^a	1	.606		
Continuity Correction ^b	.057	1	.811		
Likelihood Ratio	.267	1	.605		
Fisher's Exact Test				.783	.406
Linear-by-Linear Association	.265	1	.607		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.93.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 14SPSS table for Q23 and Q18

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q23 Why did you decide to attend University? What I have always expected to do.

Count

		Q23 What I have always expected to do		Total
		1 st or 2 nd	3 rd – 7 th	
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	27	74	101
	No	40	63	103
Total		67	137	204

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.386 ^a	1	.066		
Continuity Correction ^b	2.860	1	.091		
Likelihood Ratio	3.403	1	.065		
Fisher's Exact Test				.075	.045
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.370	1	.066		
N of Valid Cases	204				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 33.17.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 15 SPSS table for Q23 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? * Q23 Why did you decide to attend university? COVID-19
Count

		Q23 Why did you decide to attend university? COVID-19		Total
		1 st or 2 nd	3 rd –7 th	
Q18 do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	6	79	85
	No	2	83	85
Total		8	162	170

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.099 ^a	1	.147		
Continuity Correction ^b	1.181	1	.277		
Likelihood Ratio	2.192	1	.139		
Fisher's Exact Test				.277	.139
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.086	1	.149		
N of Valid Cases	170				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 16 SPSS table for Q23 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'Teachers'	Yes	67	74.68	5003.50
	No	81	74.35	6022.50
	Total	148		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?
Teachers

Mann-Whitney U	2701.500
Wilcoxon W	6022.500
Z	-.046
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.963

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?

Table H 17 SPSS table for Q25 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'Friends'	Yes	71	69.47	4932.50
	No	79	80.92	6392.50
	Total	150		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?
Friends

Mann-Whitney U	2376.500
Wilcoxon W	4932.500
Z	-1.614
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.107

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition?

Table H 18 SPSS table for Q25 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'Siblings'	Yes	60	62.76	3765.50
	No	73	70.49	5145.50
	Total	133		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?
'Siblings'

Mann-Whitney U	1935.500
Wilcoxon W	3765.500
Z	-1.171
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.242

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition?

Table H 19 SPSS table for Q25 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'Other family'	Yes	76	80.80	6141.00
	No	78	74.28	5794.00
	Total	154		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?
'Other family'

Mann-Whitney U	2713.000
Wilcoxon W	5794.000
Z	-.911
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.362

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition?

Table H 20 SPSS table for Q18 and Q25

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'School/college'	Yes	63	73.90	4656.00
	No	77	67.71	5214.00
	Total	140		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?

'School/ college'

Mann-Whitney U	2211.000
Wilcoxon W	5214.000
Z	-.900
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.368

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition

Table H 21 SPSS table for Q18 and Q25

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'Careers advisor'	Yes	60	63.23	3794.00
	No	69	66.54	4591.00
	Total	129		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?

'Careers advisor'

Mann-Whitney U	1964.000
Wilcoxon W	3794.000
Z	-.506
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.613

a. Grouping Variable: Q18Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition?

Table H 22 SPSS table for Q18 and Q25

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? 'Other'	Yes	64	68.59	4390.00
	No	61	57.13	3485.00
	Total	125		

Test Statistics^a

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university?
'Other'

Mann-Whitney U	1594.000
Wilcoxon W	3485.000
Z	-1.801
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.072

a. Grouping Variable: Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? This includes having a mental health condition?

Table H 23 SPSS table for Q25 and Q18

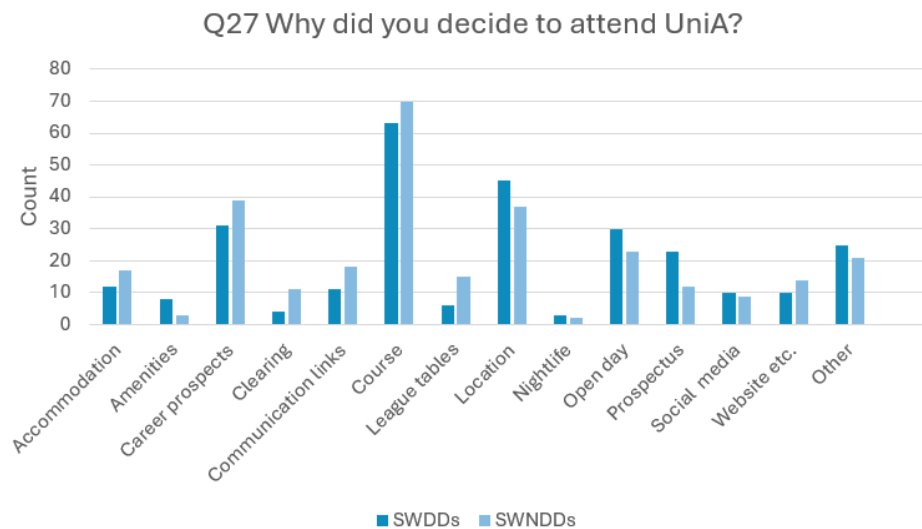


Table H 24 reasons for attending UniA among SWDDs and SWNDDs

		Q19 What type of disability do you have?												
		Type of Disability												
Overall Level of Importance	Q27 Why did you choose to attend UniA?	Physical		Sensory		Mental Health		Learning		Other		Prefer not to say		Total
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	N
10 th	Accommodation	15.8	3	15.8	3	57.9	11	10.5	2	0.0	0	0.0	0	19
6 th	Amenities	0.0	0	18.2	2	54.6	6	18.2	2	9.1	1	0.0	0	11
4 th	Career prospects	7.3	3	9.8	4	63.4	26	14.6	6	2.4	1	2.4	1	41
12 th	Clearing	28.6	2	14.3	1	42.9	3	14.3	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	7
8 th	Communication links	5.3	1	15.8	3	52.6	10	15.8	3	5.3	1	5.3	1	19
1 st	Course	15.7	16	15.7	16	47.1	48	13.7	14	7.8	8	0.0	0	102
2 nd	League tables	0.0	0	12.5	1	75.0	6	12.5	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	8
3 rd	Location	16.4	12	16.4	12	41.1	30	17.8	13	6.9	5	1.4	1	73
7 th	Nightlife	0.0	0	20.0	1	60.0	3	20.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	0	5
5 th	Open Day	14.6	6	12.2	5	58.5	24	9.8	4	2.4	1	2.4	1	41
11 th	Social Media	11.8	2	17.7	3	52.9	9	17.7	3	0.0	0	0.0	0	17
9 th	Prospectus	12.5	4	15.6	5	56.3	18	12.5	4	3.1	1	0.0	0	32
10 th	Website, etc.	13.3	2	13.3	2	40.0	6	26.7	4	6.7	1	0.0	0	15
13 th	Other	19.6	9	15.2	7	32.6	15	17.4	8	13.0	6	2.2	1	46
14 th	Prefer not to say	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0

Table H 25 SPSS table for Q19 and Q27

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q29 Did anyone influence your decision specifically to apply to UniA

		Q29 Did anyone influence your decision specifically to apply to UniA?		
		Yes	No	Total
Q18 Do you self-identify as	Yes	23	61	84
having a disability?	No	23	63	86
Total		46	124	170

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.009 ^a	1	.926		
Continuity Correction ^b	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.009	1	.926		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.531
Linear-by-Linear Association	.009	1	.926		
N of Valid Cases	170				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.73.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 26 SPSS table for Q29 and Q18

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? Q33 Prior to attending UniA did you know anyone who came or intended to come here?

Q33 Prior to attending UniA did you know anyone who came or intended to come here?

		Yes	No	Total
Q18 do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	33	53	86
	No	37	55	92
Total		70	108	178

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.063 ^a	1	.801		
Continuity Correction ^b	.010	1	.922		
Likelihood Ratio	.063	1	.801		
Fisher's Exact Test				.878	.461
Linear-by-Linear Association	.063	1	.802		
N of Valid Cases	178				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 33.82.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 27 SPSS table for Q18 and Q33

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability? * Q34 Did this (Q33) influence your choice to attend this university?

Q34 Did this (Q33) influence your choice to attend this university?

		Yes	No	Total
Q18_Do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	20	66	86
	No	18	69	87
Total		38	135	173

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.166 ^a	1	.684		
Continuity Correction ^b	.050	1	.823		
Likelihood Ratio	.166	1	.684		
Fisher's Exact Test				.716	.411
Linear-by-Linear Association	.165	1	.684		
N of Valid Cases	173				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.89.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 28 SPSS table for Q18 and Q34

Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?* Q37 Have/do any of your immediate family attend(ed) university?

		Q37 Have/do any of your immediate family attend(ed) university?		
		Yes	No	Total
Q18 Do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	45	39	84
	No	41	49	90
Total		86	88	174

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.117 ^a	1	.291		
Continuity Correction ^b	.819	1	.365		
Likelihood Ratio	1.118	1	.290		
Fisher's Exact Test				.363	.183
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.110	1	.292		
N of Valid Cases	174				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 41.52.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 29 SPSS table for Q18 and Q37

Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability? * Q41 Did you attend any Open Days/Virtual Open Days?

		Q41 Did you attend any Open Days/Virtual Open Days?		Total
		Yes	No	
Q18 Do you self-identify as having a disability?	Yes	59	26	85
	No	52	40	92
Total		111	66	177

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.139 ^a	1	.076		
Continuity Correction ^b	2.612	1	.106		
Likelihood Ratio	3.157	1	.076		
Fisher's Exact Test				.088	.053
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.121	1	.077		
N of Valid Cases	177				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.69.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table H 30 SPSS table for Q18 and Q41

Q25 Did anyone influence your decision to attend university? Q26 Please specify what Other meant for you when completing the previous question		
Coding categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Self-motivation	37	35
Family members	24	15
Named person(s)	16	<1
Friends	0	<1
Did not answer question	24	25

Table H 31 Coded responses for Q26

Q31 Can you recall when you first decided that you wanted to go to university?		
Coding Categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Secondary school/college	33	38
Mature	26	14
Young	11	25
Yes	1	5
No	7	3
Response not codable	20	15
Did not answer question	1	0

Table H 32 Coded responses for Q31

Q32 What do you hope to gain from having attended University?		
Coded categories	SWDD %	SWNDD %
Job	39	40
Qualification	28	23
Personal Growth	24	21
Experience	8	8
Salary	2	0

Table H 33 Coded responses for Q32

Q35 How did you decide which universities to apply to on UCAS?		
Coding categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Location	34	39
Course	32	34
Marketing	6	21
Open days/visits to UniA	9	13
Facilities	6	1
Only applied to UniA	12	5

Table H 34 Coded responses for Q35

Q36 How did you draw up your shortlist for UCAS?		
Coding categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Course	24	29
Location	19	23
Marketing	18	13
Open days/visits	8	8
Only applied to UniA	6	10
Facilities	6	2
Miscellaneous	0	2
Did not answer question	13	11
No response	7	3

Table H 35 Coded responses for Q36

Which elements of UniA marketing policy influenced your decision to attend? Q46 If you gave a value to Other to the previous question please specify below to what you were referring.		
Coded categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Word of mouth/recommendations	26	21
Online sources	21	17
Specific advertisement	5	8
Clearing	0	4
Answer not codable	47	50

Table H 36 Coded responses for Q46

Did anyone influence your decision specifically to apply to UniA? Q30 If you answered yes to the previous question please specify who they were below		
Coded Categories	SWDDs %	SWNDDs %
Other family members	20	26
Educational professionals	20	17
Friends	15	35
Parents	15	9
Students/alumni	15	0
Other	30	13

Table H 37 Coded responses for Q30

References

- Abbott, D. (2010) "Sonali Shah (2008), Young Disabled People: Aspirations, Choices and Constraints. Aldershot: Ashgate. £40, pp. 124, hbk.," *Journal of Social Policy*. 2009/08/27, 39(1), pp. 162–163. Available at: <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/S0047279409990262>.
- Abbott, I., Rathbone, M. and Whitehead, P. (2013) *Education Policy*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473914841>.
- Aczel, P. (2015) "Case study method. International Journal of Sales," *Retail and Marketing*, 4(9), pp. 15–22.
- Adams, Matthew (2006) "Hybridizing Habitus and Reflexivity: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Identity?," *Sociology*, 40(3), pp. 511–528. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/003803850663672>.
- Adams, Richard. (2021) "'Digital poverty' could lead to lost generation of university students, vice-chancellors say.," *The Guardian [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/17/digital-poverty-lost-generation-university-students-vice-chancellors> (Accessed: March 26, 2021).
- Agbenyega, J.S. and Klibthong, S. (2015) "Re-imagining Inclusive Research and Practice: A Focus on Bourdieu's Concepts of Habitus, Capital, Doxa and Field," *Foundations of Inclusive Education Research*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited (International Perspectives on Inclusive Education), pp. 149–167. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620150000006009>.
- Andrew, L. et al. (2021) "Widening the lens on capital: conceptualising the university experiences of non-traditional women nurse students," *Higher Education Research and Development*, 40(7), pp. 1359–1374. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1815663>.
- Arruda, W. (2009) "Brand communication: The three Cs," *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 51(5), pp. 409–416. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.20279>.
- Atkinson, W. (2011) "From sociological fictions to social fictions: some Bourdieusian reflections on the concepts of 'institutional habitus' and 'family habitus,'" *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(3), pp. 331–347. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2011.559337>.

