

# **Aspiring Towards Higher Education?**

## **The Voice of the Year 11 Student**

in 1 Volume

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

In 2001 the then UK Government set a national target to get 50 per cent of young people between the ages of 18 and 30 into higher education by the year 2010. To achieve this goal, higher education institutions were required to deliver Widening Participation initiatives that would target under-represented groups in a bid to raise aspirations and bring them into the sector. The study that underpins this thesis was an investigation into the issues surrounding widening participation from the perspective of students in their final year of compulsory schooling. It began as a year-long longitudinal study of the students' views as they moved towards a key transitional point in their lives. Nine students were identified from Year 11 in one school. Three were drawn from each of the following three categories or groups of students: (i) 'traditional students', these were students who were deemed as belonging to groups that were already well-represented in higher education; (ii) 'non-traditional' students, these were deemed 'non-traditional' in the sense that they were seen as belonging to groups that were under-represented in higher education; (iii) 'widening participation' students, these were recipients of a widening participation initiative delivered by their nearest university which, by implication, also deemed them as being 'non-traditional' in the sense that they were seen as belonging to groups that were under-represented in higher education. Each participant was interviewed in-depth three times whilst they were in Year 11; in December 2003, in March 2004, and again in June 2004. Whilst all interviews sought to elicit information about their lives at that point in time, the first interview was intended to gather relevant information about their past lives, the second a more in-depth look at their current lives, and the third focused on their future lives. Follow-up data were collected from some of the participants in 2009, 2010 and 2011. An in-depth interview also took place in June 2004 with the university's Widening Participation Officer and the school's Head of Year 11 and Widening Participation Co-ordinator. They are considered to be key informants to widening participation initiatives, more broadly in the case of the former, and specific to the school in the case of the latter.

The thesis reports on the process through which participants were selected (or not selected) for widening participation intervention, learning identities in school and out, imagined futures, choices, and ultimately what happened to those students who were tracked beyond Year 11. Flaws in the widening participation policy agenda at the time of the main data collection period were identified as: (i) the individualization of the

problem which drew attention away from the structural nature of the problem of under-representation and also from deep-rooted flaws within the education system; (ii) the lack of awareness of the longitudinal nature of the problem whereby entrance into higher education is dependent on prior learning and prior qualifications – this resulted in little or no account being taken in the selection process of widening participation-targeted individuals' previous patterns of achievements, such that they may not be on a trajectory that makes higher education a viable option, and (iii) the valuing of non-participation in higher education.

The thesis concluded by acknowledging that a new legislative framework about to be implemented in 2012 appears to be addressing some of these concerns. Issues that remain unaddressed include deep-rooted problems within the formal education system, the valuing of non-participation and of vocational training, and an appreciation that learning takes place on a trajectory.

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Widening participation, access and entry into higher education (HE) has been on the political agenda for quite some time. Back in the early 1960s, the Robbins Report (1963) concluded that access to higher education should be open to all those who could benefit from it (known as the Robbins Principle). Higher education was then restricted to the elite within society, normally determined by an individual's social class and not necessarily by academic merit. The debate has moved on slowly since then as a result of an expansion in the number of people attending Higher Education Institutions and an expansion in the number of Universities in 1992, when all former polytechnics were granted University status by the then Conservative government. The UK government's agenda on higher education throughout this time has been highlighted in various White Papers on Higher Education, notably *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990's* (1985), *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (1987) and *Higher Education: A New Framework* (1991). External organisations such as the European Union (EU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have also played an important role in shaping higher education within the UK and continue to have a role in policy-making and delivery.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the issues surrounding widening participation largely, but not exclusively, from the perspective of students drawn from both under- and over-represented groups in higher education at a point in their education trajectories when they are required to make decisions about their pathways to the future.

## 1.1 Background Issues

The higher education market has undergone huge changes over the last fifty years. There has been a change in the student population within higher education from 200,000 in 1963 to 1.8 million in 1998, an increase in the number of universities and a greater balance in the proportion of woman students – there are now more females than males in all sectors of higher education. Some of the reasons for the changes in gender representation include a change in attitudes, and the expansion and re-designation of courses that have traditionally recruited large number of females, e.g. nursing and physiotherapy. Part-time courses have also seen a dramatic increase. Representation of minority ethnic groups has increased as has the proportion of disabled students as a result of enhanced provisions.

However, the major gap in this all inclusive market is the representation of students from the lower socio-economic groups. The representation of the poorest in society, at about 25% has barely changed since 1963, encouraging the elitist image of higher education. Often, it is students from these particular groups who are the most culturally alien to the concept of taking on debt as a means of benefiting themselves, particularly when the benefits derived in the long term are not immediately clear. It is therefore important to consider the changes imposed by the UK government on higher education policy in recent years.

One major change that emerged during the 2001 general election within the United Kingdom concerned the provision of higher education (HE). The Labour Party's Manifesto pledged that:

...our goal is to get 50 per cent of all young people into higher education by 2010, combined with increased investment to improve standards.

*(Labour Party Manifesto (England), 2000, p.12)*

This was led primarily by a previous report, the Dearing Report (1997), which in its recommendations stated:

We recommend to the government and the funding bodies that when allocating funds for the expansion of higher education, they give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to Widening Participation, and have in place a participation strategy, a mechanism for monitoring progress and a provision for review by the governing body of achievement.

This came as a surprise to many within the field since there was little prior indication that such a target was being planned. Moreover, it came at a time when the Labour Government had also initiated changes to the funding system for students within higher education which made higher education unattractive for many.

The term ‘Widening Participation’ (WP) developed as a result of such aims and many different initiatives were proposed. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which provides and allocates government funding to higher education institutions, refocused their expectations on such institutions and encouraged them to consider widening their student backgrounds. In particular, HEFCE distributed funding in support of widening participation that intended to:

- encourage institutions to widen participation in Higher Education by under-represented groups
- raise the aspirations of all to attend the institution that is best able to match their abilities, interests and needs
- ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies.

*(HEFCE, 2001a, p.1)*

HEFCE also provided new funding streams to help ‘raise aspirations’ which would be ‘allocated to higher education institutions with fewer than 80 per cent of their students from state schools, and will enable them to do more to encourage applications from such students’ (*HEFCE, 2001a*). As a result, many higher education institutions quickly drew up widening participation strategies to enable them to qualify for such funding. However, there are several issues that arise as a result. Firstly, there is this notion of ‘Widening Participation’. HEFCE, the UK Government and Higher Education institutions use it, but surprisingly, there is no clear, common definition for the term. Over thirty-seven million pounds was pledged each year for the period 2000-2004 for widening participation, and yet, there is no clear unambiguous definition of what it is. HEFCE, the funding body states the following:

There is no single definition of widening participation and we have not tried to provide one. This guide [HEFCE, 2001b] uses the expression widening participation to denote activities to target the individual groups that Higher Education Institutions have identified as under-represented and to ensure success.

*(HEFCE, 2001b, p.1)*

This statement places the emphasis on Higher Education Institutions to identify under-represented groups within their institutions, but how should they do this?

Three national policy reports commissioned in 1997 focused on the need to expand post-16 participation in education. Each report was concerned to identify groups that were traditionally non-participants within higher education and they all stated that it was those groups that needed to be the focus of widening participation initiatives, (Fryer, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; NCIHE, 1997). Macdonald and Stratta (2001), summarised the groups identified as follows:

Groups referred to included the unemployed, those on low incomes, those without qualifications, the unskilled, ex-offenders, part-time and temporary workers, older adults, those with literacy, numeracy or learning difficulties, disaffected youth and some minority ethnic groups.

(Macdonald and Stratta, 2001, p. 250)

It is virtually impossible for a single Higher Education Institution to tackle each and every under-represented group listed by Macdonald and Stratta, and given that both HEFCE and Government documents place more emphasis (and indeed provide more funding) for Higher Education institutions to tackle students from lower socio-economic groups, such a group has become their target. The UK Government released a Green Paper for the education of the 14-19 age range, (14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards, Feb 2002), noting that there is currently fewer than '20% of young people under 21 from the lower socio-economic groups' going to university as opposed to over 70% from the highest. So it became more and more apparent that the UK government was seeking to address this imbalance and hoping that by pouring in millions of pounds of public money year upon year, the scales representing both groups would eventually, at least, balance out.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England require individual institutions to develop individualised widening participation strategies indicating how they intend to target the under-representation from particular groups for their own institutions. This is of course linked to funding issued by HEFCE. Institutions have therefore commonly

adopted strategies which all follow similar patterns labelled as the ‘Student Life Cycle’ (Storan, 2006). The student life cycle is summarised in the following stages:

Stage 1 – Aspiration raising – The HEIs may work on this individually, or in collaboration with other HEIs and focus on enabling young people to see what higher education is about through short programmes or day visits.

Stage 2 – Pre-entry phase – An HEI may target groups of potential students and assist them with the application process, etc. This is normally done with a small group of schools through a ‘compact’ agreement with the HEI.

Stage 3 – Admission stage – HEIs are in sole control of this process, and aim to ensure that they can (a) identify widening participation labelled students and (b) provide an easy process which students feel comfortable going through.

The cycle has three further stages – Entry to University, Transitional phases and Employment – which for the purposes of this study are not relevant.

Funding has become an important issue for students. Prior to 1997, the UK Government provided a means-tested, non-repayable grant to every student proceeding on to higher education. Tuition fees were paid for by the government, so students in higher education only paid for their accommodation and/or study related materials. In 1997, the Labour Government abolished maintenance grants, increased repayable student loans limits and for the first time charged a means-tested tuition fee for every student attending a higher education institution. This change was introduced because of a report compiled by a committee chaired by Sir Ron Dearing (*Higher Education in the Learning Society*, 1997). The belief was that by getting students to contribute towards their education, it was likely that they would be more critical and demanding, which in turn would result in improved institutional quality. Unfortunately, the report failed to determine the impact that introducing tuition fees would have on people’s perceptions of higher education. Furthermore, the Labour Government controversially introduced, albeit with its huge majority of MPs in the Houses of Parliament cut down to just five, a new bill in July 2004 enabling higher education institutions to charge a maximum of £3000 (increasing with inflation every year) for tuition fees as long as they met certain criteria as set out by a new office called the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). The Office for Fair Access has the powers to stop institutions from charging tuition fees over the standard set by the government and expects all institutions to draw up ‘Access’ agreements which detail how each institution tackles the issues of widening access and diversifying their intake of students. The first year of increased fees (top-up fees) began

in September 2006, and, unsurprisingly, all but two higher education institutions introduced charges to their students set at the highest amount possible for their courses.