- Bachan, R. (2014) "Students' expectations of debt in UK higher education," *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(5), pp. 848–873. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.754859>.
- Baker, S. and Lau, J. (2020) "Poor handling of pandemic 'could damage student recruitment,'" *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/poor-handling-pandemic-could-damage-student-recruitment?> (Accessed: April 30, 2020).
- Ball, S.J. et al. (2002) "'Classification' and 'Judgement': Social Class and the 'Cognitive Structures' of Choice of Higher Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23(1), pp. 51–72. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1393097>.
- Ball, S.J. (2017) *The Education Debate - Policy and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*.
- Balloo, K., Pauli, R. and Worrell, M. (2015) "Undergraduates' personal circumstances, expectations and reasons for attending university," *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(8), pp. 1373–1384. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1099623>.
- Barnes, C., Mercer, G. and Shakespeare, T. (2010) "The social model of disability," in A. Giddens and P. Sutton (eds.) *Sociology: Introductory Readings*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 161–166.
- Barnes, N.G. and Mattson, E. (2009) "Social media and college admissions: The first longitudinal study.," *Center For Marketing Research [Preprint]*.
- Barr, N. and Glennerster, H. (2014) "Shaping Higher Education," in N. Barr (ed.) *Preface*. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, pp. xvii–xxiv.
- Basit, T.N. (2012) "My parents have stressed that since I was a kid : Young minority ethnic British citizens and the phenomenon of aspirational capital. ," *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 7(2), pp. 129–143.
- Bass, B.M. (1999) "Two Decades of Research and Development in Transformational Leadership," *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8(1), pp. 9–32. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/135943299398410>.
- Bathmaker, A.-M. (2015) "Thinking with Bourdieu: thinking after Bourdieu. Using 'field' to consider in/equalities in the changing field of English higher education," *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(1), pp. 61–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.988683>.

- Bathmaker, A.-M. et al. (2016) *Higher education, social class and social mobility: The degree generation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- BBC News (1999) "Education," *BBC [Online]*. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/292504.stm> (Accessed: April 14, 2021).
- Beasley-Murray, J. (2000) "Value and capital in Bourdieu and Marx," in N. Brown and I. Szeman (eds.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, pp. 100–119.
- Beattie, L. (2017) "Educational leadership: a nirvana or a battlefield? A glance into the higher education in the UK using Bourdieu.," *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 21(5), pp. 608–620.
- Beauchamp-Pryor, K. (2012) "Changes in the political and policy response towards disabled students in the British higher education system: a journey towards inclusion," *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 14(3), pp. 254–269. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2011.574840>.
- Becker, G.S. (1962) "Investment in human capital: A theoretical analysis," *The Journal of Political Economy*, 70(5), pp. 9–49.
- Becker, G.S. (1993) *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- BERA (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018> (Accessed: May 18, 2023).
- BERA (2024) *Ethical Guidelines*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024> (Accessed: February 19, 2025).
- Bergerson, A.A. (2009) "Special Issue: College Choice and Access to College: Moving Policy, Research, and Practice to the 21st Century," *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 35(4), pp. 1–46.
- Bevir, Mark (2000) "New Labour: A Study in Ideology," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2(3), pp. 277–301. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856X.00038>.
- Bhardwa, S. (2017) "Why do students go to university and how they choose which one?," *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: [268](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/news/why-do-students-</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

go-university-and-how-do-they-choose-which-one (Accessed: August 12, 2019).

Bhaskar, R. (1975) *A Realist Theory of Science*. Leeds: Leeds Books.

Bhaskar, R. (2014) "Critical Realism - Roy Bhaskar." Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TO4FaaVy0Is> (Accessed: May 19, 2021).

Bhaskar, R. and Danermark, B.D. (2006) "Metatheory, Interdisciplinarity and Disability Research: A Critical Realist Perspective," *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 8(4), pp. 278–297.

Bibby, W. (2018) *Great expectations: Why we should focus on raising expectations not just aspirations*, Nesta [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/great-expectations/> (Accessed: August 9, 2021).

Biddle, C. and Schafft, K.A. (2015) "Axiology and anomaly in the practice of mixed methods work: Pragmatism, valuation, and the transformative paradigm," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 9(4), pp. 320–334.

Biesta, G. (2010) "Pragmatism and the philosophical foundations of mixed methods research," in A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (eds.) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, pp. 95–118.

BIS (2017) *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. London. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f3f67ed915d74e62294af/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy.pdf> (Accessed: April 23, 2021).

Bishop, K. (2021) "The workers keeping their disabilities secret." Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20211101-the-workers-keeping-their-disabilities-secret> (Accessed: September 4, 2024).

Blair, T. (2001) "Full text of Tony Blair's speech on Education," *The Guardian* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/may/23/labour.tonyblair> (Accessed: May 31, 2024).

Blau, P.M. (1964) "Justice in Social Exchange," *Sociological Inquiry*, 34, pp. 193–206.

Blunkett, D. (2000) "Modernising Higher Education: Facing the Global Challenge." Available at:

https://archives.shef.ac.uk/repositories/3/archival_objects/1106

(Accessed: March 26, 2024).

- Bock, D.E., Poole, S.M. and Joseph, M. (2014) "Does branding impact student recruitment: a critical evaluation," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 24(1), pp. 11–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.908454>.
- Boliver, V. (2011) "Expansion, differentiation, and the persistence of social class inequalities in British higher education," *Higher Education*, 61(3), pp. 229–242. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9374-y>.
- Boliver, V. (2013) "How fair is access to more prestigious UK universities?," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 64(2), pp. 344–364. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12021>.
- Boliver, V. (2015) "Lies, damned lies, and statistics on widening access to Russell Group universities," 113, pp. 29–38. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33430921>.
- Boliver, V. et al. (2017) *The use of contextual information by leading universities*. Available at: <https://dro.dur.ac.uk/23457/1/23457.pdf> (Accessed: June 20, 2022).
- Bosma, H.A. et al. (1994) *Identity and development: An interdisciplinary approach*. Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE publications.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985) "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, 74(6), pp. 723–744.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986a) "The forms of capital," in J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood, pp. 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986b) "The production of belief: Contribution to an economy of symbolic goods," in C. R. et al. (ed.) *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (1992) *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993) *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage. Available at: https://monoskop.org/File:Bourdieu_Pierre_Sociology_in_question_1993.epub (Accessed: April 25, 2026).

- Bourdieu, P. (1996) *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Cambridge : Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997) "The Forms of Capital," in A.H. Halsey (ed.) *Education: Culture, Economy and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002) "Habitus," in J. Hillier and E. Rooksby (eds.) *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. Burlington VT: Ashgate, pp. 27–34.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1977) *Education, society and culture*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, J.D. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Brennan, J., Brodnick, R. and Pinckley, D. (2008) "De-Mystifying the U.S. News Rankings: How to Understand What Matters, What Doesn't and What You can Actually Do About It," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 17(2), pp. 169–188. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841240801912385>.
- Brewer, G., Urwin, E. and Witham, B. (2023) "Disabled student experiences of Higher Education," *Disability & Society*, 40(1), pp. 108–127. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2263633>.
- Briggs, S. (2006) "An exploratory study of the factors influencing undergraduate student choice: the case of higher education in Scotland," *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(6), pp. 705–722. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070601004333>.
- Brown, L. (2008) "A review of the literature on case study research," *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 1(1), pp. 1–13.
- Brown, N. and Leigh, J. (2018) "Ableism in academia: where are the disabled and ill academics?" *Disability and Society*, 33(6), pp. 985–989. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1455627>.
- Brown, N. and Leigh, J. (2020) *Ableism in Academia: Theorising experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education*. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/51775/9781787354975.pdf?sequence=1> (Accessed: June 20, 2022).
- Brown, R. (2011) "Looking back, looking forward: the changing structure of UK higher education, 1980–2012," in J. Brennan and T. Shah (eds.) *Higher*

Education and Society in Changing Times: Looking Back and Looking Forward, pp. 13–22.

- Bryman, A. (2009) "Sage Methodspace: Alan Bryman on research methods." Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHzM9RIO6j0> (Accessed: July 3, 2019).
- Buch-Hansen, H. (2005) "Critical realism in the social sciences - An interview with Roy Bhaskar," *Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 6(2), pp. 59–69.
- Bunbury, S. (2020) "Disability in higher education – do reasonable adjustments contribute to an inclusive curriculum?" *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24(9), pp. 964–979. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1503347>.
- Bunn, Matthew, Threadgold, Steven and Burke, Penny Jane (2020) "Class in Australian higher education: The university as a site of social reproduction," *Journal of Sociology*, 56(3), pp. 422–438. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319851188>.
- Burawoy, M. (2011) "Redefining the Public University: Global and National Contexts," in J. Holmwood (ed.) *A Manifesto for the Public University*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 27–41.
- Burchardt, T. (2005) *The education and employment of disabled young people: frustrated ambition*. Policy Press.
- Burke, P.J. (2017) "Widening Access to Higher Education," in J. C. S. P. Teixeira (ed.) *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 1–10.
- Burmann, C. and Zeplin, S. (2005) "Building brand commitment: A behavioural approach to internal brand management," *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(4), pp. 279–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540223>.
- Burns, A. (1999) *Collaborative action research for English language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Busby, E. (2018) "Gender gap in university applications at record high, Ucas figures show," *Independent [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/gender-gap-university-applications-high-men-women-ucas-figures-students-a8191491.html> (Accessed: March 8, 2022).

- Byrne, M. *et al.* (2012) "Motivations, expectations and preparedness for higher education: A study of accounting students in Ireland, the UK, Spain and Greece," *Accounting Forum*, 36(2), pp. 134–144. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accfor.2011.12.001>.
- Cahill, S.E. and Eggleston, R.A. (1994) "Managing emotions in public: The case of wheelchair users.," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57(4), pp. 300–312. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787157>.
- Calhoun, C. (2014) "Conclusion: The Robbins Report and British higher education past and future," in N. Barr (ed.) *Shaping Higher Education: 50 Years After Robbins*. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, pp. 65–87.
- Callender, C. and Dougherty, K.J. (2018) "Student choice in higher education-reducing or reproducing social inequalities?" *Social Sciences*, 7(10), p. 189. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100189>.
- Callender, C. and Wilkinson, D. (2003) *2002/03 Student Income and Expenditure Survey: Students' income, expenditure and debt and changes since 1998*. Nottingham, UK.
- Camilleri, M.A. (2020) "Higher education marketing communications in the digital era," *Strategic marketing of higher education in Africa*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.
- Campbell, C. and Rozsnyai, C. (2002) *Quality Assurance and the Development of Course Programmes*. Bucharest.
- Canterbury, R.M. (1999) "Higher Education Marketing: A Challenge," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9(3), pp. 15–24. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1300/J050v09n03_02.
- Chapleo, C. (2011) "Exploring rationales for branding a university: Should we be seeking to measure branding in UK universities?" *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(6), pp. 411–422. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2010.53>.
- Chapleo, C. (2015) "An exploration of branding approaches in UK universities," *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 20(1), pp. 1–11. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1513>.
- Chapman, D.W. (1981) "A Model of Student College Choice," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 52(5), pp. 490–505. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1981.11778120>.