The last few years have seen a sudden impetus from central government to encourage widening participation within higher education. The re-election of the Labour Government for a fourth term of office meant that their policy on widening participation at higher education remained. The main opposition party (the Conservative party) condemned the policy and pledged, if elected, to eradicate the targets and reintroduce the funding of tuition fees by the state. – this is outlined in a report entitled *A fair deal for everyone* (May 2003). A White Paper published by the government in January 2003 reports that the government believes that ‘wide access to higher education makes for a more enlightened and socially just society’, introducing for the very first time this notion of having a ‘just society’. It is not the only time when the scales of society are mentioned. In reference to the under-representation of the low-socio economic groups in higher education, it says; ‘this state of affairs cannot be tolerated in a civilised society. It wastes our national talent; and it is inherently socially unjust’. Another government publication, *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (DfES, 2003b), sets four main conditions for tackling widening participation within higher education. These are: 1- Attainment, 2- Aspiration, 3- Application and 4- Admission. It places most of the responsibility on Higher Education Institutions to increase their efforts by increasing their work targeting the low socio-economic groups, but crucially overlooks one important aspect, the views of the widening participation pupils themselves, e.g. do these students want to go into higher education?

It is difficult to state exactly what the Labour government’s policies, and focus for widening participation, were based on. Many critics believe that the government engaged on such a path in order to address other problems within society, i.e. poverty levels, social imbalance, etc, as vote-catchers or so as to attempt to climb up the rankings on the OECD tables for participation in higher education. The Labour government’s drive towards an all-inclusive society is explained through a simple human capital approach. It assumes that individuals, regardless of their background, will realise it is in their best interests to upgrade their skills and to make themselves more economically efficient for the good of the wider economy. This type of approach indicates very little understanding of the major shifts in culture and views that need to take place in many communities in order for them to understand and engage with higher education. This has led many HEIs to develop individual plans to widen participation, including activities such as summer schools, mentoring, etc.

## 1.2 Aimhigher

Aimhigher is a national programme which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from under-represented groups. Originally launched in August 2004, as a result of the integration of two widening participation initiatives (Excellence Challenge and Aimhigher: Partnerships for Progression), its aims are to complement and lead on the work carried out within the educational sector to work towards the 2010 participation rates as set out by the government. The role of Aimhigher is to:

- Raise aspirations and motivations to enter HE among young people from under-represented groups in schools, further education and workplace learning
- Raise the attainments of potential HE students from under-represented groups, so that they gain the academic or vocational qualifications and learning skills that will enable them to enter HE
- Strengthen progression routes into HE via vocational courses, including Apprenticeships, whether they are delivered in schools, colleges or the workplace
- Raise students' aspirations to enter HE and to apply to the institution and/or course best able to match their abilities
- Improve the attainment, aspirations, motivation and self-esteem of gifted and talented young people; and the quality of identification, provision and support for those students in schools and colleges.

Aimhigher is jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It operates across nine regional partnerships and is then split into forty-five area partnerships throughout England allowing each area to develop more localised support according to their needs. As a result, Aimhigher activities are extremely varied though all cover the following main activities:

- Offering information, advice and guidance to potential HE students, their teachers and families so that learners are well-advised about their future
- Organisation of summer schools, taster days, masterclasses and mentoring schemes

- Work with employers and training providers to progress students onto vocational routes to HE
- Work to encourage those already in the workplace to become either full- or part-time or distance learning students.

All regions rely on the central office to produce common literature on student finance, progression on to higher education, etc. In this manner, all students considering further and higher education should receive the same information and support from similar sources. Aimhigher continued to receive funding for the delivery of its programmes up until 2010 when the programme was evaluated and the future of the programme decided upon. Funding for Aimhigher was abolished in 2010 and the programme concluded in July 2011.

### 1.3 Problems

There are numerous problems outlined above that need to be tackled if the UK government is serious about widening access and diversifying the student population as opposed to making small cosmetic changes in order to comply with its electoral needs.

The first obvious issue surrounds the need to understand what is motivating the UK government to pursue the widening access agenda. Having such a huge issue spring up on institutions in an election campaign is rather unorthodox and therefore needs careful scrutiny. Was the UK Labour party diverting attention from other educational issues? Were they merely educational issues or was it a series of social issues that they sought to re-address and decided to throw this one in to complement the rest? What were they trying to achieve when they incorporated their widening participation targets within their manifesto? What kind of financial commitment is the UK government willing to provide, and for how long? Is there an attempt to provide a clearer definition for the term ‘widening participation’?

Having a widening participation strategy means that government educational policies must follow suit and be coherent with this policy. However, since their manifesto pledge in 2001, various policy documents, white papers and parliament bills have been drawn up concerning both access to, and the provision of, higher education within society. Do all these policies integrate and intertwine? Is there a clear focus and direction provided by the central administration? Is this communicated sufficiently well to all key players (i.e. both HEIs and students)?



The above examines policy matters concerning central government. It is also crucial to examine what this all means for those that it affects, i.e. students within schools and colleges. Students' perceptions of higher education have no doubt been altered as a result of the costs and charges imposed by both government and HEIs in recent years. It is unclear what kind of an impact this may have had on students, and whether different groups and classes within society view the charges in different ways. Moreover, it is even more unclear whether the right message about fees and charges has been passed on to those who need it, or whether there may have been a series of misunderstandings amongst students, either through stories in the media, or when listening to politicians, which is causing greater confusion and ultimately disenchantment with the educational process. This links in with the need to develop a greater understanding of how students decide what to do with their future careers and lives, both in terms of their short and long term plans. How are these decisions made, and how far in advance do students consider them? Is it purely an individual's choice, or are there other factors to take into consideration? Do others play a role in the decision-making process? If so, what type of role? What determines the roles that different people play in the decision-making process, and are there differences dependent on the student's class, background, etc?

#### 1.4 Aims of research

This research project will attempt to examine in detail the issues that matter to widening participation students from their viewpoints and illustrate how other factors, e.g. social/cultural capital, may influence or determine their decisions about their future. It will shed light on whether there is coherence between policy documents and strategies and the lived reality of WP students' lives as told, first hand, by the students themselves as they go through the stages of education targeted by WP policies.

My research will be led by the following principles. At present, we have students who are labelled as 'widening participation students' working their way through the educational system. Some of these students<sup>1</sup> are targeted by Higher Education Institutions when in Year 9 and are introduced to various schemes and initiatives both short and long term. These programmes are normally aimed to run from Year 9 through to Year 11 (just before students take their GCSEs). Even though these students are

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<sup>1</sup> This target group accounts for a very small proportion of the widening participation students within the year group, and may at times be as little as 4% of all widening participation students within their year. In practical terms this may mean that out of a year group of 200 students, 130 are identified as coming from a widening participation background, and only ten receive long-term intervention as part of a Higher Education Institution's programme.

identified as having the potential to proceed and succeed at higher education, it is assumed that HE will be beneficial to them and therefore this is what they should be aiming for. However, little if any attention is actually paid to identifying what these young individuals actually want or need from their perspectives. Various policy documents released by the UK government highlight both the financial rewards of attending a Higher Education Institution, and the benefits that accrue towards the development of becoming a good citizen within society. Yet, there appears to be very little research into whether these policies and expectations are actually matched to the individual's vision of their future lives and/or career paths.

I aim to develop an *understanding* of what is happening to the individual through the stages from Year 9 to Year 11 (13-16 years) in relation to how they think about their educational careers and their motivations and aspirations when considering higher education. I particularly want to gain an insight into their lives as they see and live them from their perspective. My interests are in obtaining an insight into the decision-making process concerning their educational careers. In this regard I am particularly interested in their role models/leaders/influences and the sorts of social and economic pressures they are under. I will also be able to examine who, in their view, controls and shapes their future and at what stage decisions are taken on their future educational careers.

Having obtained this, I will attempt to understand what influences their individual educational choices post-16 as they see them. In particular, I will want to gain a deeper understanding as to why these students choose to follow certain career paths and what actually influences them to take different approaches at this important juncture.

Once I have developed such an understanding I will then be able to examine what current policy, as dictated from central government, states are the issues for widening participation students at this level. A cross examination between what policy says should be happening, and what these particular students describe as happening will be done in an attempt to shed some light on whether there is any coherence between policy and practice.

## 1.5 Why this PhD?

It is evident from the brief introduction that there are a multitude of issues that arise as a result of the Labour government's drive to widen participation in higher education. Most of these issues are not new to the field of education, but are new within the areas of higher education and access to it. Given the sudden impetus to work towards a

socially just society, and the long-term target set by the Labour government of having 50% of those under the age of 30 having some form of higher education experience, the issues raised by these targets are ones which need to be addressed and examined if the concept of widening access is to be fruitful.

There are obvious gaps in knowledge within this field and it is troubling to see how a policy can be drawn up and implemented on a national basis, whilst at the same time acknowledging that there is little substance to its creation and establishment. Furthermore, even more worrying is the manner in which HEIs have had to embrace and implement such a policy, having little understanding of the issues that affect individual students when choosing post-16 options and career paths. The issue of finances alone cannot point to an understanding of the issues and concepts that inform sixteen-year-olds on their educational options.

It is for these reasons therefore that I embarked on this research project. Having the opportunity to work with large numbers of sixteen-year-olds made me realise how little HEIs knew about the world that they live in, and, more importantly, how misguided some of their policies could be. In the HEIs' defence, they have had very little time to plan and determine a course of action - the government wanted all institutions to work on widening participation strategies almost immediately after they entered office for their second term. As a result of the relatively new drive for widening participation within higher education, there is currently an apparent vacuum of knowledge and data relating to widening participation policy and practice and I envisage that this study will be able to shed some light on the prominent issues highlighted previously.

The study will make a contribution to the research community within a practical framework. It will develop an explanatory understanding of the case studies within it (the unit of analysis for these case studies being the individual WP student), and will be able to contribute to the current knowledge on individuals and the decisions that they make at this crucial point of their lives, although not through wide generalisations. More specifically, it will be able to provide a deeper insight into the lives of students labelled as 'widening participation students', and their views and aspirations when considering higher education.

On a practical level, schools, FE colleges and Higher Education Institutions will be interested in obtaining an insight into the type of students that they are currently targeting as part of their WP policies and what actually matters to them. This is particularly relevant to these institutions as they continue in their quest to widen participation by attracting increasing numbers of students from the lower socio-

economic groups. It may be that this study will highlight different issues from the ones these institutions are currently focussing on and will encourage them to re-direct their efforts in different directions. For the research community, this study will provide further knowledge on widening participation as seen by the students working their way through the system. It may stimulate further research into the area, perhaps on a much larger scale with greater resources. On a personal level, this study will contribute to my own knowledge and enable me to develop a deeper understanding of the individuals with whom I currently work.

## 1.6 Research Problem

This section will provide a brief resume of what my research problem is about. The subsequent chapter will refine the issue and provide the questions to be asked. The problem in general terms is one of policy versus practice. On the one hand, we have government policy telling us that young people should be provided with opportunities which they will undoubtedly grasp and take advantage of. There is no doubt from the government's perspective that young people will understand that following their educational careers will, in the long run, be more beneficial to them. This they link to better job prospects, higher standards of living, and a happier environment in which to work and live. However, on the other hand, there is little understanding displayed by these policies on what these young people actually think. Many assumptions are made about how these young people live their everyday lives, and the manner in which they will supposedly embrace these new initiatives. There appears to be little research in this field aiming to actually find out, not from a policy, but from those living such lives what preoccupies them and what they consider to be important, and the value they place on their education. Therefore, the purpose of asking these questions, and raising these issues, is to attempt to see how far policies are in tune with reality. This is the research problem that this study will attempt to tackle.

## 1.7 Personal Interest

I originally intended to examine family issues within a child's academic attainment and at the start of the study began to review literature in this field. At the same time as

starting my PhD studies, the University of Exeter was developing its widening participation programme and advertising posts for student mentors. These posts would require students to engage with planned widening participation activities and in addition assist with the promotion of the University in general recruitment – i.e. through the use of students as ambassadors for the University. I had some experience of working as a student ambassador and applied for one of the student posts. My application was viewed favourably, and, as a result I was asked whether I would be willing to assist with the development and delivery of the programme (working as the general coordinator of the programme) whilst also, in addition, fulfilling the role of student mentor. Becoming involved with the development of the programme provided me with an invaluable insight into the issues behind widening participation and, although unable to alter the direction and steer of the institution, it allowed me to question the manner in which certain things were done. I was particularly fortunate to be able to have first-hand experience of setting up and maintaining a partnership with local schools in the area and as a student mentor, undertook mentoring sessions as part of an interventionist programme aimed at widening participation students. This allowed me to work directly with students in schools, and ultimately it provided me with the opportunity to develop an understanding of the issues from the student's viewpoint. Working as both an implementer of policy and as a deliverer of the programme made me question whether there was a mismatch between policy and practice and whether we, as an institution, truly believed in what we were doing.

My involvement in the programme made me question whether we were the only institution implementing projects where the motives and delivery could be questioned and whether there was a clear mismatch between intended outcomes and reality. This PhD provided me with a fantastic opportunity to examine these issues and develop a greater understanding of the issues with regards to widening participation.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter will review current policy and literature in the areas of widening participation and higher education policy. It will examine several theorists' viewpoints about opportunities available to young people and the authors' views on how decisions are made. The chapter will begin by reviewing recent government policy and its direction. It will attempt to provide an understanding of the issues currently within the widening participation agenda and develop a steering as to the relevance of the literature and how it is to inform my research problem.

### 2.1 Review

We have reached a time in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century/early 21<sup>st</sup> century (late modernity) when people are provided with an array of choices and life opportunities. Such opportunities are new to this generation and were never available to previous ones. There are numerous reasons and causes for these changes, many of which are not directly linked to the educational process but are more to do with the society and environment in which we operate. The changing nature of family compositions, for example, is one key factor in the transitions witnessed within our society over the last two decades. Whereas previous generations have traditionally had the female parent taking on a childcare role, putting aside any career ambitions or aspirations, this is now less and less so, and either their male counterparts, or private childcare have come into prominence. This may be partly due to the fact that society has developed greater concerns for the materialistic aspects of its operations, and less time is apportioned towards, for example, the development of young individuals. It may also be as a result of the rising costs of existing within the developed world - nowadays many mod-cons are a necessity rather than a luxury. Living in such a world brings along its problems/adjustments and changes are occurring every day to accommodate the change in the way we focus our lives.

It is however worth noting that in stark contrast to this description, there exist governmental policies with an all-inclusive agenda. This agenda lies across all the spectrums of society from education to welfare, from employment to health care. Up until this current government, all these services were considered a part of the state and therefore delivered free of charge. It was the government's duty to provide health care free of charge to its citizens. It was the government's duty to provide free education from pre-school to higher education for all its citizens who were academically able and willing to undertake such an education. Similarly, it was a government's duty to provide long-term sustainable welfare provisions, e.g. in social care, with pensions, etc. However, this reliance on the central government has slowly been withered away and the guarantees that once stood for many generations of young people are no longer present to the current generation of young people. Jobs for life are no longer a guarantee, pension provisions are no longer guaranteed. So with such changes, has come along the need to pay for higher education.

It is true to say that there has been a marked increase in the amount of information and choices presented to people today as compared to the information presented to them twenty years ago. However, this has been driven primarily by communication channels, such as the mass usage of the internet as a means of gathering and disseminating information, the increase in digital television stations bringing up-to-date news and information live as and when it happens, and the increase in mobility amongst individuals within their respective countries and areas. With the increase in communication and information channels has come the increase in discussions and comparisons amongst colleagues, companies and governments leading to an increase in competition and standards. However, this, in some sectors, has come at a price. In education for example, higher education institutions in the UK struggle to keep up with the academic excellence within the USA, as the American higher education market has opened up to higher fees and increases in its sources of revenue, whilst the UK market has only just accepted the introduction of variable fees with a modest cap on its highest possible level. This is a policy mirrored in other areas of government, such as health, welfare services and even transport, whereby policies within these areas are not as ambitious as in other countries. There are some who subscribe to the view that the United Kingdom has always done well and never relied on outsiders, such as the EU, OECD, to perform, therefore why has it become an issue in recent times?

The answer lies in the current generation of young people, who are leading the needs of the country and shaping policy. These young people are growing up in an era where

they can access the news via a mobile phone, where they are able to purchase their weekly shopping online without having to visit their supermarket, where they may be taught by someone who may be in a different country from where their lecture is. These young people have grown up in a new era where they expect different things that may be unheard of to previous generations. Expectations are therefore far greater than they once were. However what about their expectations? What do they want from life, and where are they heading?

The fundamental issue to be considered is one about life choices. The manner in which choices are defined and opportunities become available is strongly influenced by the wider debate about how human behaviour is interpreted and the effect of existing social institutions. Contrasting views about life opportunities and the effects of social structures have been expressed by various theorists, posing a dilemma when looking at individual life opportunities. There are two main issues which are particularly relevant when conceptualising educational choice and decision-making amongst young people.

The first issue concerns the impact of existing social structures versus human action and its effect on the way we live our lives. This is a debate that is central to the issues in social theory. How much are we in control of our own individual lives by the manner in which we behave or the way in which we control the conditions of our lives? Or, on the other hand, are our lives, the way we live, and our perceptions of who we are created and controlled by social forces beyond our control? In essence, we are discussing the issues of structure versus agency and the way in which these may alter the way we live our lives. Structure refers to factors such as gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, etc. which act as controlling forces either by limiting or influencing life opportunities for individuals. At the other end of the spectrum, we have agency which states that individuals have the ability to act independently from existing structures and make their own decisions freely without having any restrictions placed on them by external forces.

The second major issue to consider is the debate around the analysis of social change. Several theorists have concluded that we have moved beyond the era of modernity and moved into postmodernity or late modernity and this is reflected by the way in which we live, or the ways in which we think, particularly about ourselves. The breaking down of tradition and the emergence of new forms of opportunities and uncertainties has meant the creation of social agents who are able to make choices about their individual biographies in an increasing risk-led society.

Both issues are very relevant to the underlying themes of this thesis. The study is looking at how young people choose what to do with their lives and whether they feel



empowered to take decisions as individuals or whether they feel that these are already taken for them. Theorists looking at this topic from a modernist point of view will align themselves with the importance of structure and approach the study of society from a macro level. Postmodernists will disagree with this viewpoint and consider the importance of agency and choice and therefore approach the study from the micro level.

The following section will review young people's expectations and ambitions in life from various theorists' points of view.

## 2.2 Theorists' views

### 2.2.1 Zygmunt Bauman

Zygmunt Bauman's philosophies on life opportunities and paths are aligned with those expressed by Giddens and Becks. Bauman highlights a decline of traditional political institutions and class politics and a rise in identity politics and individual identity as changes evident within our society. He observes how these changes have contributed towards both what he terms 'individualisation' and a slow erosion of a communal way of thinking. In his view, individuals in the modern-day world are now much more insecure and there exists a larger amount of uncertainties in our everyday lives. All these factors have contributed towards the creation of an individualised world, whereby individual identities have emerged and have been created. These identities are, according to Bauman, interchangeable by the individual in relation to their varying environments and circumstances.

Previous generations will describe how there were many certainties in life in the areas of job opportunities and careers, etc. Bauman, like Becks, describes the changes in society in relation to the opportunities available to individuals. He acknowledges that individuals are far more likely to take major risks in their lives, but only as a result of the changes made within society whereby individuals will now have greater possibilities presented to them and be expected to make choices on an everyday basis. He provides us with a useful metaphor – the possibilities presented are like a buffet on a table. There are numerous mouth-watering dishes, too numerous for the individual to taste. Therefore, the diners have to select which ones they want to taste and which ones they would like to set aside, possibly for another day, or perhaps, not to ever experience. From a diner's point of view, they will always be left wondering what those other dishes were like, and whether they made the right choice with their selection. However, with this freedom of choice comes a change in attitudes.

Bauman believes that people are now able to have a greater freedom of choice when identifying themselves with who they would like to be. Individuals have the freedom to become anybody and therefore the constraints that once existed in society have been diminished. Identities, according to Bauman, can be made and unmade, selected and deselected as if they were on sale in a supermarket, according to the individual's current needs. However, individuals are responsible for choosing or quitting these identities and

therefore what used to be a collective decision made by peers, families, etc, now rests solely on the individual.