- Chapman, R. (1993) "Non-Simultaneous Relative Importance-Performance Analysis: Meta-Analysis from 80 College Choice Surveys with 55,276 Respondents," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 4(1/2), pp. 405–422.
- Charlesworth, T.E.S. and Banaji, M.R. (2019) "Gender in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics: Issues, Causes, Solutions," 39(37), pp. 7228–7243. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0475-18.2019>.
- Charmaz, K. (1995) "The body, identity, and self: Adapting to impairment.," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36(4), pp. 657–680. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1995.tb00459.x>.
- Chatzitheochari, S. and Platt, L. (2018) "Low expectations are stopping young disabled people going to university." Available at: <https://theconversation.com/low-expectations-are-stopping-young-disabled-people-going-to-university-93033> (Accessed: March 30, 2022).
- Chatzitheochari, S. and Platt, L. (2019) "Disability differentials in educational attainment in England: primary and secondary effects," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 70(2), pp. 502–525. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12372>.
- de Chernatony, L. and Segal-Horn, S. (2003) "The criteria for successful services brands," *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), pp. 1095–1118. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477681>.
- CIPD (2017) *Human capital theory: assessing the evidence for the value and importance of people to organisational success*. Available at: https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/human-capital-theory-assessing-the-evidence_tcm18-22292.pdf (Accessed: April 20, 2025).
- Clark, D., Conlon, G. and Galinda-Rueda, F. (2005) "Post-Compulsory Education and Qualification Attainment," in S. Machin and A. Vignoles (eds.) *What's the Good of Education? The Economics of Education in the United Kingdom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Clarke, M. (2007) *The Impact of Higher Education Rankings on Student Access, Choice, and Opportunity, Higher Education in Europe*. Washington, DC: Institute of Higher Education Policy. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03797720701618880>.

- Coates, D. (1998) "Marketing of further and higher education: an equal opportunities perspective," *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 22(2), pp. 135–142.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research methods in education*. 8th ed. Oxford: Routledge.
- Coleman, J.S. (1988) "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(1), pp. 95–120. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243>.
- Collini, S. (2020) *Utopian universities: a global history of the new campuses of the 1960s*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Available at: <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/2434> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).
- Connie, G. and Rahman, A. (2019) "Exploring Key Factors Influencing University Choice." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331973161_Exploring_Key_Factors_Influencing_University_Choice (Accessed: November 18, 2019).
- Constantinides, E. and Stagno, M.C.Z. (2011) "Potential of the social media as instruments of higher education marketing: A segmentation study," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 21(1), pp. 7–24. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2011.573593>.
- Cooper, L. (2013) "Women and higher education: Perspectives of middle-class, mother-daughter dyads," *Gender and Education*, 25(5), pp. 624–639. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2013.810711>.
- Coughlan, S. (2019) "The symbolic target of 50% at university reached." Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-49841620> (Accessed: May 10, 2021).
- Cranfield, D.J. and Taylor, J. (2008) *Knowledge Management and Higher Education: A UK Case Study*. Available at: <https://academic-publishing.org/index.php/ejkm/article/download/814/777/810> (Accessed: October 7, 2019).
- Crawford, C. (2014) *Socio-economic differences in university outcomes in the UK: drop-out, degree completion and degree class IFS Working Paper W14/31*. Available at: <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org>.
- Creswell, John W and Tashakkori, Abbas (2007) "Editorial: Differing Perspectives on Mixed Methods Research," *Journal of Mixed Methods*

- Research*, 1(4), pp. 303–308. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689807306132>.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003) *Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed method approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed method approaches. International Students Edition*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2011) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2018) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Cropanzano, R. *et al.* (2017) “Social exchange theory: A critical review with theoretical remedies.,” *Academy of management annals*, 11(1), pp. 479–516.
- Cropanzano, R. and Mitchell, M. (2007) “Social Exchange Theory,” in S. G. Rogelberg (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 733–736.
- Crossing, S. (2018) *The student experience: How can universities meet student demands?* Available at: https://www.studiosity.com/blog/the-student-experience-how-can-universities-meet-student-demands?fbclid=IwAR3R5TDAX7QJBjyJkIfphiwLuilRCc9gFywiwVGVN_RNPtecstONADaYkLk (Accessed: October 25, 2021).
- Cubillo, J.M., Sánchez, J. and Cerviño, J. (2006) “International students’ decision-making process,” *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(2), pp. 101–115. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540610646091>.
- Curtis, P. (2003) “Tony Blair on education.,” *The Guardian [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/aug/02/schools.uk1> (Accessed: July 26, 2023).
- Curtis, W., Murphy, M. and Shields, S. (2014) *Research and education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- D’Alessio, S. (2011) *Inclusive education in Italy: A critical analysis of the policy of integrazione scolastica*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Darling, R.B. (2003) “Toward a model of changing disability identities: a proposed typology and research agenda,” *Disability & Society*, 18(7), pp. 881–895. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759032000127308>.

- DBIS (2016) *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-white-paper> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).
- Dearing, R. (1997) *The Dearing Report (1997) Higher Education in the learning society*. Available at: <https://education-uk.org/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html> (Accessed: May 30, 2024).
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2008) "Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research," in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 1–44.
- Department for Business, I.& S. (2010) *The Browne report: higher education funding and student finance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-browne-report-higher-education-funding-and-student-finance> (Accessed: April 6, 2020).
- Department for Business Innovations and Skills (2011) *Students at the Heart of the System*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf#:~:text=Students%20at%20the%20Heart%20of%20the%20System.%20Presented,Her%20Majesty.%20June%202011 (Accessed: December 14, 2020).
- Department for Education (2014) *School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation*. London.
- Department for Education (2019a) *Call for universities to improve support for disabled students*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-universities-to-improve-support-for-disabled-students> (Accessed: January 18, 2021).
- Department for Education (2019b) *post-18 review of education and funding: independent panel report*.
- Department for Education and Employment (1998) *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain*. London: Stationery Office.
- Department for Work & Pensions (2023) *Official Statistics Employment of disabled people 2023*. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2023/employment-of-disabled-people-2023> (Accessed: June 24, 2024).

Department of Education (2010) *The Importance of Teaching. The Schools White Paper 2010.* Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf (Accessed: July 25, 2023).

Department of Education and Skills (2003) *The Future of Higher Education.* Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmmeduski/425/425.pdf> (Accessed: December 14, 2020).

Dess, G.D. and Picken, J. (1999) *Beyond productivity: how leading companies achieve superior performance by leveraging their human capital.* New York: American Management Association.

DfEE (1998) *Blunkett Welcomes Teaching and Higher Education Act.* Press Release. Available at: <https://www.lgcplus.com/archive/blunkett-welcomes-teaching-and-higher-education-act-17-07-1998/> (Accessed: March 26, 2024).

Dika, Sandra L and Singh, Kusum (2002) "Applications of Social Capital in Educational Literature: A Critical Synthesis," *Review of Educational Research*, 72(1), pp. 31–60. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072001031>.

DiMaggio, P. and Mohr, J. (1985) "Cultural capital, educational attainment, and marital selection.," *American Journal of Sociology*, 90(6), pp. 1231–1261. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/228209>.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (no date) *Disability Discrimination Act 1995.* Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents> (Accessed: January 2, 2026).

Donelan, M. (2022) *Our new plan to crack down on low-quality higher education.* Available at: <https://conservativehome.com/2022/01/21/michelle-donelan-how-the-government-will-crack-down-on-low-quality-higher-education/> (Accessed: July 4, 2024).

Donnellan, J. (2002) "the impact of marketer-controlled factors on college-choice decisions by students at a public research university, Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts

Amherst,” *Amherst: University of Massachusetts UMI number 303-350*. [Preprint].

- Donnelly, M. (2015) “Progressing to university: hidden messages at two state schools,” *British Educational Research Journal*, 41(1), pp. 85–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3136>.
- Doyle, Louise, Brady, Anne-Marie and Byrne, Gobnait (2009) “An overview of mixed methods research,” *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 14(2), pp. 175–185. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987108093962>.
- Duckworth, V. and Cochrane, M. (2012) “Spoilt for choice, spoilt by choice,” *Education + Training*, 54(7), pp. 579–591. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911211265620>.
- Dumais, S.A. (2006) “Early childhood cultural capital, parental habitus, and teachers’ perceptions,” *Poetics*, 34(2), pp. 83–107. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.POETIC.2005.09.003>.
- Dunnett, A. *et al.* (2012) “Choosing a university: A conjoint analysis of the impact of higher fees on students applying for university in 2012,” *Tertiary Education and Management*, 18(3), pp. 199–220. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2012.657228>.
- Eccles, S. *et al.* (2018) “Risk and stigma: students’ perceptions and disclosure of ‘disability’ in higher education,” *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 20(4), pp. 191–208. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5456/wpll.20.4.191>.
- Edgerton, Jason D and Roberts, Lance W (2014) “Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality,” *Theory and Research in Education*, 12(2), pp. 193–220. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878514530231>.
- edm.parliament.uk (1993) *DISABLED STUDENTS’ ALLOWANCE EDM (Early Day Motion) 1870: tabled on 27 April 1993*. Available at: <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/5966/disabled-students-allowance> (Accessed: April 11, 2025).
- Ellwood, D.T. and Kane, T.J. (2000) “Who is getting a college education? Family background and the growing gaps in enrollment,” in S. Danziger and J. Waldfogel (eds.) *Securing the Future: Investing in Children from Birth to College*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 283–324.
- Elster, J. (1988) “The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation,” in E. Ullmann-Margalit (ed.) *Science in Reflection: The Israel Colloquium*:

- Studies in History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Science Volume 3*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 51–65. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-2957-9_5.
- Elster, J. (1989) *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Emerson, R. (1962) "Power-dependence relations," *American Sociological Review*, 27, pp. 31–41.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (2016) *What is the Equality Act?* Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- Erikson, E. (1968) *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Evennett, H. (2022) "The Equality Act 2010: Impact on disabled people." Available at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/the-equality-act-2010-impact-on-disabled-people/#heading-1> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- Fairweather, J. and Blalock, E. (2015) "Higher education: The nature of the beast," in J. Huisman et al. (eds.) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Higher Education Policy and Governance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3–19.
- Farr, M. (2001) "Home or away? A study of distance travelled to higher education 1994–1999," *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 3(1), pp. 17–25.
- Faure, E. (1972) "Learning to Be, Paris," *UNESCO* [Preprint].
- Feilzer, M.Y. (2010) "Doing mixed methods research pragmatically: Implications for the rediscovery of pragmatism as a research paradigm," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), pp. 6–16.
- Fetters, M.D. and Molina-Azorin, J.F. (2019a) "A call for expanding philosophical perspectives to create a more "worldly" field of mixed methods: the example of yinyang philosoph," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 13(1), pp. 15–18.
- Fetters, M.D. and Molina-Azorin, J.F. (2019b) "Philosophy, Call for Expanding Philosophical Perspectives to Create a More 'Worldly' Field of Mixed Methods: The Example of Yinyang.," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3(1), pp. 15–18.
- Fetters, Michael D and Freshwater, Dawn (2015) "Publishing a Methodological Mixed Methods Research Article," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*,

9(3), pp. 203–213. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815594687>.

- Fife, B.L. and Wright, E.R. (2000) “The dimensionality of stigma: A comparison of its impact on the self of persons with HIV/AIDS and cancer.,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41(1), pp. 50–67. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2676360>.
- Fleming, T. et al. (2009) *Access and Retention: Experiences of Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education - A Literature Review*. Available at: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2041.8642 (Accessed: January 13, 2020).
- Forber-Pratt, A.J. et al. (2017) “Disability identity development: A systematic review of the literature,” *Rehabilitation psychology*, 62(2), p. 198.
- Ford, J.B., Joseph, M. and Joseph, B. (1999) “Importance-performance analysis as a strategic tool for service marketers: The case of service quality perceptions of business students in New Zealand and the USA. ,” *The Journal of Services Marketing*, 13(2), pp. 171–186.
- Foskett, N., Roberts, D. and Maringe, F. (2006) *Changing Fee Regimes and their impact on Student Attitudes to Higher Education*. Available at: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=9d0e77cc234dc7d5b0eeb6055eeaf077447aad22> (Accessed: March 27, 2023).
- Foss, C. and Ellefsen, B. (2002) “The value of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in nursing research by means of method triangulation,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 40, pp. 242–248.
- Frels, R.K. and Onwuegbuzie, A. (2013) “Administering Quantitative Instruments With Qualitative Interviews: A Mixed Research Approach.,” *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 91, pp. 184–194.
- Freshwater, D. and Cahill, J. (2012) “Why write?,” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(3), pp. 151–153.
- Freud, S. (1905) *On psychotherapy*. Standard. Toronto: Hogarth Press.
- Friga, P., Bettis, R.A. and Sullivan, R. (2003) “Changes. In graduate management education and new business school strategies for the 21st century. ,” *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2(3), pp. 233–249.
- Fryer, R. (1997) *Learning for the 21st century: first report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning’, National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong*

Learning, Available at: <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/30387> (Accessed: December 14, 2020).