In essence, a combination of major changes experienced with the globalisation of the world, and the change in self whereby individualisation has now emerged as a powerful force within society, determine an individual's path within life. The individual is now very much by themselves and is free to determine their chosen career, identity and future. However, responsibility for selection now rests solely on the individual whereas in the past, it could be attributed to society and its cultures.

### 2.2.2 Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu's work and theories revolve around the individual and the way they live their lives. His analysis investigates the complex nature of inter-relationships amongst a wide and varied selection of people. Bourdieu describes a series of 'power relationships' whereby there is a hierarchy of people communicating and inter-relating. This kind of environment is described by Bourdieu as 'field'. Every individual will have different fields which they operate on, and work from. Each field will be specific to that individual, and in most cases no two fields will be identical in the same way as no two individuals are the same. In essence, what he is saying is that each individual lives and operates in a world of their own, constructed by their own perceptions of the environment and culture in which they live. However, it is also evident that individuals form part of groups and sub-groups within their environments, and these groups generate differing norms and acceptance of ways and standards of living. These groups are eventually divided into class structures although there are differences of standards of living within the traditional class divisions. Bourdieu believed that these groups within society ensure their existence from generation to generation via what he termed 'social reproduction'. What he meant by this was that as people entered these groups via birth, not out of choice, they are brought up in particular ways which enable them to accept and value ways of living. Individuals therefore behave as their upbringing dictates and so the onus is very much on their parents/guardians to select the type of life that these individuals will lead. It is not as easy as this, as their parents will have had their own lives shaped by their parents, etc, and we can therefore see a generational selection of standard of lifestyles and norms.

Bourdieu describes the selection of lifestyles and the way individuals are introduced to them through his 'capital' theories. He claimed that individuals live in certain

environments enabling them to accept certain norms. For example, lower class individuals believed that their counterparts in the middle class were destined to be much more successful within education, and therefore accepted this as a matter of course and expected their counterparts to have more success within the educational system than themselves. This is because throughout their upbringing, they will have had instilled in them that this was purely a fact of life and that different people were destined to have different roles in life. A lower class individual was not and did not have the type of academic calibre necessary to be a success at school, and therefore their aspirations should be adjusted accordingly. It was important, Bourdieu felt, that such individuals understood their role within the spectrum and did not expect too much from themselves. This is referred to by Bourdieu as cultural capital – parameters in existence allowing different individuals to achieve varying standards in life, but, controlled and determined by the type of network you joined at birth.

According to Bourdieu's critical conflict theory, it is very much self-perceptions that people develop that control and allow them to take different paths at different junctures of their lives. People develop these self-perceptions through cultural capital – i.e. upbringing, type of individuals that they are in contact with, etc. However, and more importantly, Bourdieu believed that people constantly return to these self-perceptions regardless of the type of experiences that they may have been exposed to. He described this as habitus. What he meant was that regardless of whether an individual was exposed to, or provided with, opportunities to alter their style of life, they would return to that with which they felt more comfortable and which they knew – in a sense, returning to what is familiar and secure. This is because individuals develop or acquire schemes of perceptions of how things are and are meant to be, and it is very rare for an individual to alter such ideas. Therefore, according to Bourdieu's theory, social class and structure is retained throughout society through this inter-generational evolution which transforms through social capital.

### 2.2.3 Ulrich Beck

Ulrich Beck's perspective of life and society differs greatly to those described by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Beck believes that there has been a fundamental shift in the structure and composition of cultural and societal structures over the last several hundred years enabling a visible change in life opportunities and mobility for individuals. He describes how in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, individuals lived in 'traditional

societies', classed as pre-modern, whereby lives were shaped around structures where the relationship was very much prescribed by the 'we' element. What is meant by this is that there was a sense of shared meanings amongst communities – people were embedded within groups and cultures mainly led by either the extended family, the church or the village community. The structures were very much in control of individuals and in a sense were deterministic. Social groups played a vital role in determining life opportunities, as according to Beck, they formed an individual's identity. Therefore, in a sense, an individual had little or no control of their lives as their choices and opportunities were either available or curtailed by the social groups that they entered at birth.

Social classes played a more prominent role in what Beck describes as the 'Early-Simple Modern Societies'. During this time, individuals developed a different approach to life, i.e. there were greater shared interests, needs and wants amongst people whilst the communality amongst groups remained in existence. Society was still very much controlled and directed by the structural organisations within it, though individuals were moving away from the structures and gaining some extra control of their own lives. However, individuals were still confined to boundaries and limits in relation to life opportunities, and expectations which were in accordance with their social class.

The final transition is made into what Beck labels the 'Late or Reflexive Modernity'. It is in this phase that Ulrich Beck describes the shift between individuals acting as part of a structure or group to a more flexible approach whereby individuals are able to make life changing decisions. Whereas class, culture and family roles may have been systematic of the industrialised age, we have now moved towards a more individualised way of living. He believes that the labour market has played an important role in eliminating class divisions and barriers and in a sense has 'liberated' individuals enabling them to take control of their lives. The onus is now very much on the individual to decide and choose between different options, including which groups or subcultures you wish to be identified with. The notion of a class society, according to Beck, remains useful only as an image of the past and is still alive only because we have yet to develop a suitable alternative. Therefore, in this particular phase of society, the individual becomes more of an agent rather than a structure – the individual takes control and is flexible around networks of groups and cultures. A major change has taken place from the former 'wealth-distribution' society, to a 'risk-distribution' society otherwise known as the 'Risk Society'. The emphasis here is on the fact that individuals are now more likely to consider taking risks, as life changing opportunities, and this

culture has arisen from the creation of this new society – the conditions set by the apparent modernisation.

Beck's main thrust is upon individuals taking full control of their lives and having the ability to choose any particular life course as they wish with very few boundaries or obstacles. Individuals are now willing to take greater risks in order to further their careers and life opportunities, and this has been encouraged through the labour market whereby the notion of 'jobs for life' is no longer a common aspect of society and instead there is increasing competition and a need to move out of the comfort zone. The boundaries once set by social classes appear to have been eradicated through the increasingly educated population, and opportunities once only available to certain sectors are now open to all.

#### 2.2.4 James Coleman

Coleman (1988) proposes that social capital is intangible and has various forms: a level of trust (as shown by obligations and expectations), and information channels which contain norms and sanctions that promote common good over self-interest. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a set of resources that are inherent in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or a young person. Social capital, in Coleman's eyes, is significant because it acts primarily as a way of understanding the relationship between educational achievement and social inequality. There are two major differences evident in the definitions of social capital. Firstly, the distinction of resources from the ability to obtain them in the social structure is explicit to Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1990, Dika, Singh 2002) but is obscure in Coleman's work. Secondly, Bourdieu sees social capital as a tool of reproduction for the dominant class whereas Coleman sees social capital as a position tool for social control, where trust, information channels and norms are characteristics of the community. Coleman's work supports the idea that it is the family's responsibility to adopt and use certain norms in order to advance children's lives (Dika, Singh 2002).

Coleman defines social capital as the resource inherent to the structure of relationships. This associates the sources of social capital (e.g. the relationships) with the benefits (resources and opportunities) derived from it, leading to circular reasoning. Social relations, Coleman argues, constitute useful capital resources for actors through processes such as establishing obligations, expectations and trustworthiness, creating

channels for information and setting norms backed by efficient sanctions (Schuller et al. 2001). Coleman's work shares marked similarities to the work of Bourdieu (Schuller et al. 2001) including a shared concern for social capital as a source of educational advantage.

Coleman believed that an individual was able to perform well academically irrespective of their social background as long as those around them were also performing well. In other words, although the environment and settings of the individual is an important factor for life opportunities, it is equally important to consider who the individual is with – peer groups could radically alter their life opportunities through the introduction of new aspirations, etc. Therefore, the issue of social capital is construed here through the wider circle of peers and individuals rather than solely on the social backgrounds and settings.

### 2.2.5 Andy Furlong

Andy Furlong's work identifies big changes in the life experiences of young people over the last two decades. He states that these changes have affected the types of relationships young people have with their family, friends, experiences within the labour market, education about the labour market, leisure patterns and lifestyles which overall have an impact on the individuals' ability to become established as independent young adults. In his view, young people now have to negotiate a set of risks which were not commonly present to their parents. These changes are present irrespective of social background, class or gender. This in turn has had an impact on the process of social reproduction as they have come about within a relatively short period of time thus eliminating points of reference which previously aided the process. However, even though structures may have become fragmented, changing in their forms and become increasingly obscure, Furlong suggests that life chances and experiences can still largely be predicted, using knowledge of an individual's location within their social structures. He believes that class and gender divisions remain central to an understanding of an individual's life opportunities whilst also noting that these structures are increasingly becoming obscure as collectivist traditions weaken and individualist values intensify.

Furlong uses the analogy of the transport system to illustrate how life opportunities have altered over the last few decades. He simulates life opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s by comparing it to the trajectory of a train journey. He describes how young people boarded trains which were bound for varying destinations. The trains they

boarded, he states, were determined by factors like social class, gender and educational attainment. Once the journey began, opportunities to alter the destination of the train were limited. Individuals could upgrade the class of the ticket, or disembark at a station en route, but, given that the trains follow different set tracks, there were few opportunities to change their directions. As a result of spending long periods of time in the company of fellow passengers, all sharing similar goals and experiences, a certain camaraderie developed whereby they would develop affinities and familiarities with their fellow passengers on their respective train. This particular relationship would encourage them to work as a collective, and, for example, recognise that a change in direction was necessary as a collective. Individuality was not a common aspect to young people's lives in the 1960s and 1970s. Furlong states that the last twenty to thirty years has seen many changes which, running with his analogy, simulates the closure of the railways. Instead, he believes, the journey now takes place by car.

Although trains run on pre-set tracks, car drivers have the ability to select their journeys from a vast number of routes. Throughout the journey, car drivers have control over various factors, including the speed and comfort of their journey. They are able to monitor their progress and others in essence are in control of their paths. However, what is commonly overlooked is the fact that it will be the type of car allocated to the driver which will determine the type of journey that they will experience. Furlong believes that it is this factor which provides the best predictor of the type of journey and its outcome. Those with inferior cars will find themselves spending significant periods of time off the roads, whilst those with higher quality cars will take advantage of the stretches of open roads, and arrive at their selected destinations. This metaphor, he believes, can be transposed onto young people's life opportunities and experiences.

Furlong believes that young people are now facing new risks and opportunities. These arise through the demise of traditional links between family, school and work, encouraging young people to embark on journeys into adulthood, many of which may have uncertain outcomes. He states that young people now view these journeys as individual journeys unique to them, and therefore the risks that they face are to be overcome as individuals rather than the traditional view of collective action. These views are formulated through various changes in the way young people live their lives. Furlong includes the following reasons for the apparent changes:

- The tendency to remain in full time education by individuals from all social classes



- The changes to higher education enabling it to be seen as an experience for the masses as opposed to an opportunity for the elite
- The changes in the labour market including the demise of the industrial sector and the rise in unemployment
- The dependency of young people on their families for longer periods of time
- The changes in legislation encouraging young people to rely on their families for longer periods through the elimination of support benefits, etc.
- The changes to the school structure including the attempt to standardise the school experience for young people, including the introduction of the comprehensive system encouraging students from all backgrounds to remain in school until the age of 16
- The introduction and reliance by young people on government-sponsored training schemes post-16.

Young people's lives have also benefited from the possibilities opened to them through the ability to experiment with different forms of living and through the establishment of self-identities in contexts which are free from many of the evident constraints present to previous generations. As an example, he illustrates how three decades ago, young people from working classes tended to leave home in order to establish a marital household, and parental responsibilities were assumed at an early age. However, with the increasing post-compulsory educational participation, this is no longer the case, and there are increasing similarities between the experiences of working-class and middle-class youths. This has also meant that there is an increasing dependency amongst young people on their families, which has also raised tensions within the family structure as to support and financial dependency.

Furlong suggests that there is little evidence to indicate that the effect of social class on life opportunities is diminishing and even though it may have become a little more obscure as a result of greater individualisation of experiences, class is still a powerful indicator of life chances.

#### 2.2.6 Anthony Giddens

Giddens (2001) believes modernity is not over, but that it has evolved into something different – what he calls high/late-modernity. Reflexive Modernity, as he terms it, identifies a separation of time and space; achieved through the use of disembedding

mechanisms. This means *'the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space'* (Giddens, 1990, p.21). The mapping of the globe and of time itself has enabled a separation of time-space, along with the advancement of technology. Anthony Giddens shares many views which are similar to those expressed by Ulrich Beck. Giddens' theory of structuration notes that social life is more than random individual acts, but is not merely determined by social forces. He illustrates this by explaining that he does not consider the actions of individuals to be explained as a mass of 'micro' level activity but, on the other hand, it cannot be attributed to 'macro' level explanations. Micro level he describes as the individual's internal sense of self and identity, whereas macro level is the bigger picture of the state, at multinational levels and globalisation. Giddens suggests that human agency and social structure are not incompatible and are instead in a 'relationship' with each other, and it is instead the repetition of the acts of individuals which reproduces the structure. In practical terms, what he is saying is that there exists a social structure with traditions, institutions, moral codes and norms, but, these can be altered when individuals either ignore them, replace them or reproduce them differently. Therefore, in effect, the individual is very much in control and ultimately their perception of the self is the controlling factor towards the way they live their individual lifestyles. However, individual agency in one institution, he notes, can affect the global community, but conversely society has the power to alter the position of the individual (Giddens, 1990), due to the interconnectedness of the individual and society. There have been many unintended consequences of reflexive modernity. 'Few people anywhere in the world can any longer be unaware of the fact that their local activities are influenced, and sometimes even determined, by remote events or agencies... Less evident is the other side of the coin. The day-to-day actions of an individual today are globally consequential' (Giddens, 1994, pp.57-58). The globalization of modernity involves the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant relations in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1990). The mass media and communications system has facilitated this change in attitude amongst individuals.

However, this does not necessarily mean that individuals feel that they have the autonomy to live in any way they like. Giddens acknowledges that there exists some form of restriction or boundary and he compares it to the use of a language. People use language on an everyday basis to read, write and speak. Many will react very strongly against others who disregard its rules and conventions and this analogy can be

compared to the rules of social order. Even though these rules may be exclusively in our heads, people will be shocked when seemingly minor social expectations are not adhered to. In a sense, people's everyday actions help to reinforce and reproduce a set of expectations. It is this set of expectations which provides the social forces and social structures which at times can place limitations as to what an individual does or doesn't do.

Giddens explains that it is the conflict between the micro and macro levels that determines people's individual lifestyles. He believes that everyone in modern society has to select a lifestyle, although different groups will have different possibilities and options. Lifestyles, he believes, can be seen as readymade templates; however, the choice of one lifestyle does not predict any particular type of life story. Giddens believes that there are very little determinates of life opportunities other than the individual themselves. The choices made by individuals are affected by both the weight of tradition and the relative freedom that we all experience. Normal day to day choices such as what we eat, wear, and who we socialise with are, he says, all decisions that have an impact on who we are and the kind of person that we come across as. In addition, he sees self-identity as an important determinant of these lifestyles. Self-identity, he describes, not as a set of traits or observable characteristics but as a person's own understanding of their biography. A stable self-identity is based on an account of a person's life, actions and influences which makes sense to themselves, and which can be explained to other people without much difficulty.

Trust is a major issue within Giddens' theories and he defines it as confidence in the reliability of a structure or individual, regarding a set of outcomes or events, where the confidence expresses faith in the completion (Giddens, 1990). Accompanying trust is risk; the probability that trust will be misplaced - without trust we could not live as we cannot question everything and everyone (Bryant & Jary, 2001). Consideration of the new environment of trust and risk is central to understanding not just the new institutional forms of modernity but also the potentials for transformation now apparent at all levels from personal to global (Bryant & Jary, 2001).

### 2.2.7 Reflections

The above theorists highlight the varying views held on the life chances and opportunities presented to the current generation of young people, and reflect the differences and transitions experienced over the last two decades. In loose terms, on the

one hand we have philosophers such as Giddens, Beck and Bauman promoting the concept of individuality and control of life as largely the responsibility of the individual. They argue that the current young generation of individuals are able to make choices and are presented with opportunities which may not have existed to previous generations and in fact are more willing to take on greater risks in order to try out new things and share new experiences. These individuals are not, in their view, bound or constrained to any particular paths or channels, and can make their own independent decisions about their future.

On the other hand, philosophers such as Furlong, Coleman and Bourdieu believe that individuals are restricted or bound by birth to particular social groupings according to where they were born, who to, etc. This belief enables the concept of social reproduction to exist, whereby social groupings are able to continue and contribute to the general workings of society and enable individuals to be channelled into certain pathways. It is their view that little can be done to alter these paths, and society has learnt to accept these as a standard aspect of everyday life.

These two views lie in complete conflict with each other. On the one hand there are those advocating individuality and self-control, whilst on the other, there are those promoting the reproduction of class and confinement of social status within society. They are each at opposite ends of the spectrum, indicating that individuals can either be one or the other. In actual fact, life is not as clear cut as this theory appears to suggest, there must be a happy medium, in between, whereby individuals are neither as liberal as this suggests nor as controlled. This debate is in effect discussing the effects of structure versus agency. How constrained are individuals within society (structure) as opposed to how liberal and open individuals have the capability to be (agency).

When focusing on widening participation issues, the above debate has major implications for the way policies and programmes are put into practice and the overview of life chances for the targeted groups of students. If subscribing to the Giddens, Beck and Bauman approach, then students from a widening participation background should in theory have equal opportunities and chances as non-widening participation students. There should be little differentiation made between these groups as they should all share similar aspirations of equal status. Their outlooks on life should be very similar, not necessarily in content, but in the type of the views that they are putting across. After all, if these theorists are correct, students from this new generation are exposed to opportunities and life chances which were virtually non-existent to previous generations, and therefore young people are now more likely to take these risks

regardless of the type of background or social settings that they inherited at birth. The world is truly an oyster for this generation, and it is up to them to conquer it and grasp every opportunity presented.

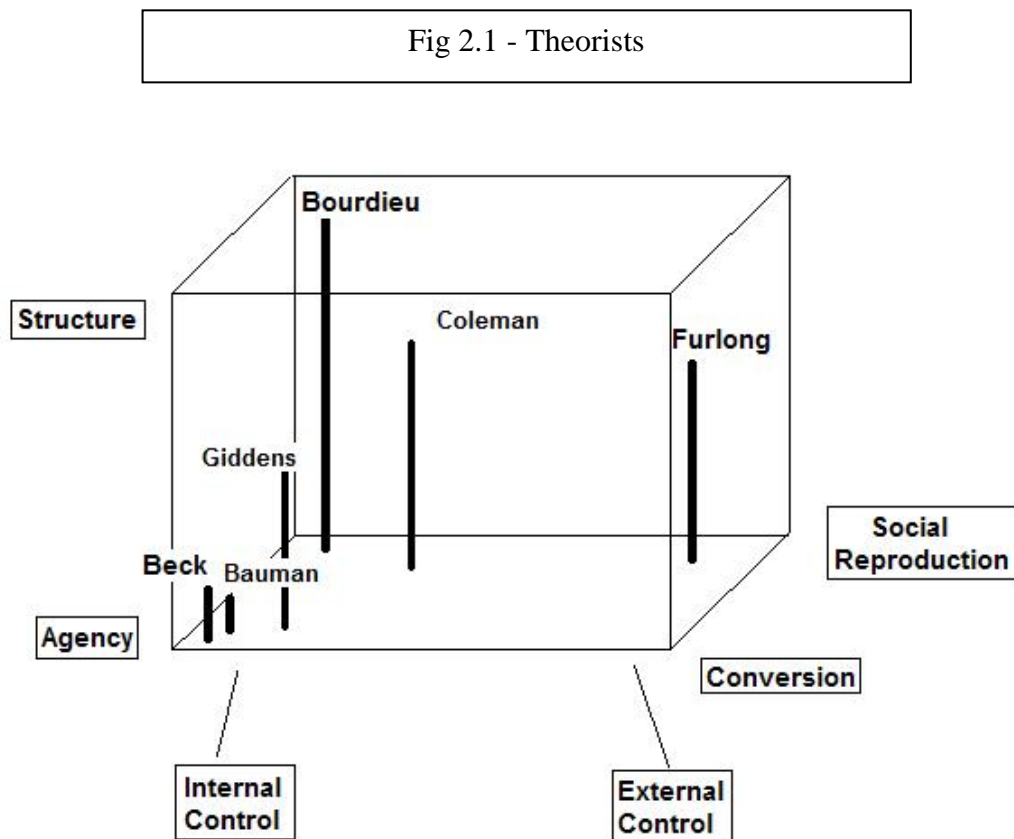
In stark contrast, the views expressed by Furlong, Bourdieu and Coleman share few similarities with the previous sentiments. According to these philosophers, students from a widening participation background – who are identified as widening participation students as a result of their low socio-economic backgrounds and low aspirations – will have very little in common with traditional students when considering their future careers, lifestyles, etc. Instead, they will reproduce the type of lifestyles and aspirations that they may have been brought up with, or live and operate within. In effect ‘social reproduction’ takes place enabling the class structures within society to remain given that they will be reproduced from generation to generation. Such students will have little opportunities to broaden their horizons beyond their immediate surroundings, and will aspire towards living a life similar to that which they have experienced.