- Fuller, M. *et al.* (2004) "Barriers to learning: a systematic study of the experience of disabled students in one university.," *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(3), pp. 303–318.
- Fuller, M., Bradley, A. and Healey, M. (2004) "Incorporating disabled students within an inclusive higher education environment," *Disability & Society*, 19(5), pp. 455–468.
- Fullick, P. *et al.* (2014) "Should universities use contextual data when considering student applications?" *The Guardian [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/oct/21/universities-student-contextual-data-admissions> (Accessed: August 17, 2020).
- Gallacher, J. (2006) "Widening Access or Differentiation and Stratification in Higher Education in Scotland. ," *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60(4), pp. 349–369.
- Gentles, S.J., Charles, C. and Ploeg, J. (2016) "Sampling in qualitative research: Insights from an overview of the methods literature," *The Qualitative Report*, 20(11), pp. 1772–1789.
- Getzel, E.E. and Thoma, C.A. (2008) "Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings.," *Career development for exceptional individuals*, 31(2), pp. 77–84.
- Giannakis, M. and Bullivant, N. (2016) "The massification of higher education in the UK: Aspects of service quality," *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(5), pp. 630–648.
- Gibbs, G.R. (2012a) *Planning a Case Study*, Youtube [Online].
- Gibbs, G.R. (2012b) *Replication or Single Cases*, Youtube [Online].
- Gibbs, P. and Knapp, M. (2002) *Marketing higher and further education: an educator's guide to promoting courses, departments and institutions*. . London: Kogan Page.
- Giddings, L.S. and Grant, B.M. (2006) "Mixed methods for the novice researcher.," *Contemporary Nurse*, 23, pp. 3–11.
- Gill, C.J. (1997) "Four types of integration in disability identity development.," *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 9(1), pp. 39–46.

- Gillard, D. (2019) *Education in England*. Available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/wp1991b/index.html> (Accessed: April 16, 2020).
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Ptrentice-Hall.
- Gog, M. (2015) "Case Study Research.," *International Journal of Sales, Retailing & Marketing*, 4(9), pp. 33–41.
- Goodley, D. (2017) "Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies," *Culture - Theory - Disability* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839425336-008>.
- Goodman, P., Robert, R.C. and Johnson, J.E. (2020) "Rigor in PhD dissertation research.," *Nursing Forum*, 55(4), pp. 611–620.
- Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N. and Boliver, V. (2017a) "An Analysis of School-Based Contextual Indicators for Possible Use in Widening Participation," *Higher Education Studies*, 7(2), pp. 79–100.
- Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N. and Boliver, V. (2017b) "How can we widen participation in higher education? The promise of contextualised admissions," in R. Deem and H. Eggins (eds.) *The University as a Critical Institution?* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 95–109.
- Gorard, S. and Taylor, C. (2004) *Combining Methods in Educational and Social Research*. 1st ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Gorman, K.D. and MacIntosh, R. (2014) "Research methods for business and management," *Goodfellow Publishers Limited* [Preprint].
- Gorman, W.P. (1976) "An Evaluation of Student-Attracting Methods and University Features by Attending Students," *College and University*, 51(2), pp. 220–225.
- Gottfert, E. (2015) "Embedding case study research into the Research context," *International Journal of Sales, Retail and Marketing*, 4(9), pp. 23–31.
- Government Equalities Office and Equality and Human Rights Commission (2015) *Equality Act 2010: guidance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance#overview> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- Gov.uk (no date a) "Discrimination: your rights." Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).

- Gov.uk (no date b) *Government Response to the House of Lords Select Committee Report on The Equality Act 2010: The impact on disabled people.* Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-committees/equality-act/Govt-Response-to-HoL-SC-Report-on-the-EA2010.pdf> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- gov.uk (no date) "Major expansion of post-18 education and training to level up and prepare workers for post-COVID economy." Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-expansion-of-post-18-education-and-training-to-level-up-and-prepare-workers-for-post-covid-economy> (Accessed: March 30, 2022).
- Graue, C. (2016) "Qualitative Data Analysis," *International Journal of Sales, Retail and Marketing*, 4(9), pp. 5–14.
- Green, S. (2007) "Components of perceived stigma and perceptions of well-being among university students with and without disability experience," *Health Sociology Review*, 16(3–4), pp. 328–40.
- Greene, J. (2008) "Is mixed methods social inquiry a distinctive methodology?," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 2(1), pp. 7–22.
- Greene, J.C. and Hall, J.N. (2010) "Dialectics and pragmatism: Being of consequence," in A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (eds.) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, pp. 119–144.
- Greenwood, M.D. and Terry, K.J. (2012) "Demystifying mixed methods research: articulation in a reading group 'sign-posts' the way," *International Journal of Multiple Research Approached*, 6(2), pp. 98–108.
- Grenfell, M. (2008) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. 1st ed. Durham: Acumen.
- Grimes, S. et al. (2018) "University student perspectives on institutional non-disclosure of disability and learning challenges: reasons for staying invisible," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(6), pp. 639–655. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1442507>.
- Grove, J. (2020) "Minister: university entry is 'simplistic' social mobility measure.," *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/minister-university-entry-simplistic-social-mobility-measure> (Accessed: July 21, 2020).

- Groves, R.M. *et al.* (2009) *Survey methodology*. 2nd ed. Hoboken NJ: J. Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) "Competing paradigms in qualitative research," in N. K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 105–117.
- Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1981) "Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic. ," *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 3, pp. 233–252.
- Guetterman, T.C. and Fetters, M.D. (2018) "Two Methodological Approaches to the Integration of Mixed Methods and Case Study Designs: A Systematic Review. ," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(7).
- Halcomb, E.J. and Andrew, S. (2009) "Practical considerations for higher degree research students undertaking mixed methods projects. ," *International Journal of Multiple Research Projects*, 3(2), pp. 153–162.
- Hall-Phillips, A. *et al.* (2016) "I (heart) social ventures: Identification and social media engagement," *Journal of Business Research*, 69(2), pp. 484–491. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.05.005>.
- Harris, J. (2017) "Dear students, there's a reason all universities charge the same fees, and it's not a good one.," *Telegraph [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/06/dear-students-reason-universities-charge-fees-not-good-one/> (Accessed: July 20, 2022).
- Harris, M.S. (2009) "Message in a bottle: University advertising during bowl games.," *Innovation Higher Education*, 33, pp. 285–296.
- Harrison, H. *et al.* (2017) "Case study research: Foundations and methodological orientations," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 18(1), pp. 1–16.
- Harrison, N. (2011) "ave the changes introduced by the 2004 Higher Education Act made higher education admissions in England wider and fair," *Journal of Education Policy*, 26(3), pp. 449–468.
- Hassel, S. and Ridout, N. (2018) "An Investigation of First-Year Students' and Lecturers' Expectations of University Education.," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8(2218).
- Hayton, A. and Bengry-Howell, A. (2016) "Theory, Evaluation, and Practice in Widening Participation: A Framework Approach to Assessing Impact.," *London Review Of Education*, 14(3), pp. 41–53.

- Hazelkorn, E. (2014) "The Effects of Rankings on Student Choices and Institutional Selection. ," *Access and Expansion Post-Massification: Opportunities and Barriers to Further Growth in Higher Education Participation*. London: Routledge.
- Healy, T. and Côté, S. (2001) "The Well-Being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital. Education and Skills," *Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/wellbeingofnatio0000heal/page/2/mode/2up> (Accessed: April 21, 2025).
- Hearn, J.C. (1991) "Academic and nonacademic influences on the college destinations of 1980 high-school graduates," *Sociology of Education*, 64(3), pp. 158–171.
- Heath, A. *et al.* (2013) "Education under New Labour, 1997–2010. ," *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 29(1), pp. 227–247.
- Hemsley-Brown, J. and Oplatka, I. (2006) "Universities in a competitive global marketplace," *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 19(4), pp. 316–338. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550610669176>.
- Henderson, M., Shure, N. and Adamecz-Völgyi, A. (2020) "Moving on up: 'first in family' university graduates in England," *Oxford Review of Education*, 46(6), pp. 734–751. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2020.1784714>.
- Hendry, L.B. and Kloep, M. (2007) "Redressing the Emperor!—A Rejoinder to Arnett," *Child Development Perspectives*, 1(2), pp. 83–85. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2007.00019.x>.
- HEPI (no date) *Social mobility and elite universities*. Available at: HEPI-Policy-Note-20-Social-Mobility-Challenge-FINAL.pdf (Accessed: January 20, 2021).
- HESA (no date) *Where do HE students study?* Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-study#location> (Accessed: November 17, 2021).
- Hilgers, M. and Mangez, E. (2014) "Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields.," in M. Hilgers and E. Mangez (eds.) *Bourdieu's theory of social fields: Concepts and applications*. . Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 1–35.

- Hillman, N. (2015) "Why do students study so far from home?" Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/why-do-students-study-so-far-from-home> (Accessed: April 19, 2023).
- Hillman, N. (2023a) "The state of higher education at the end of 2023 – by Nick Hillman (HEPI Director)." Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/12/12/the-state-of-higher-education-at-the-end-of-2023-by-nick-hillman-hepi-director/> (Accessed: September 5, 2024).
- Hillman, N. (2023b) "The Robbins Report at 60: Essential facts for policymakers today." Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-Robbins-Report-at-60-Essential-facts-for-policymakers-today.pdf> (Accessed: February 20, 2025).
- Holland, D. *et al.* (2013) *BIS RESEARCH PAPER NO. 110: The relationship between graduates and economic growth across countries.*
- Holt, L., Bowlby, S. and Lea, J. (2019) "Disability, special educational needs, class, capitals, and segregation in schools: A population geography perspective," *Population, Space and Place*, 25(4), p. e2229. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2229>.
- Homans, G.C. (1958) "Social Behaviour as Exchange.," *American Journal of Sociology*, 63, pp. 597–606.
- Hooley, G.J. and Lynch, J. (1981) "Modelling the student university choice process through the use of conjoint measurement techniques.," *European Research*, 9(4), pp. 158–170.
- Horvat, E.M. (2001) "Understanding equity and access in higher education: The potential contribution of Pierre Bourdieu.," in J. C. Smart (ed.) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. New York: Agathon Press, pp. 158–171.
- Horwedel, D.M. (2008) "Putting first-generation students first.," *Diverse*, 25(5), pp. 10–12.
- Hoskins, K. (2023) "Unleashing the 'undergraduate monster'? The second-order policy effects of the 1988 Education Reform Act for higher education in England," *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 55(2), pp. 165–180. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2022.2040451>.
- Hossler, D., Braxton, J. and Coopersmith, G. (1989) "Understanding student college choice," in J. C. Smart (ed.) *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*. New York: Agathon Press, pp. 231–288.

- Hossler, D. and Gallagher, K.S. (1987) "Studying Student College Choice: A Three-Phase Model and the Implications for Policymakers. ," *The Journal of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*, 62(3), pp. 207–221.
- Hossler, D., Schmit, J. and Vesper, N. (1999) *Going to College: How Social, Economic, and Educational Factors Influence the Decisions Students Make*. Baltimore.
- Hubble, S. and Bolton, P. (2021) *Support for disabled students in higher education in England, Number*. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8716/> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- Hubble, S., Foster, D. and Bolton, P. (2019) "Postgraduate loans in England." Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07049/SN07049.pdf> (Accessed: January 17, 2023).
- Hughes, G. and Smail, O. (2015) "Which aspects of university life are most and least helpful in the transition to HE? A qualitative snapshot of student perceptions," *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39(4), pp. 466–480. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2014.971109>.
- Huisman, J., Meek, L. and Wood, F. (2007) "Institutional Diversity in Higher Education: a Cross-National and Longitudinal Analysis," *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61(4), pp. 563–577. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2007.00372.x>.
- Idiart, M.A.P. et al. (2019) "How the brain represents language and answers questions? Using an ai system to understand the underlying neurobiological mechanisms," *Frontiers in Computational Neuroscience*, 13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fncom.2019.00012>.
- Idris, M.Z. and Whitfield, T.W.A. (2014) "Swayed by the logo and name: does university branding work?," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 24(1), pp. 41–58. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.919979>.
- Iloh, C. (2018) "Toward a New Model of College 'choice' For a Twenty-first-century Context," *Harvard Educational Review*, 2(88), pp. 227–244. Available at: <https://www.harvardeducationalreview.org/content/88/2/227/tab-article-info> (Accessed: January 2, 2026).