Can life be mapped out into such crude measures? Is it simply a case of either belonging to one end of the spectrum, or the other? There surely must be intermediate points where individuals can lie? The short synopsis provided above reflects a very crude attempt to group the varying theorists into two main categories – those supporting the individualised world as opposed to those promoting the notion of social reproduction. In reality, some of the theorists do not express as clear-cut views as the debate above highlights, so therefore where do they lie? Is it in fact a continuum as opposed to two ends of a spectrum with no intermediary points? Are there other factors or influences that need to be taken into account?

### 2.3 Conceptual Model

I begin by adopting a conceptual model developed by Evans, K (2002) used in a recent journal paper. Her model deals with three dimensions, labelled (i) structure – agency, (ii) internal – external control and (iii) social reproduction – conversion. Each of these dimensions is plotted on a three dimensional bar graph using the x, y, z axis as the basis. She then places various researchers within this bar graph according to her analysis of where she believes they lie on each dimension. I have chosen to adapt this model for my study and placed on it several of the theorists reviewed previously in this

chapter. This serves to highlight the placement of the various theorists in relation to the three concepts adopted from the Evans' model. This is illustrated in the figure below.



The first dimension, structure versus agency, examines the issues surrounding control versus self-belief. Both lie at opposite ends of the spectrum. Researchers close to the agency spectrum believe that individuals are always in control of what they do, and in control of their lives. External factors play little to no role in the decision-making process, and therefore individuals are very much independent of the world around them. Researchers closer to the structure part strongly believe that individuals may not necessarily be in control of their lives but, instead may be born into groups and structures that pre-determine the access that they may have to life opportunities. Questions such as what beliefs individuals have on their future life possibilities inform the placement of individuals on this model.

The second dimension deals with internal versus external control processes. Internal control processes refer to the way individuals behave in certain ways in relation to the way they perceive others are interpreting them. In other words, individuals' life opportunities are controlled by their perception of what those around them believe about them. At the other end of the spectrum is the belief that others control or restrict opportunities according to what they believe to be your abilities and capabilities. The

third dimension examines social reproduction versus conversion. On this dimension, conversion is used to describe the way individuals change their views and perceptions according to what they are doing and where they are. A change in circumstances will dictate their self-beliefs and have the potential to alter their way and view of life. On the other hand, social reproduction indicates how habits and life choices are dictated by what has happened to previous generations, and therefore class structures are merely reproduced from generation to generation.

The model presented by Karen Evans is an interesting viewpoint. It is interesting as the manner in which it is used indicates that each of the axes has a finite point. For example, if we take the x-axis where we have the internal vs external control axis, Evans appears to indicate that there is a finite point, at the start of the axis where internal control is at its highest. Similarly, there is also a point on the axis where external control is at its highest, and therefore this axis is seen as having two fixed end points. This is also the case with the other two axes where there appear to be fixed points.

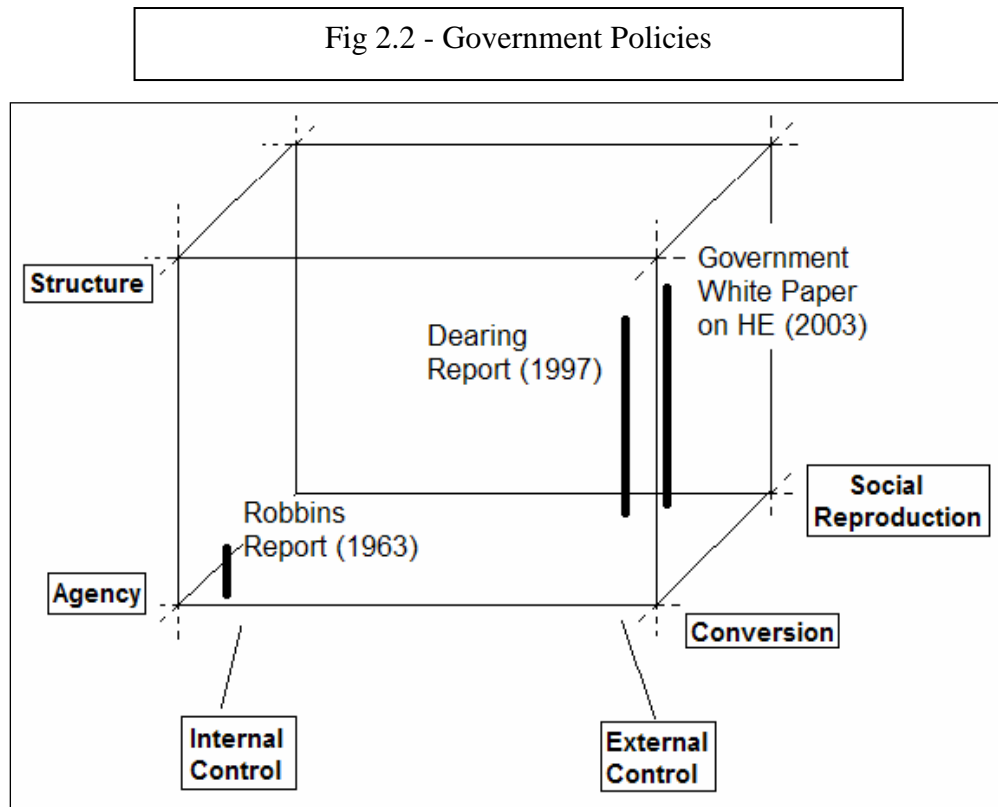
My adaptation places the theorists in a similar model but one that exists in a continuum. What I mean by this is that I do not believe that each axis has a finite point which can be the ultimate 'structural' point, or the ultimate 'social reproduction' point, but instead, I can show theorists on the model as being either greater or less than another theorist. I do not believe that there is such a thing as a theorist advocating the greatest point on any of the axioms, and therefore don't believe that they should be represented as such. The placing of theorists on the model is a rough estimate of where they lie, and not an exact science. It is of course dependant on my interpretation of their theories, in relation to the other theorists.

Having used the model above as a basis to illustrate the different viewpoints from the theorists, we will now turn to examine the varying policies within higher education and what they currently advocate. This will provide a useful insight into the UK government's preferences for young people and higher education institutions and will allow us to determine whether there is a consistent approach to the policies emerging for higher education.

The policy documents have been placed on the model used above as a means of illustrating the transition that has taken place over the last few decades in terms of the focus and strategies emerging from policies and recommendations made to the UK government on the direction and focus required for the higher education sector. This will be reviewed in greater detail throughout the next section.

## 2.4 Policy Reports

The following section highlights major policy documents that have helped shape higher education over the last sixty years. There have been many different policies released by mostly Conservative governments over this period. I have chosen to highlight and review several of the key documents that have altered or made an impact on the setup of the sector.



### 2.4.1 The Robbins Report (1963)

The Robbins Committee were appointed by Treasury on the 8th February, 1961 'to review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular, to advise in the light of these principles, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the



present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution’.

The committee held 111 meetings and received over 400 written submissions of evidence from people or organisations. Their terms of reference covered a wide field and would have justified investigation of almost any circumstances relevant to the future of higher education. But in preparing both their analysis and their recommendations they tried to concentrate on leading aspects and leading problems.

The committee noted that in recent years, important changes had occurred both within higher education and in the nation at large. Within higher education two sets of changes were especially remarkable. First, the financial position of the universities had changed. Although some universities still had substantial sources of independent income, all depended on large grants from the state to enable them to carry out their functions. Secondly, developments had taken place elsewhere. Much of the work done in certain technical colleges and colleges for the education and training of teachers had risen to university or near university level.

During the same period, outside the field of higher education, there had been changes in the community and its position in the world at large. The extension of educational opportunity in the schools and the widening of the desire for higher education on the part of young people greatly increased the demand for places. At the same time the growing realisation of the country's economic dependence upon the education of its population led to questions about the adequacy of its higher education arrangements. Unless higher education was speedily reformed, it was argued, then there was little hope of the UK maintaining an adequate position in the fiercely competitive world of the future.

In 1962/3 there were 118,000 students in universities, 55,000 in Training Colleges and Colleges of Education, and 43,000 taking full-time advanced courses in further education. There were 54,000 advanced students attending these institutions for at least one day a week (compared with 29,000 in 1954/5). In the case of women, only 7.3% of the school leaving age group entered full-time higher education in 1962, compared with 9.8% in the case of men. But the important point was that the difference between the sexes had its origin long before the age of entry to higher education.

The committee made several comparisons with other countries. They noted that different systems offered widely different opportunities for higher education for young people in their respective countries. However, from this aspect there was a fundamental distinction between the traditions of Western Europe and those of Britain. In England

and Wales the successful completion of a sixth form course gave no right of admission to higher education. This was found not to be so in other countries.

Throughout their Report, the committee assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available to all those who were qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wished to do so. They strongly believed that the UK government should have 'subsidized any qualified applicant for higher education who would not otherwise have had the income or savings to pay for it'. This was an underlying theme within their report and became known as the Robbins Principle.

The committee also noted previous reports, chiefly the Crowther Report, which had already indicated the close association between a father's level of occupation and the educational achievement of his children at school. A survey confirmed that the association with parental occupation was closer where higher education is concerned. The proportion of young people who entered full-time higher education was 45% with only 4% of those whose fathers were in skilled manual occupations. The underlying reasons for this were complex, but differences of income and of the parents' educational level and attitudes were identified as being among them. The link was even more marked for girls than for boys. They noted that the economic circumstances of the home were very influential: even in families of the same occupational level, the proportion of children reaching full-time higher education was four times as high for children from families with one or two children as from those where five or more children had claims on the family's resources. Thus a continuing growth in family incomes was likely to increase still further the demand for higher education. There was also a very important influence from the educational background of the parents. The proportion reaching full-time higher education was eight times as high among children whose fathers continued their own education to the age of eighteen or over as among those whose fathers left school aged under sixteen. These facts suggested that, since the war more children stayed on at school for a full secondary education, so in turn more of their children would come to demand higher education during the 1970s. The desire for education, they suggested, would tend to spread as more and more parents themselves received a fuller education. Children of manual worker were on average much less successful than children of the same ability in other social groups. This was largely because they left school earlier.

The Robbins Committee therefore recommended a huge expansion in the provision of higher education in the United Kingdom, together with the Robbins Principle which

encouraged any individual with the academic ability to continue their education through to higher education, thus attempting to eradicate the elitist image of the sector.

The Robbins report was a keen advocate of opportunities for all, in particular attempting to expand the sector in order to eradicate the elitist image that higher education had developed. It believed in providing opportunities for individuals, for them to be able to grasp and fully participate within the higher education market. In a sense, it aimed to facilitate the engagement of individuals by creating further opportunities within the sector, and the expectation was that individuals would automatically follow through into the system without the need to be provided with much encouragement or support. The committee made references to the fact that more and more young people were willing to continue through the educational system regardless of their parental background. Therefore, in this respect, the Robbins report was very much on the agency side of the spectrum believing that individuals would see the benefits of entering the higher education process and would engage with the process. In a similar way, the report believes that individuals are able to take control of their lives and are not controlled by external backgrounds, e.g. family backgrounds, past family experience of higher education, etc. Lastly, this report very much looks upon people having the ability to convert their particular settings and beliefs and embrace new concepts and ideas such as higher education. It focuses on the sector having to reform its outlook on individuals rather than individuals having to alter their views on the sector. The broadening of access to higher education is promoted through the enlargement of what is considered to be higher education, i.e. through further provision and additional institutions becoming Universities.

#### 2.4.2 The Dearing Report (1997)

The Dearing Report was released on July 1997, after having been commissioned over a year before (10<sup>th</sup> May 1996) with bipartisan support. A general election within the UK delayed the publication of the report. The change of government from a Conservative government (who had been in power for over 18 years) to a Labour government also meant that there was undoubtedly a change in focus and rewording so as to conform with the general election manifesto and Labour's policies on Higher Education. The Report describes its remit as one which was to make recommendations 'on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education, including support for

students, should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next 20 years’.

Throughout the introductory chapter, the report examines its vision for higher education. It states that it sees higher education ‘gaining in strength through the pursuit of quality and a commitment to standards’. Central to this vision for the UK is the need to develop a ‘learning society’. The report recognises that the Robbins Committee did the last major study of higher education in the early 1960s and since then, higher education has ‘changed dramatically’. It examines participation rates within higher education and notes that over the last 35 years, the general trend across the developed world has been for an increase in participation. However, it comments on the fact that although participation rates amongst those within the socio-economic group V has at least doubled between 1991/2 to 1995/6, they still represent a very small minority compared to those attending from higher groups. This they state is partly due to the fact that those students from the lower socio-economic groups (IV and V) attain lower academic achievements at A-Level.

The report’s very first recommendation to the government tackled the variety of courses and qualifications on offer to students at post-16 level. Within recommendation 1, when examining the demands and needs for Higher Education in the future, the committee recommended to government that it should develop ‘a long term strategic aim of responding to increased demand for higher education, much of which we [*the committee*] expect to be at sub-degree level...’. The seventh chapter (amongst the shortest in the report), details the committee’s thoughts on widening participation within Higher Education. The committee was keen to agree with the Robbins committee in rejecting the notion that there is a limited ‘pool of ability’ within the student market. They felt that if opportunities were opened such as those recommended within their report, more students would opt for the greater variety and so they would attract a greater number of students within a wider range of courses and programmes. The first aspect of their investigations centred on the patterns of participation within Higher Education. Comparisons between participation rates from 1986 to 1995 revealed that;

- 1- There was an increase in participation by women.
- 2- There was an increase in participation by mature students (over the age of 21).
- 3- There was an increase in participation by students from socio-economic groups III to V.

- 4- There was an increase in participation by students with new kinds of entry qualifications.
- 5- There was an increase in participation by students from ethnic minorities.

This was commended by the committee who related it to the fact that higher education was shown to have material benefits for those who take part in it, whether in higher salaries or in having a job rather than being unemployed. Although the participation rate by students from socio-economic groups III to V had increased, this did not have a significant impact on the ratios of overall participation given that most groups had also witnessed a similar increase. The committee noted that men from within the socio-economic groups IV and V were most unlikely to participate and participants within these groups were the most likely to be studying for a 'sub-degree' qualification. They also made a link between the locality and region of where a student lives and their participation levels within education. A HEFCE-funded research project found that the probability of a young person entering a Higher Education Institution is strongly related to the student's immediate surroundings and neighbourhood. This is the first such link made by the committee to a student's home/family background in relation to their performance and continuity in education. The committee made some analysis of the proportion of students attending pre/post 1992 universities. They examined the proportion of students from within a Widening Participation background that entered both pre and post 1992 universities. Interestingly, they found that there was no positive discrimination by the Universities in selecting and accepting students and that they were 'even-handed' in their procedures.

The committee sought to provide some explanations as to why there are possible differences in the levels of participation within the different social groups. It first looked at the demand for higher education within the context of widening participation. It suggested that if overall numbers in Higher Education increased, then, participation would widen as a result. (This was based on historical data, which showed this to be the case). However, they recommended that the funding council provide funding to institutions that had a coherent strategy that would attempt to widen participation, and which would be measurable. Secondly, it looked at the entrance requirements and achievement pre-university level. The committee stated that 'the largest single determinant of participation in higher education amongst the 18 to 21-year-old cohort is educational achievement at 18'. This therefore implies that the causes for uneven participation by young people lie outside Higher Education and the committee list the

following as possible causes; individuals' aspirations and attitudes, peer pressure/influence, family backgrounds, quality of schooling and financial circumstances.

In terms of funding and student support, the committee reported that they believe that students should contribute towards the costs of higher education. The impact this may have on widening participation is examined and it is suggested that asking students to contribute towards their studies should not act as a deterrent for those within the lower socio-economic groups, as there are student loans that can offset this initial cost. It also suggests that Access Funds should be enhanced so that they are able to provide more support and assistance to those in need, particularly those from the low socio-economic groups.

The Dearing Report was a very different report from that produced by the Robbins Committee primarily for two reasons. Firstly, and as an important element, the committee had a relevant and important document to make particular reference to – the Robbins Report. Although produced over thirty years ago, it was still the only significant report produced within this timeframe on the state of the sector and therefore comparisons were always made to it, with particular reference to the Robbins Principle. However, much had changed since the production of the Robbins report. The sector had expanded, with the inclusion of many institutions (formerly known as polytechnics) now re-branded as Universities, and with many more students taking an active role within the educational system and continuing on to higher education. The Dearing Report, particularly the sections on widening participation in higher education, was keen to focus in greater detail on the external circumstances of why students may not necessarily engage within higher education and more particularly how those obstacles may be counterbalanced. It considered its recommendations on the introduction of student fees, and the ramifications it may have had towards its quest to widen participation at higher education. However, more importantly, it highlighted possible factors for the uneven participation by people and the fact that the reasons may lie outside higher education. The committee listed the following as possible causes; individuals' aspirations and attitudes, peer pressure/influence, family backgrounds, quality of schooling and financial circumstances. Interestingly, this is the first time in an official report that such factors are mentioned as possible contributors towards the imbalance in participation rates within higher education. Moreover, the committee goes on to examine these and make further recommendations on how they should be counterbalanced.

It is clear that this report focuses more on the external elements of the decision-making process for individuals. Although not completely on the structural end of the spectrum, the report clearly indicates that it considers the external causes such as peer influences, family backgrounds and quality of schooling as factors that need to be taken into account. These are factors that cannot be altered by individuals with much ease; some can't be changed at all. Therefore, there is the introduction of the structure debate playing its part within this report. In addition, it also indicates that consideration must be given to the social reproduction debate whereby young people may be confined or choose to mirror the life opportunities and experiences that their parents/guardians have themselves undergone. It acknowledges that this may be a contributing factor towards the non-engagement of certain groups with the educational process and the report therefore focuses on these issues with an aim of providing some guidance and advice for HEIs. It is interesting to note that having had the expansion of the higher education sector from 1963 to 1997, with the inclusion of many institutions as proper higher education establishments, the committee now decided to focus on the student market and its needs, rather than on how the sector needed to change to accommodate students. The debate has shifted along the continuum from having a focus solely on the need to change and expand the sector (with the Robbins Report) to reflecting on the student population and its needs and views on higher education (the Dearing Report).

#### 2.4.3 Critiques of the Dearing Report

There are several critiques of the Dearing Report and its recommendations. Most of these critiques focus on the issues of funding in relation to both HEIs and individual students. Higher education during the 1990s was experiencing a huge growth both in terms of student numbers and the number of institutions offering higher education qualifications. Despite this growth, funding per student from the UK government's treasury department fell during this period, and there were little signs that further capital would be injected into the sector. It is therefore understandable that the majority of the Dearing Report focused on issues to do with funding, and even more so that the debate that ensued following the release of the report centred on these recommendations. These issues are not unrelated to the concept of widening participation. Widening access to higher education revolves around the need to create a suitable environment in which all students, but particularly those under-represented in the higher education market, are able to sustain their studies and fund their student years. Barr and Crawford (1998)

examined the funding proposals and questioned the reasoning and effects that they may have had.

Barr and Crawford believed that the funding proposals contained within the Dearing Report were flawed. Their views were centred on the following arguments: firstly, the recommendations would not generate any further income for either HEIs or students – students would remain poor, universities would remain poor; and secondly, they believed that the issues surrounding widening access would not be tackled through the proposed funding changes. No additional resources would become available to HEIs which so desperately needed them in order to keep up with international competition, namely from the United States.