- Iloh, C. (2019) "An Alternative to College 'Choice' Models and Frameworks: The Iloh Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories," 94(4), pp. 2–9. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/c80fc8012e18820e36de61e9fcb3fbe1/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1059> (Accessed: December 2, 2025).
- Ivy, J. (2008) "A new higher education marketing mix: the 7Ps for MBA marketing.," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 22(4), pp. 288–299.
- Jackson, G. (1982) "Public Efficacy and private choice in Higher Education.," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 4(2), pp. 237–247.
- Jackson, M.A. (2018) "Models of Disability and Human Rights: Informing the Improvement of Built Environment Accessibility for People with Disability at Neighborhood Scale?," *Laws*, 7(1), p. 10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws7010010>.
- de Jager, J. and Gbadamosi, G. (2010) "Specific remedy for specific problem: measuring service quality in South African higher education," *Higher Education*, 60(3), pp. 251–267. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9298-6>.
- James, D. (2011) *Beginning with Bourdieu in educational research*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/beginning-with-bourdieu-in-educational-research> (Accessed: November 15, 2019).
- Jameson, J. and Hillier, Y. (2003) *Researching post-compulsory education*. London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. Available at: <https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/3053/> (Accessed: April 27, 2026).
- Jan, M.T. and Ammari, D. (2016) "Advertising online by educational institutions and students' reaction: a study of Malaysian Universities," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 26(2), pp. 168–180. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2016.1245232>.
- Jary, D. and Parker, M. (1998) *The new higher education : issues and directions for the post-Dearing university / edited by David Jary & Martin Parker*. Edited by M. Parker. Stoke-on-Trent: Stoke-on-Trent: Staffordshire University Press, 1998.
- Jerrim, J., Chmielewski, A.K. and Parker, P. (2015) "Socioeconomic inequality in access to high-status colleges: A cross-country comparison," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 42, pp. 20–32. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2015.06.003>.

- Jevons, C. (2006) "Universities: a prime example of branding going wrong.," *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 15(7), pp. 466–467.
- St. John, E.P. and Asker, E. (2001) "The role of finances in student choice: A review of theory and research," in M. B. Paulsen and J. C. Smart (eds.) *The finance of Higher Education: Theory, Research, Policy and Practice*. New York: Agathon Press, pp. 419–438.
- St. John, E.P., Paulsen, M.B. and Carter, D.F. (2005) "Diversity, College Costs, and Postsecondary Opportunity: An Examination of the Financial Nexus between College Choice and Persistence for African Americans and Whites," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), pp. 545–569. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3838839>.
- Johnson, B. and Turner, L.A. (2003) "Data Collection Strategies in Mixed Methods Research.," in A.M. Tashakkori and C.B. Teddlie (eds.) *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 297–319.
- Johnson, M., Bowden, G. and Alonso, G. (2020) "Rethinking Disadvantage: a social capital approach to Widening Participation." Available at: <https://doi.org/http://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.22.1.55>.
- Johnson, R. Burke and Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J (2004) "Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come," *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), pp. 14–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014>.
- Jones, R. and Thomas, L. (2005) "The 2003 UK Government Higher Education White Paper: a critical assessment of its implications for the access and widening participation agenda.," *Journal of Education Policy*, pp. 615–630.
- Jones, S. (2020) "Covid-19 is our best chance to change universities for good.," *The Guardian* [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/mar/31/covid-19-is-our-best-chance-to-change-universities-for-good?fbclid=IwAR0cPD_OiV1N1yKJovQhhzpFLyNtHdnDFrgolEMX4K06jBzXjYZEWuDvZ3s (Accessed: April 22, 2020).
- Jongbloed, B. (2003) "Marketisation in higher education, Clarke's triangle and the essential ingredients of markets," *Higher Education Quarterly*, 57(2), pp. 110–135.

- Julal, F.S. (2013) "Use of student support services among university students: Associations with problem-focused coping, experience of personal difficulty and psychological distress.," *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 41(4), pp. 414–425. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.741680>.
- Jung, M. (2010) "Korean university students' willingness to communicate.," 36(1), pp. 283–311.
- Kallio, R. (1995) "Factors influencing the college choice decisions of graduate students.," *Research in Higher Education*, 36(1), pp. 109–125.
- Kandiko, C. and Mawer, C. (2013) "Student expectations and perceptions of higher education.," *Student expectations and perceptions of higher education*, pp. 1–82.
- Kasser, S. and Lytle, R. (2005) *Inclusive physical activity: A lifetime of opportunities*. Champaign, IL (Illinois): Human Kinetics.
- Kattari, S.K. (2020) "Ableist Microaggressions and the Mental Health of Disabled Adults," *Community Ment Health* , 56, pp. 1170–1179. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-020-00615-6>.
- Kelly, R. and Mutebi, N. (2023) *Invisible Disabilities in Education and Employment*. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0689/POST-PN-0689.pdf> (Accessed: December 2, 2025).
- Kennedy, H. (1997) " Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education." Available at: [https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15073/2/Learning%20works%20-%20widening%20participation%20in%20further%20education%20\(Kennedy%20report\).pdf](https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15073/2/Learning%20works%20-%20widening%20participation%20in%20further%20education%20(Kennedy%20report).pdf) (Accessed: September 25, 2019).
- Khattab, Nabil (2014) "How and when Do Educational Aspirations, Expectations and Achievement Align?," *Sociological Research Online*, 19(4), pp. 61–73. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3508>.
- Kim, A.J. and Ko, E. (2012) "Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand.," *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), pp. 1480–1486.
- Kimura, M. (2014) "Non-performativity of university and subjectification of students: the question of equality and diversity in UK universities," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(4), pp. 523–540. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43818037> (Accessed: July 31, 2025).

- King, K.P., Kobayashi, N. and Bigler, L.G. (1986) "Factors influencing students' perceptions of college recruitment activities," *College and University*, 61, pp. 99–113.
- Kingston, P. (2001) "The Unfulfilled Promise of Cultural Capital Theory," *Sociology of Education*, (74), pp. 88–99.
- Knight, E.B. (2018) "The Impact of Massification of the Higher Education Sector on the Idea of a Degree in the UK." Available at: https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/thesis/The_Impact_of_Massification_of_the_Higher_Education_Sector_on_the_Idea_of_a_Degree_in_the_UK/5732178?file=16379087 (Accessed: November 25, 2024).
- Koca-Atabey, M. (2017) "Re-visiting the role of disability coordinators: The changing needs of disabled students and current support strategies from a UK university.," *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32(1), pp. 137–145.
- Košutić, I. (2017) "The Role of Cultural Capital in Higher Education Access and Institutional Choice," *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 7(1), pp. 149–169.
- Kravets, M. (2006) "Hidden Disabilities: Another Diverse Population ," *Journal Of College Admission*, 190, pp. 18–25.
- Krosnick, J.A. and Presser, A. (2010) "Question and Questionnaire Design," in P. V. Marsden and J. D. Wright (eds.) *Handbook of Survey Research*. 2nd ed. Bingley, UK: Emerald, pp. 264–313.
- Krstić, M. (2022) "Rational choice theory—alternatives and criticisms.," *Socijalna ekologija: časopis za ekološku misao i sociologijska istraživanja okoline*, 31(1), pp. 9–27.
- Kusumawati, A., Perera, N. and Yanamandram, V. (2019) "Modelling trade-offs in students' choice set when determining universities.," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(5), pp. 979–989.
- Lackman, C. and Lanasa, J.M. (1993) "Family decision-making theory: An overview and assessment," *Psychology & Marketing*, 10(2), pp. 81–93. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.4220100203>.
- Lahno, Bernd (2007) "Rational Choice and Rule-Following Behavior," *Rationality and Society*, 19(4), pp. 425–450. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463107083737>.
- Lami, R. and Mele, M. (2014) *Applying to Higher Education: Information sources and choice factors*. Valencia.

- Lamont, M. and Lareau, A. (1988) "Cultural capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments," *Sociological Theory*, 6, pp. 153–168.
- Langton, P. (2022) "Only about 20 per cent of school-leavers need to go to university," *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/only-about-20-cent-school-leavers-need-go-university> (Accessed: April 21, 2025).
- LaVigne, B.A. (2019) "The Effect of Marketization on Students in Higher Education: Do They Think They Are the Customer and Does It Affect High Engagement Learning Practices?" Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/c0bfd1ba7f4fa41dd0b5679e4fbd4bb4/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=51922&diss=y> (Accessed: January 25, 2022).
- Layard, R. (2014) "What was the world like then? The context in 1963," in N. Barr (ed.) *Shaping Higher Education: 50 Years After Robbins*. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, pp. 13–22.
- Leathwood, C. and O'Connell, P. (2010) "It's a struggle': the construction of the 'new student' in higher education," *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(6), pp. 597–615.
- LeBlanc, G. and Nguyen, N. (1997) "Searching for excellence in business education: An exploratory study of customer impressions of service quality," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 11(2), pp. 72–79.
- Leese, M. (2010) "Bridging the gap. Supporting students into higher education," *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34, pp. 239–251.
- LeFevre, D. (2020) "Covid-19 is no longer a short-term crisis for higher education.," *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/covid-19-no-longer-short-term-crisis-higher-education> (Accessed: June 30, 2020).
- legislation.gov.uk (no date) *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. Available at: <https://education-uk.org/documents/acts/1992-further-higher-education-act.html> (Accessed: January 1, 2026).
- Levine, R. (2001) "International financial liberalisation and economic growth," *Review of International Economics*, 25(1), pp. 1–18.
- Lewis, J., Bolton, P. and Wilson (2024) *Tuition fees in England: History, debates, and international comparisons*. Available at:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10155/>
(Accessed: April 15, 2024).

- Lietz, P. (2010) "Research into questionnaire design: A summary of the literature.," *International Journal of Market Research*, 52(2), pp. 249–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2501/S147078530920120X>.
- Lin, L. (1997) "What are student education and educational related needs?," *Marketing and Research Today*, 25(3), pp. 199–212.
- Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815447>.
- Lindsay, S. et al. (2024) "Accessible independent housing for people with disabilities: A scoping review of promising practices, policies and interventions," *PLoS ONE*. Public Library of Science. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0291228>.
- Link, B. and Phelan, J. (2003) "Social conditions as fundamental causes of health inequalities," in C. E. Bird et al. (eds.) *Handbook of medical sociology*. 6th ed. Vanderbilt University Press, pp. 3–17.
- Litten, L.H. (1982) "Different strokes in the applicant pool: some refinement in a model of student college choice," *Journal of Higher Education*, 53(4), pp. 383–402.
- Logan, J. and Martin, N. (2012) "'Unusual Talent: A Study of Successful Leadership and Delegation in Entrepreneurs who have Dyslexia'," *Inclusive Practice*, 4(1), pp. 57–76.
- Lubbe, I. and Petzer, D. (2016) "Key information sources influencing prospective students university choice a South African perspective.," *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27, pp. 274–275.
- Lubbe, I. and Petzer, D.J. (2013) "Key information sources influencing prospective students' university choice: a South African perspective.," *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27(4), pp. 920–940.
- Luck, L., Jackson, D. and Usher, K. (2006) "Case study: A bridge across the paradigms," *Nursing Inquiry*, 13(2), pp. 103–109.
- Luft, J.A. et al. (2022) "Literature Reviews, Theoretical Frameworks, and Conceptual Frameworks: An Introduction for New Biology Education Researchers," *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 21(3), p. rm33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.21-05-0134>.

- Lynch, K. (2006) "Neo-liberalism and marketisation: the implications for higher education.," *European Educational Research Journal*, 5(1), pp. 1–17.
- Lyons, L. (2013) "U.S. News breaks online traffic record." Available at: <https://www.usnews.com/info/blogs/press-room/2013/09/12/us-news-breaks-online-traffic-record> (Accessed: December 17, 2020).
- Machin, S. and Vignoles, A. (2006) *Education Policy in the UK. CEE DP 57*. London.
- Madriaga, M. *et al.* (2010) "Confronting similar challenges? Disabled and non-disabled students' learning and assessment experiences," *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(6), pp. 647–658. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903222633>.
- Mahar, C. and Wilkes, C. (2004) "Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).," in J. Simons (ed.) *Contemporary critical theorists: From Lacan to Said*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 218–233.
- Major, L.E. and Banerjee, A.B. (2019) "Social mobility and elite universities." Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HEPI-Policy-Note-20-Social-Mobility-Challenge-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed: September 30, 2023).
- Malina, M., Norreklit, H. and Selto, F. (2011) "Lessons Learned: Advantages and disadvantages of mixed method research," *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8, pp. 59–71.
- Mamboleo, Dong and Fais (2019) "Factors Associated with Disability Self-Disclosure to Their Professors among College Students with Disabilities."
- Mandizha, T. (2016) "Unemployment causes decrease in government revenue." Available at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/business/article/89730/unemployment-causes-decrease-in-govt-revenue> (Accessed: April 20, 2025).
- Marginson, S. (2019) "Limitations of human capital theory.," *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(2), pp. 287–301.
- Maringe, F. (2006) "University and course choice: Implications for positioning, recruitment and marketing," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(6), pp. 466–479.
- Maringe, F. and Carter, S. (2007) "International students' motivations for studying in UK HE. Insights into the choice and decision making of

- African students,” *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21(6), pp. 459–475.
- Maringe, F. and Fuller, A. (2006) “Widening participation in UK higher education: a policy overview.,” *University of Southampton* [Preprint].
- Maringe, F. and Gibbs, P. (2008) *Marketing Higher Education: Theory and Practice*. UK: McGraw-Hill .
- Marjoribanks, K. (1998) “Family Capital, Children’s Individual Attributes, and Adolescents’ Aspirations: A Follow-Up Analysis,” *The Journal of Psychology*, 132(3), pp. 328–336. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223989809599171>.
- Martin, N. (2020) *A practical response to ableism in leadership in UK higher education*. Available at: <https://openresearch.lsbu.ac.uk/download/35b450aed3e8ad5946630797046d30d6724f0e5b8311780726203fa0fd377bb1/4185385/Ableism-in-Academia.pdf> (Accessed: June 20, 2022).
- Martin-Mazé, M. (2017) “Returning struggles to the practice turn: How were Bourdieu and Boltanski lost in (some) translations and what to do about it?,” *International Political Sociology*, 11(2), pp. 203–220.
- Maton, K. (2005) “A question of autonomy: Bourdieu’s field approach and higher education policy.,” *Journal of education policy*, 20(6), pp. 687–704.
- Maton, K. (2008) “Habitus,” in M. Grenfell (ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu*. Stocksfield: Acumen, pp. 49–65.
- Matzdorf, F. and Greenwood, J. (2015) “Student choice, league tables and university facilities,” in K. Alexander and I. Price (eds.) *EuroFM Research Papers - Advancing Knowledge in FM*. Schipol, Netherlands: EuroFM.
- Maxwell, J.A. (1996) *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.*, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc (Applied social research methods series, Vol. 41.).
- Mazzarol, T. (1998) “Critical success factors for international education marketing,” *International Journal of Educational Management*, 12(4), pp. 163–175.
- Mazzarol, T. and Soutar, G.N. (2002) “‘Push-pull’ factors influencing international student destination choice”.,” *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), pp. 82–90.

- McCaig, C. (2010) "Access agreements, widening participation and market positionality: enabling student choice?," in M. Molesworth, E. Nixon, and R. Scullion (eds.) *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*. Abingdon: Routledge. Available at: <https://network23.org/freeunisheff/files/2015/07/Mike-Molesworth-Richard-Scullion-Elizabeth-Nixon-The-Marketisation-of-Higher-Education-and-the-Student-as-Consumer-book.pdf> (Accessed: December 2, 2025).
- McCombes, S. (2023) *Writing Strong Research Questions | Criteria & Examples*. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-questions/> (Accessed: January 31, 2023).
- McCune, V. *et al.* (2010) "Mature and younger students' reasons for making the transition from further education into higher education," *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(6), pp. 619–702.
- McDonough, P.M. (1994) "Buying and selling higher education: the social construction of the college applicant," *Journal of Higher Education*, 65(4), pp. 427–446.
- McDonough, P.M. (1997) *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- McGettigan, A. (2013) *The great university gamble: money, markets and the future of higher education*. London: Pluto Press.
- McHale, S.M., Updegraff, K.A. and Whiteman, S.D. (2012) "Sibling Relationships and Influences in Childhood and Adolescence," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(5), pp. 913–930. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.01011.x>.
- McKie (2019) "More young disadvantaged students from England apply for university," *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/more-young-disadvantaged-students-england-apply-university> (Accessed: July 12, 2019).
- McKie (2019) "Identify outreach students nationally, says report.," *Times higher education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/identify-outreach-students-nationally-says-report> (Accessed: February 3, 2020).

- McLaren, R. (2016) *Could T.E.F. be good news for disabled students? Blog.*. Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/comment-could-tef-be-good-news-for-disabled-students/>. (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- McLean, K.C. and Syed, M. (2015) "The field of identity development needs an identity: An introduction to the Oxford handbook of identity development," in K. C. M. a. M. Syed (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of identity development*. Oxford, pp. 1–10.
- McManus, R., Haddock-Fraser, J. and Rands, P. (2017) "A methodology to understand student choice of higher education institutions: The case of the United Kingdom," *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 39(4), pp. 390–405.
- McManus-Howard, M. (2002) *Student Use of Rankings in National Magazines in the College Decision-Making Process*. [Online] . Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/entities/publication/f3212455-fbd8-4698-ae6c-e6ca93b32958> (Accessed: February 18, 2021).
- McNeal Jr, R.B. (1999) "Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out.," *Social forces*, 78(1), pp. 117–144.
- Meierdirk, C. (2018) *Bourdieu for beginners*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMfVvC32Kbk> (Accessed: July 29, 2021).
- Melchiorre, M.M. and Johnson, S.A. (2017) "Creating a social media marketing plan for professional and continuing higher education programs," *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 65(2), pp. 73–81.
- Menon, M.E. (1998) "Factors influencing the demand for higher education: The case of Cyprus," *Higher Education*, 35, pp. 251–266.
- Merchant, A. et al. (2015) "Effect of university heritage and reputation on attitudes of prospective students," *International journal of nonprofit and voluntary sector marketing*, 20(1), pp. 25–37.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998) *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriam, S.B. (2009) *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation. Revised and Expanded*. San Fransico: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertens, D. (2012) "Transformative Mixed Methods," *American Behavioral Scientist* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211433797>.

- Mertens, D.M. (2003) "Mixed methods and the politics of human research: The transformative emancipatory perspective," in C. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (eds.) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 135–164.
- Mertens, D.M. (2010) "Transformative mixed methods research," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), pp. 469–474. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410364612>.
- Mertens, D.M. (2015) *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Mertens, D.M. and Zimmerman, H. (2014) "A transformative framework for culturally responsive evaluation. Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context Evaluation Theory and Practice." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271586209_A_transformative_framework_for_culturally_responsive_evaluation/citations (Accessed: November 8, 2019).
- van der Merwe, A. (2010) "Does Human Capital Theory Account For Individual Higher Education Choice?," *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 9(6), pp. 81–94.
- Midgley, James (1996) "Involving Social Work in Economic Development," *International Social Work*, 39(1), pp. 13–25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002087289603900102>.
- Mitchell, E.M. and Ramsey, C. (2019) *Upper Sixths and Higher Education: 2019 Survey Commissioned by the HMC/GSA Universities Committee*. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/40442708/Upper_Sixths_and_Higher_Education_2019_Survey?email_work_card=view-paper (Accessed: April 6, 2020).
- Mitchell, M.S., Cropanzana, R.S. and Quisenberry, D.M. (2012) "Social exchange theory, exchange resources, and interpersonal relationships: A modest resolution of theoretical difficulties.," in K. Törnblom and A. Kazemi (eds.) *Handbook of Social Resource Theory: Theoretical Extensions, Empirical Insights, and Social Applications*. New York NY: Springer, pp. 99–118.

- Mogaji, E. and Yoon, H. (2019) "Thematic analysis of marketing messages in UK universities' prospectuses.," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(7), pp. 1561–1581.
- Mohler, E.C. and Rudman, D. (2022) "Negotiating the Insider/Outsider Researcher Position within Qualitative Disability Studies Research," *The Qualitative Report*, 27(6), pp. 1511–1521. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5047>.
- Molesworth, M., Scullion, R. and Nixon, E. (2011) *The marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Molina-Azorin, J.F. and Fetters, F.D. (2020) "Virtual Special Issue on "Paradigms in Mixed Methods Research," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 14(1), pp. 6–10.
- Molm, L.D. (2003) "Theoretical comparisons and forms of exchange," *Sociological Theory*, 21(1), pp. 1–17.
- Money *et al.* (2017) "Undergraduate student expectations of university in the United Kingdom: What really matters to them?," *Cogent Education*, 4(1), pp. 1–11.
- Moogan, Y.J. (2011) "Can a higher education institution's marketing strategy improve the student-institution match?," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(3), pp. 570–589.
- Moogan, Y.J. and Baron, S. (2003) "An analysis of student characteristics within the student decision making process.," *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27(3), pp. 271–287.
- Moogan, Y.J., Baron, S. and Harris, K. (1999) "Decision-Making Behaviour of Potential Higher Education Students. ," *Higher Education Quarterly*, 53(3), pp. 211–228.
- Moogan, Y.J., Baron, S. and Bainbridge, S. (2001) "Timings and trade-offs in the marketing of higher education courses: a conjoint approachTimings and trade-offs in the marketing of higher education courses: a conjoint approach," *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 19(3), pp. 179–187.
- Moore, R. (2021) " The free-market gamble: has Covid broken UK universities? ,," *The Guardian* [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/17/free-market-gamble-has-covid-broken-uk-universities?CMP=fb_gu&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwY2xjawJtieYBHV4BZlqjunkt6c_HRp3W_jY0L3Vg082dgSi

zwW4S0z16dkTJTogSQ6Rw#Echobox=1610877334 (Accessed: April 17, 2025).

- Morgan, D.L. (1998) "Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Application to health research," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1, pp. 48–76.
- Morgan, D.L. (2007) "Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), pp. 48–76.
- Morgan, J. (2020) "Minister: looking at which groups don't enter HE 'doesn't matter,'" *Times Higher Education [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/minister-looking-which-groups-dont-enter-he-doesnt-matter> (Accessed: July 15, 2020).
- Morgan, K. (2021) "Why inexperienced workers can't get entry-level jobs.," *BBC [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210916-why-inexperienced-workers-cant-get-entry-level-jobs> (Accessed: December 11, 2024).
- Morgan, M. (2013) *Supporting Student Diversity in Education: A practical guide*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Morse, J.M. (1991) "Approaches to qualitative-quantitative methodological triangulation," *Nursing Research*, 40, pp. 120–123.
- Moseholm, E. and Fetters, M.D. (2017) "Conceptual models to guide integration during analysis in convergent mixed methods studies," *Methodological Innovations*, 10(2).
- Murphy, P.E. (1981) "Consumer buying roles in college choice: Parents and students' perceptions. ," *College and University*, 56(2), pp. 140–150.
- Murphy, R. *et al.* (1988) " Physical disability and social liminality: A study of rituals in adversity," *Social Science and Medicine*, 26, pp. 235–242.
- M'zungu, S.D.M. and Merrilees, B.& M.D. (2010) "Brand management to protect brand equity: A conceptual model.," *Journal of Brand Management*, 17, pp. 605–617.
- Naidoo, R. (2004) "Fields and institutional strategy: Bourdieu on the relationship between higher education, inequality and society.," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25, pp. 457–471.
- Naude, P. and Ivy, J. (1999) "The marketing strategies of universities in the United Kingdom," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 13(3), pp. 126–136.

- Nedbalová, E., Greenacre, L. and Schulz, J. (2014) "UK higher education viewed through the marketization and marketing lenses," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 24.
- Nicholls, J. *et al.* (1995) "Marketing higher education: the MBA experience.," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 9(2), pp. 31–38.
- Noble, J. and Davies, P. (2009) "Cultural capital as an explanation of variation in participation in higher education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(5), pp. 591–605.
- Nölleke, D., Maares, P. and Hanusch, F. (2020) "Illusio and disillusionment: Expectations met or disappointed among young journalists," *Journalism*, 23(2), pp. 320–336.
- O'Connell, P.J., McCoy, S. and Clancy, D. (2006) "Who Went to College? Socio-Economic Inequality in Entry to Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland in 2004.," *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60, pp. 312–332.
- Office for Students (2021) "Disabled Students' Commission." Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/disabled-students-commission/#:~:text=The%20Disabled%20Students%27%20Commission%20%28DSC%29%20is%20a%20new%2C,disabled%20students.%20Why%20has%20the%20group%20been%20cr> (Accessed: April 14, 2021).
- Office for Students (2022a) "Regulatory advice 22 Guidance on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023." Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/77d4955c-4165-4f8f-94cf-315544b6cf25/ra22-tef-framework-guidance-final.pdf> (Accessed: April 15, 2025).
- Office for Students (2022b) "The Office for Students annual review 2022." Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/annual-review-2022/a-statistical-overview-of-higher-education-in-england/> (Accessed: December 21, 2023).
- Office for students (2025) *Support for disabled students*. Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/equalities-and-support/support-for-disabled-students/what-to-expect/> (Accessed: November 25, 2025).
- O'Hara, D. (2000) "Capitalism and Culture: Bourdieu's Field Theory.," *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 45(1), pp. 43–53.

- Oliver, D. (2004) "Human Capital Theory and Higher Education in Developing Countries.," *Journal of Thought*, 39(1), pp. 119–130.
- Oliver, M. (1990) *Social work with disabled people*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Oliver, P. (2008) *Writing your thesis*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- Olkin, R. and Pledger, C. (2003) "Can disability studies and psychology join hands?," *American Psychologist*, 58(4), pp. 296–304.
- Onwuegbuzie, A.J. and Johnson, R.B. (2006) "The Validity Issue in Mixed Research," *Research in the Schools*, 13(1), pp. 55–63.
- Onwuegbuzie, A.J. and Leech, N.L. (2006) "Linking Research Questions to Mixed Methods Data Analysis," *The Qualitative Report*, 11(3), pp. 474–498.
- O'Sullivan, K. *et al.* (2019) "Academic identity, confidence and belonging: The role of contextualised admissions and foundation years in higher education," *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), pp. 554–575. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3513>.
- O'Sullivan, K., Robson, J. and Winters, N. (2018) "‘I feel like I have disadvantage’: how socio-economically disadvantaged students make the decision to study at a prestigious university." Available at: https://www.academia.edu/36445622/I_feel_like_I_have_a_disadvantage_how_socio_economically_disadvantaged_students_make_the_decision_to_study_at_a_prestigious_university (Accessed: March 29, 2021).
- Palumbo, A. (2017) *The market as statecraft: how to reform higher education and commodify knowledge in the process*. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/31632771/The_market_as_statecraft_how_to_reform_higher_education_and_commodify_knowledge_in_the_process (Accessed: September 20, 2021).
- Parry, G. (2006) "Policy-Participation Trajectories in English Higher Education," *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60, pp. 392–412.
- Pather, S. and Chetty, R. (2015) "The Habitus and Social Capital of First-Year Students: A Case Study.," *Alternation Special Edition*, 17, pp. 54–76.
- Pather, S. and Chetty, R. (2016) "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Pre-Entry Factors Influencing First-Year University Experience. South African Journal of Higher Education," 30(1), pp. 1–21.
- Paulsen, M.B. (2001) "The economics of human capital and investment in higher education," in M. B. Paulsen and J. C. Smart (eds.) *The Finance of*

Higher Education: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice. New York: Agathon Press, pp. 55–94.

- Paulsen, M.B. and St. John, E.P. (2002) "Social Class and College Costs: Examining the Financial Nexus between College Choice and Persistence," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(2), pp. 189–236. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1558410>.
- Pedler, M.L., Willis, R. and Nieuwoudt, J.E. (2021) "A sense of belonging at university: student retention, motivation and enjoyment," *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(3), pp. 397–408. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1955844>.
- Peimani, N. and Kamalipour, H. (2021) "Online education and the covid-19 outbreak: A case study of online teaching during lockdown," *Education Sciences*, 11(2), p. 72. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11020072>.
- Perna, L.W. (2000) "Differences in the Decision to Attend College among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(2), pp. 117–141. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2000.11778831>.
- Perna, L.W. (2006) "Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model," in J.C. Smart (ed.) *HIGHER EDUCATION: Handbook of Theory and Research*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 99–157. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4512-3_3.
- Perna, L.W. and Titus, M.A. (2005) "The Relationship between Parental Involvement as Social Capital and College Enrollment: An Examination of Racial/Ethnic Group Differences," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), pp. 485–518. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2005.11772296>.
- Phinney, J.S., Dennis, J. and Osorio, S. (2006) "Reasons to attend college among ethnically diverse college students," *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(2), pp. 347–366.
- Pickering, N. (2019) "No such thing as a free lunch: widening participation in English higher education for those on free school meals," *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 21(3), pp. 57–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5456/wpll.21.3.57>.

- Pluye, P. and Hong, Q.N. (2014) "Combining the power of stories and the power of numbers: mixed methods research and mixed studies reviews.," *Annual review of public health*, 35(1), pp. 29–45.
- Polianskaya, A. (2018) "Student sues Anglia Ruskin University for 'Mickey Mouse' degree that hasn't helped her career." Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/student-anglia-ruskin-university-mickey-mouse-degree-pok-wong-tuition-fees-a8250441.html> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).
- Ponterotto, J.G. (2005) "Qualitative research in counseling philosophy: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science.," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2, pp. 126–136.
- Poole, S.M., Levin, M.A. and Elam, K. (2017) "Getting out of the rankings game: a better way to evaluate higher education institutions for best fit. ," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 28(1), pp. 12–31.
- Pratt, J. (2008) *UK: End of the British Binary System*. Available at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20080410142936814> (Accessed: October 2, 2019).
- Prensky, M. (2001) "Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1.," *On the Horizon*, 9, pp. 1–6.
- Price, I. *et al.* (2003) "The impact of facilities on student choice of university," *Facilities*, 21(10), pp. 212–222.
- Principal (no date) *Why Gen Z Is Driving the New Print Revival*. Available at: <https://www.principal.co.uk/news/why-gen-z-is-driving-the-new-print-revival> (Accessed: July 22, 2025).
- Pucciarelli, F. and Kaplan, A. (2016) " Competition and strategy in higher education: Managing complexity and uncertainty.," *Business Horizons*, 59(3), pp. 311–320.
- Qualtrics (2022) *Formatting Answer Choices*. Available at: <https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/survey-module/editing-questions/formatting-answer-choices/> (Accessed: May 18, 2023).
- Radice, H. (2013) "How we got here: UK higher education under neoliberalism. ," *ACME*, 12(3), pp. 407–418.
- Rainford, J. (2019) *Equal practices?: a comparative study of widening participation practices in pre and post -92 higher education institutions :*

- thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Staffordshire University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.* Stoke-on-Trent:
- Rainford, J. (2021) "Are we still 'raising aspirations'? The complex relationship between aspiration and widening participation practices in English higher education," *Educational Review*, pp. 1–18.
- Ranson, S., Rikowski, G. and Strain, M. (2001) "International Handbook of Lifelong Learning," in J. Chapman and D. Aspin (eds.) *Lifelong learning for a learning democracy*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 136–154.
- Raposo, M. and Alves, H. (2007) *A model of university choice: an exploratory approach*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/29448540_A_model_of_university_choice_an_exploratory_approach (Accessed: September 8, 2020).
- Ratcliffe, M. (2017) "The end of the binary divide reflections on 25 years of the 1992 Act. ." Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/analysis-25-years-on-the-higher-and-further-education-act-1992/> (Accessed: October 10, 2022).
- Rauscher, L. and Greenfield, B.H. (2009) "Advancements in contemporary physical therapy research: Use of mixed methods designs. ," *Physical Therapy*, 89(1), pp. 91–100.
- Ravulakollu, N. (2023) *Why do we always take p-value as 5%?* Available at: <https://www.almabetter.com/bytes/articles/why-do-we-always-take-p-value-as> (Accessed: August 16, 2023).
- Reay, D. *et al.* (2001) "Choices of degree or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. ," *Sociology*, 35(4), pp. 855–874.
- Reay, D. (2007) "Cultural Capital Theories," in S. Delamont and C. Marshall (eds.) *Gender and Education: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G. and James, D. (2011) *White middle-class identities and urban schooling*. New York: Springer.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G. and James, D. (2013) *White middle-class identities and urban schooling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S.J. (2005) *Degrees of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. . Stoke on trent: Trentham Books.

- Redmond, M. V. (2015) “‘Social Exchange Theory’ English Technical Reports and White Papers. 5.” Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/engl_reports/5 (Accessed: June 6, 2022).
- Riddell, S. *et al.* (2024) “Living and Studying at Home: Commuter Students in the Aftermath of the Pandemic.” Available at: <https://institute-academic-development.ed.ac.uk/learning-teaching/funding/funding/previous-projects/year/march-2022/commuter-students-in-the-aftermath-of-the-pandemic> (Accessed: December 12, 2025).
- Riddell, S. and Weedon, E. (2014) “Disabled students in higher education: Discourses of disability and the negotiation of identity.,” *International Journal of Educational Research*, 63, pp. 38–46.
- Robbins, L. (1963) “The Robbins Report. Higher Education. Report of the committee appointed by the prime minister under the chairmanship of Lord Robbins.” Available at: <https://education-uk.org/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html> (Accessed: April 3, 2025).
- Roberts, B.W. (2009) “Back to the future: Personality and Assessment and personality development.,” *Journal of Research in Personality*, 43(2), pp. 137–145.
- Robertson, D. and Hillman, J. (1997) “Widening participation in higher education for students from lower socio-economic groups and students with disabilities,” in R. Dearing (ed.) *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. London: HMSO (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office).
- Robinson, A. and Tormey, S. (2003) *New Labour’s neoliberal Gleichschaltung: the case of higher education*. Available at: https://libcom.org/files/5_07robinson&tormey.pdf (Accessed: December 7, 2020).
- Roper, S. and Davies, G. (2007) “The corporate brand: Dealing with multiple stakeholders.,” *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23(1–2), pp. 75–90.
- Russell, M. (2005) “Marketing education: A review of service quality perceptions among international students,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17(1), pp. 65–77.
- Rutter, R. (2013) *An empirical study of the effect of brand personality and consistency between marketing channels on performance within the UK higher education sector (Doctoral dissertation, University of East Anglia)*. Norwich.

- Ryan, C. (2018) "Choice Decisions Office for Students." Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/choice-decisions> (Accessed: March 12, 2020).
- Ryan, Y.J. *et al.* (2019) "Factors Influencing the Choice of College Among Undergraduate Students in Public Universities in Kenya A Case Study of the Univ," *Australian Journal of Commerce Study* [Preprint].
- Sambell, K., McDowell, L. and Brown, S. (1997) "'But is it fair?': An exploratory study of student perceptions of the consequential validity of assessment," *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 23(4), pp. 349–371. Available at: [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-491X\(97\)86215-3](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-491X(97)86215-3).
- Saris, W.E. and Gallhofer, I.N. (2014) *Design, Evaluation, and Analysis of Questionnaires for Survey Research*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118634646>.
- Saunders, C. (2002) *Analysis: Mixed report for class of '92*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/analysis-mixed-report-for-class-of-92/170093.article> (Accessed: October 2, 2019).
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2012) *Research methods for Business Students*. 6th ed. Harlow: Pearson.
- Saunders, M., Thornhill, A. and Lewis, P. (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Sbeglia, G.C. *et al.* (2021) "Are faculty changing? How reform frameworks, sampling intensities, and instrument measures impact inferences about student-centered teaching practices," *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 20(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.20-11-0259>.
- Schoonenboom, J. (2019) "A performative paradigm for mixed methods research," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 13(3), pp. 284–300.
- Schultz, T.W. (1961) "Investment in human capital," in J. Karabel and A.H.Halsey (eds.) *Power and ideology in education*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 313–324.
- Schultz, T.W. (1981) *Investing in people: The economics of population quality*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Schwartz, S. (2004) *Fair admissions in higher education: recommendations for good practice*. Available at: <https://www.spa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Admissions-review-Schwartz-2004.pdf> (Accessed: September 16, 2020).

- Scott, P. (2012) "It's 20 years since polytechnics became universities – and there's no going back," *The Guardian [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/sep/03/polytechnics-became-universities-1992-differentiation> (Accessed: October 2, 2019).
- Sense (2024) *Mental health*. Available at: <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-with-complex-disabilities/adult-life-and-planning-for-your-future/mental-health/> (Accessed: March 19, 2025).
- Sevier, R. (1987) "How Students Choose a College. Currents," 13, pp. 146–152.
- Shah, S. (2005) "Voices and choices: how education influences the career choices of young disabled people," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 5(3), pp. 112–117. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2005.00050.x>.
- Shakespeare, T. (2013) *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.
- Shanka, T., Quintal, V. and Taylor, R. (2006) "Factors Influencing International Students' Choice of an Education Destination—A Correspondence Analysis," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 15(2), pp. 31–46. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1300/J050v15n02_02.
- Shannon-Baker, P. (2015) "'But I Wanted to Appear Happy': How using Arts-Informed and Mixed Methods Approaches Complicate Qualitatively Driven Research on Culture Shock," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 14, pp. 34–52. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691501400204>.
- Shannon-Baker, Peggy (2016) "Making Paradigms Meaningful in Mixed Methods Research," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 10(4), pp. 319–334. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815575861>.
- Shaw *et al.* (2007) "Embedding widening participation and promoting student diversity. What can be learned from a business case approach." Available at: https://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/embedding_wp__and_promoting_diversity_Shaw_et_al.pdf (Accessed: October 28, 2020).
- Shaw, A. (2024) "Inclusion of disabled Higher Education students: why are we not there yet?," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28(6), pp. 820–838. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1968514>.
- Siamagka, N.T. and Christodoulides, G. (2016) "Social media in higher education: an investigation into UG marketing education in the UK," in

- M. D. Groza and C.B. Ragland (eds.) *Marketing Challenges in a Turbulent Business Environment*. Cham: Springer, pp. 19–23.
- Simister, J. (2011) “Elitism and Meritocracy in UK Universities: the UK Needs Investment in its Labour Force,” *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65(2), pp. 113–144. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00476.x>.
- Simões, C. and Soares, A.M. (2010) “Applying to higher education: information sources and choice factors,” *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(4), pp. 371–389. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903096490>.
- Skär, R.N. (2003) “Peer and adult relationships of adolescents with disabilities,” *Journal of Adolescence*, 26(6), pp. 635–649. Available at: [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-1971\(03\)00061-7](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-1971(03)00061-7).
- Skidmore, C. (2019) “Universities must do all they can to help disabled students succeed.” Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/cn/opinion/universities-must-do-all-they-can-help-disabled-students-succeed> (Accessed: June 27, 2019).
- Smith, L. and Cavusgil, T. (1984) “Marketing planning for colleges and universities,” *Long Range Planning*, 17(6), pp. 104–117.
- Smith, M.S. (2022) *Employment levels among graduates with disabilities*. Available at: <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/employment-levels-among-graduates-with-disabilities> (Accessed: March 3, 2023).
- Sokol, J. (2009) “Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory,” *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1(2), pp. 139–148.
- Soutar, G. and Turner, J.P. (2002) “Students’ preferences for university: a conjoint analysis,” *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(1), pp. 40–45.
- Spiliopoulou, G., Koustourakis, G. and Asimaki, A. (2017) “Family ‘Capital’ and Young People’s Educational Occupational Choices in the Context of a Review of Recent Sociological Literature,” *Open Journal for Sociological Studies*, 1(1), pp. 15–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojss.0101.02015s>.
- Stage, F.K. and Hossler, D. (1989) “Differences in Family Influences on College Attendance Plans for Male and Female Ninth Graders,” *Research in*

- Higher Education*, 30(3), pp. 301–315. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40195902>.
- Stake, R.E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R.E. (2006) *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Stamp, R. (2004) “The new challenge of branding buy-in,” *Education News*, Winter, p. 7.
- Statista (2021) *Facebook: distribution of global audiences 2021, by age and gender*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/> (Accessed: November 3, 2021).
- Statista (2024) *United Kingdom: Median age of the population from 1950 to 2100*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/275394/median-age-of-the-population-in-the-united-kingdom/> (Accessed: August 13, 2025).
- Stella, A. and Woodhouse, D. (2006) *Ranking of higher education institutions*. Available at: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/publications/> (Accessed: January 15, 2021).
- Stuart, M. (2002) *Collaborating for change? managing participation in further and higher education*. Leicester.
- Sullivan, A. (2002) “Bourdieu and Education: How Useful is Bourdieu’s Theory for Researchers?,” *Netherlands’ Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), pp. 144–166.
- Sundorf, E., Vasilev, D. and Coffait, L. (2017) *Joining the elite: how top universities can enhance social mobility*. Available at: <https://reform.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/Joining%20The%20Elite%20final.pdf> (Accessed: July 22, 2025).
- Sutton Trust (2004) *The missing 3000; state school students underrepresented at leading universities*. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/missing-3000-state-schools-represented-leading-universities/> (Accessed: January 16, 2023).
- Sutton-Long, C. et al. (2016) *Co-Design for Community Inclusion*. Available at: https://www.nds.org.au/images/events/files/huddle_report.pdf (Accessed: March 20, 2023).
- Swaen, B. and George, T. (2022) *What Is a Conceptual Framework? | Tips & Examples*. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.co.uk/research-methods/conceptual-frameworks/> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

- Syed, M. (2016) "Emerging adulthood: Developmental stage, theory, or nonsense," in J. J. Arnett (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of emerging adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 11–25.
- Tajfel, H. (1970) "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination." Available at: <https://asfranthompson.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/tajfel-1970-experiments-in-intergroup-discrimination.pdf> (Accessed: December 2, 2025).
- Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. (2010) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- TASO (no date) *Promoting self-advocacy for disabled students (post-entry)*. Available at: <https://taso.org.uk/intervention/promoting-self-advocacy-for-disabled-students-post-entry/> (Accessed: December 5, 2025).
- Taylor, R.E. and Darling, J.R. (1991) "Perceptions toward marketing higher education: Do academic disciplines make a difference?," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 3(2), pp. 17–38.
- Taylor-Powell, E. (1998) "Questionnaire design: asking questions with a purpose." Available at: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2058_citpart_questionnaire_050198_5.pdf (Accessed: December 2, 2025).
- Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2003) "Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioral sciences," in A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (eds.) *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, pp. 3–50.
- Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2006) "A general typology of research designs featuring mixed method. ," *Research in the Schools*, 13(1), pp. 12–28.
- Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2009) *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2011) "Mixed methods research: contemporary issues in an emerging Field," in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.
- Temkin, L. (2000) " Equality, Priority, and the Levelling-Down Objection," in M. Clayton and A. Williams (eds.) *The Ideal of Equality*. London: MacMillan, pp. 121–61.
- Terenzini, P.T., Cabrera, A.F. and Bernal, E.M. (2001) *Swimming Against the Tide: The Poor in American Higher Education*. New York NY.

- The Pocklington Trust (2021) "TPT welcomes Disabled Students' Allowance reform." Available at: <https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/news/tpt-welcomes-disabled-students-allowance-reform/> (Accessed: February 14, 2023).
- Thiele, T. *et al.* (2018) "Exploring the use of mixed methods in research and evaluation of widening participation interventions: guidance for practitioners.," *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 20(4), pp. 7–38.
- Thomas, G. (2011) *How to do Your Case Study*. London: Sage.
- Thompson, K. (2017) *Education Policies – A Summary*. Available at: <https://revisesociology.com/2017/05/13/education-policies-uk-summary> (Accessed: October 3, 2019).
- Thomson, P. (2012) "Field," in M. Grenfell (ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, pp. 65–82.
- Threadgold, S. (2018) *Bourdieu is not a determinist: Illusio, aspiration, reflexivity and affect*. . London/New York.
- Tight, M. (1998) "Education, Education, Education! The vision of lifelong learning in the Kennedy, Dearing and Fryer reports," *Oxford Review of Education*, 24(4), pp. 473–485.
- Tomlinson, M. (2017) "Student perceptions of themselves as 'consumers' of higher education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(4), pp. 450–467.
- Trow, M. (1974) "Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education," *Policies for Higher Education: General Report on the Conference on Future Structures of Post-Secondary Education*. Paris: OECD, pp. 55–101.
- Tumele, S. (2015) "Case Study Research ,," *International Journal of Sales, Retail and Marketing*, 4(9), pp. 68–78.
- Tzanakis, M. (2011) "Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Thesis and The Role of Cultural Capital in Educational Attainment: A Critical Review of Key Empirical Studies," 11(1), pp. 76–90.
- UCAS (2017) *End of cycle report 2017*. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduaterelases/ucas-undergraduate-analysis-reports/2017-end-cycle-report> (Accessed: December 14, 2020).

- UCAS (2021) *Disabled Students*. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/applying/applying-university/students-individual-needs/disabled-students> (Accessed: April 22, 2025).
- UCAS (no date) *Accommodation for disabled students*. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/money-and-student-life/student-life/accommodation-advice/accommodation-disabled-students> (Accessed: December 5, 2025).
- Universities UK (2018) "Growth and choice in university admissions." Available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/growth-and-choice-in-university-admissions-final.pdf> (Accessed: December 14, 2020).
- Veloutsou, C., Paton, R. and Lewis, J. (2005) "Consultation and reliability of information sources pertaining to university selection. Some questions answered?," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19(4), pp. 279–291.
- Vickerman, P. and Blundell, M. (2010) "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education.," *Disability & Society*, 25(1), pp. 21–32.
- Vigurs, K. (2010) "Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher education.," *Report to HEFCE* [Preprint].
- Wacquant, L. (2014) "Homines in Extremis: What Fighting Scholars Teach Us about Habitus.," *Body & Society*, 20(2), pp. 3–18.
- Waeraas, A. and Solbakk, M. (2009) "Defining the essence of a university: Lessons from higher education branding," *Higher Education*, 57(4), pp. 449–462.
- Wang, R.R. (2012) *Yinyang: The way of heaven and earth in Chinese thought and culture*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Warde, A. (2004) "Practice and field: revising Bourdieusian concepts. ." Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2017.1330490> (Accessed: September 15, 2022).
- Watkins, B.A. and Gonzenbach, W.J. (2013) "Assessing university brand personality through logos: An analysis of the use of academics and athletics in university branding. ," *Journal of marketing for higher education*, 23(1), pp. 15–33.

- Weale, A. (2022) "Taking Back Control as Democratic Theory," *Global Policy*, 13(S2), pp. 89–97. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13080>.
- Weale, S. (2020) "Social mobility does not depend on attending university, says minister.," *The Guardian [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/10/just-29-of-students-in-england-with-disabilities-receiving-dsa-allowance-analysis> (Accessed: July 15, 2020).
- Whitburn, B. and Riffo-Salgado, P. (2025) "Negotiating access and belonging in a higher education institution: a postqualitative narrative," *Higher Education*, 89(4), pp. 1129–1143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01263-5>.
- Whitty, G., Hayton, A. and Tang, S. (2015) "Who you know, what you know and knowing the ropes: A review of evidence about access to higher education institutions in England.," *Review of Education*, 3(1), pp. 27–67.
- Wilkins, A. and Burke, P.J. (2013) "Widening participation in higher education: the role of professional and social class identities and commitments," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp. 1–7.
- Wilkins, S., Shams, F. and Huisman, J. (2012) "The decision making and changing behavioural dynamics of potential higher education students: the impacts of increasing tuition fees in England," *Educational Studies*, 39(2), pp. 125–141.
- Willetts, D. (2014) "Introduction," in N. Barr (ed.) *Shaping Higher Education: 50 Years After Robbins*. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, pp. 1–12.
- Williams, A. (2006) "Facilities Play a Key Role in Students' Enrollment Decisions, Study Finds." Available at: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/facilities-play-a-key-role-in-students-enrollment-decisions-study-finds/> (Accessed: March 17, 2023).
- Wilson, E. (2022) "Learning from the Past: What can we learn from Polytechnics?" Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/01/25/learning-from-the-past-what-can-we-learn-from-polytechnics/> (Accessed: November 21, 2022).
- Wilson, L. and Martin, N. (2017) "Disabled Student Support for England in 2017. How did we get here and where are we going? A brief history,

- commentary on current context and reflection on possible future directions,” *The Journal of Inclusive Practice in Further and Higher Education*, 1(9), pp. 6–22. Available at: <https://researchportal.lsbu.ac.uk/en/publications/disabled-student-support-for-england-in-2017-how-did-we-get-here--3/> (Accessed: April 17, 2023).
- Winter, E. (2018) “Forget university rankings, open days are the biggest factor in student choice,” *Independent [Online]*. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/poor-students-live-home-university-sutton-trust-social-mobility-a8229816.html> (Accessed: March 11, 2021).
- WONKHE (2023) “What’s going to happen in higher education policy in 2023-24?” Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/whats-going-to-happen-in-higher-education-policy-in-2023-24/> (Accessed: August 3, 2025).
- Yanchar, S.C. and Williams, D.D. (2006) “Reconsidering the Compatibility Thesis and Eclecticism: Five Proposed Guidelines for Method Use,” 35(9), pp. 3–12.
- Yin, R.K. (2008) “Case Study Research: Design and Methods. Applied Social Research Methods Series,” 5(282).
- Yin, R.K. (2014) *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Yin, Y.K. (2018) *Case Study Research and Applications: Design Methods*. 6th ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage.
- Yosso, T.J. (2005) “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth,” *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), pp. 69–91. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>.
- Younger, K. *et al.* (2019) “A systematic review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions and strategies for widening participation in higher education,” *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43(6), pp. 742–773. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1404558>.
- Zat'ková, T.Š., Seberini, A. and Tokovska, M. (2025) “First Year University Life: Expectations Versus Reality,” *International Journal of Instruction*, 18(3), pp. 335–352. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2025.18318a>.
- Zechariah, M.R. and Eissa, A. (2019) “Impact of Social Media Advertising on Selection of Higher Education Institution: A Mediating Role of Perceived

- Value,” *International Journal of Education, Learning and Training*, 4(2), p. 94. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24924/ijelt/2019.11/v4.iss2/92.112>.
- Zevenbergen, R., Mousley, J. and Sullivan, P. (2004) “Disrupting pedagogic relay in mathematics classrooms: Using open-ended tasks with Indigenous students.,” *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 8(4), pp. 391–415.
- Zohrabi, M. (2013) “Mixed method research: Instruments, validity, reliability and reporting findings,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(2), pp. 254–262. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>.