Barr and Crawford also focused on student needs and support in the government's bid to widen access to higher education. They felt that the Dearing Report made damaging recommendations for students who needed support. The first critique of the report came in the form of the proposed loans for students. They stated that such loans were too small and would not allow students to have adequate living standards whilst undergoing a higher education course. In their opinion, the loans would provide a shortfall of nearly 20% comparable to the amount that would be needed to fund both the actual courses and for general living arrangements. This, they believed, would force students to have to rely on their parents to make up the shortfall in income – something which they stated would be a regressive social policy. Moreover they concluded that parents normally did not contribute towards their children's education, leading towards student poverty, and in the cases where they did, this normally came on the basis of conditions placed on which courses or higher education institutions they attended. In a bid to widen access, these recommendations would do little to attract students who could not depend on financial support from their respective families, and could instead achieve the complete opposite.

The other major obstacle which Barr and Crawford found difficult to comprehend was the need to pay fees up-front upon entry. The Dearing recommendations suggested that fees should be paid up-front from day one of entry to university. It is recognised that students are expected to pay their fees for tuition and accommodation (hall fees) at the start of the academic year irrespective of whether they have received their student loans. This type of pressure placed on students means that on many occasions they have to resort to their parents/guardians in order to cover these costs as an interim arrangement until their loans are put into place. It is questionable whether this type of policy and arrangement is in keeping with the drive to widen access to higher education from non-



traditional groups. Interestingly, Barr and Crawford made a distinction between genders. They expressed the view that these measures would hit females harder than their male counterparts. This is because, in their view, parents are more prone to impose conditions on daughters than sons and in particular, for women from ethnic backgrounds with weaker traditions of educating daughters. They predicted that higher education institutions would be seeking to enrol a greater number of international students in order to increase their fee income (international students paying close to double in fees as compared with their UK counterparts). They saw this as a detrimental step for both UK students and UK institutions as they believed that quality and competition would be undermined in a bid to generate further income. In summary, they concluded that 'no student is any better off than currently (pre-1997); many are worse off; and women are likely particularly to be affected'. (Barr & Crawford, 1998, p. 80)

Barr and Crawford also provided some comment on the question of variable fees. The fees proposed would be subjected to a means testing, so in effect overall parental income would be considered before deciding how much each student should pay. In this way, the proposals are looking at the starting point for students rather than outcomes. They provide an example as follows: a shop worker's son on low income would pay little to no fees as his total parental income would be very low. A managing director's daughter would pay full fees. Should the shop worker's son become a successful barrister on a high salary, he would still not have been liable for full fees whilst at university. Similarly, should the managing director's daughter become a social worker on a low starting salary, she would still have had to pay full fees. They argue that fees should not be calculated on starting points but instead on overall outcomes. This is reinforced by a statement made by the then Secretary of State for Education which appears to reinforce this idea, although the policies suggest otherwise. 'Our solution reflects the graduate's earnings of the future, not the circumstances of today's student.' (*The Times*, 24 July 1997, p.20). It appears that these are two very contradictory statements.

Their final comments are reserved for the notion of the 'one fee fits all'. They argue that it is inconceivable that every university should charge one flat fee, as this suggests that all degrees, regardless of the institution at which they are obtained, are equal in quality. The one fee fits all system suggests that undergoing a degree programme at the University of Oxford is equal in value to undergoing one at the local technical college. This, they claim, is totally unfair and will lead to resentment amongst parents and students.

#### 2.4.4 2003 Government White Paper on Higher Education

The White Paper was delayed several times as a result of the departure/appointment of different Secretaries of State for Education and Skills. It was released during mid-January 2003, amid intensive media speculation that the final details regarding widening participation issues had not been finalised right up until the night before it was due. This white paper is overshadowed in part by the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), and many regard it as a 'follow on' from the report, providing the necessary details and infrastructure so as to implement the various recommendations as detailed by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.

The paper recognises the impact and contribution that higher education gives within society. It begins by establishing the link between higher education and the economic and social well-being of the nation. As part of its introductory chapter, the report describes how the role of higher education is to equip 'the labour force with appropriate and relevant skills' and to enrich the quality of life. Higher education 'powers the economy, and its graduates are crucial to the public services'. More importantly, the government believes that 'wide access to higher education makes for a more enlightened and socially just society'.

The terminology within the paper has changed from its predecessors when examining its sections on widening participation. The term Widening Participation is no longer used, and instead 'fair access', 'wide access', access in general is the new way to deliver and respond to issues which would once come under the general Widening Participation theme. The paper handles these issues right from the very beginning, where it acknowledges that there still is very much a social class gap amongst those entering higher education, and describes this as 'unacceptably wide'. Its assessment of this situation is that it is 'disturbing' as the gap has widened and at present, young people from a professional background are over five times more likely to enter higher education than those from unskilled backgrounds. It states that 'this state of affairs cannot be tolerated in a civilised society. It wastes our national talent; and it is inherently socially unjust'. Once again the notion of rebalancing the scales of justice in society is raised, by the paper within its first introductory chapter.

The paper attempts to address one of the fundamental questions within education, which is what the purpose of Higher Education is. The main thrust of the argument is given by relating the gains of experiencing higher education to financial gains. It states that, 'Graduates and those who have "sub-degree" qualifications earn, on average,

around 50 per cent more than non-graduates. Graduates are half as likely again to be employed, and as a group they have enjoyed double the number of job promotions over the last five years, compared to non-graduates'. However, the paper also links in some social benefits as it claims that graduates are likely to become more engaged citizens.

In response to various critics (namely the opposition party) on the question of the 50% participation target set by the Government, the paper states that it believes that because of this general employability and financial stability gained by graduates, it is right to encourage and actively promote the target and work towards meeting it. However, it defines how, in their terms, this target is going to be met – not by increasing the numbers of students on the traditional three-year undergraduate degree courses, but by encouraging students on to different non-traditional courses which are classified under the 'Higher Education experience';

5.9 Our overriding priority is to ensure that as we expand higher education places, we ensure that the expansion is of an appropriate quality and type to meet the demands of employers and the needs of the economy and students. We believe that the economy needs more work focused degrees – those, like our new foundation degrees, that offer specific job-related skills.

In order to achieve this, and in a sense persuade Higher Education Institutions, the paper promises states that;

5.17 For institutions, we will offer additional funded places for foundation degrees from 2004, in preference to traditional honours degree courses; so that the numbers studying traditional three-year courses will remain steady, and growth will come predominantly through this important new route.

In addition, for students, the paper states that the government will provide 'incentives' for those doing foundation degrees in the form of bursaries. A considerable amount of money will be paid to such students enabling them to use it as an extra form of maintenance or to pay off the course fees.

Chapter 6 mainly deals with widening 'access' to higher education. The government's aims are clearly set out within its first paragraph:

Education must be a force for opportunity and social justice, not for the entrenchment of privilege. We must make certain that the opportunities that higher education brings are available to all those who have the potential to benefit from them, regardless of their background. This is not just about preventing active discrimination; it is about working actively to make sure that potential is recognised and fostered wherever it is found.

It reassures those concerned that it is fully committed towards working to achieve their 50% participation target by 2010 and begins to provide the substance and detail to their plans. The paper recognises that widening access cannot be done simply and states that it depends on building ‘aspirations and attainment’ throughout all the stages of education. It lists a few methods in which this can be attained. Firstly, by supporting Higher Education Institutions in their efforts to reach out to students from non-traditional backgrounds and providing them with the right pastoral and teaching support. Secondly, it identifies the need for young people and their families to be encouraged to raise their aspirations and achieve greater potential in examinations prior to Higher Education level. A significant link is made here by mentioning the need to work with both students and families, signifying the importance and role of the family within the drive to raise aspirations. Thirdly, the report states that there must be an effective and fair system of student support. Student support is given a chapter to itself, introducing radical new concepts and ideas in student funding. Government believe that their Education Maintenance Allowance (available to students within the 16-19 age range) will encourage more young people to stay on in learning.

University funding has become a political hot potato in recent years. Higher education institutions have continuously asked for extra funding from government so that they can maintain their competitive edge with higher education institutions in other countries such as the U.S. or Europe. Students, post-Dearing 1997, have partly contributed towards the cost of their university experience. (Students then paid approximately a quarter of the total cost). This white paper reassesses student contributions and opens up the market so that higher education institutions are provided the freedom to charge extra fees of up to £3000 per person. However, as part of and inter-linked with this change, a new ‘Access Regulator’ is established within the Higher Education Funding Council for England, whose remit is to ensure that higher education institutions develop ‘Access Agreements’ and to ensure that these agreements are robust and challenging. Such a regulator will have the power to ‘withdraw approval for variable fees, or impose financial penalties, if the Agreements are not fulfilled’. In addition, such fees will be paid after students graduate and will be linked to earnings through the tax system and not have to be paid up-front as at present.

Government will continue to subsidise students whose total overall parental earnings are under £20,000 a year by paying the current rate of tuition fees. However, since the new fee system came into effect in 2006, government continues to subsidise these

students at the current rate of fees. In other words, if such a student opts to do a course at a higher education institution where they will be charged the full £3000 a year, the government will pay for the first £1100 (current fee rate) creating a shortfall of £1900. In order to compensate for this, students whose total parental income is under £10,000 will receive a maintenance grant of £1000 a year. Students whose total parental income is over £20,000 will receive no support at all.

The White Paper signals a departure from the traditional source of funding for universities. As from 2006, students have funded three-quarters of their studies whilst the tax payer will contribute only a quarter of it. What remains to be seen is whether universities will continue to receive considerable amounts of funding from the Government, allowing them to adopt further measures so as to encourage greater access for higher education, or whether funding from the government will be reduced, so that the overall total funding received by higher education institutions remain at current levels.

#### 2.4.5 Widening Participation in Higher Education – April 2003

*Following the publication of the Government's White Paper in January titled 'The Future of Higher Education', this document provides the fine details and substance to the proposals contained in the White Paper. The document appears to tackle various issues that have been criticized by both politicians and individuals within Higher Education, namely how the differential fees would be introduced and controlled by the Department for Education and Skills. It also defines very explicitly the areas which, in the government's view, need to be tackled in order for there to be meaningful advances in widening participation in higher education. These areas are described as 'conditions' within the report, and are listed as: attainment, aspiration, application and admission. It is stated that 'the evidence' suggests that the principle barriers to access are attainment, aspiration and application.*

The document is divided into four distinct sections, mainly tackling each of the 'conditions'. Aspiration and application are combined into one section enabling the fourth section to describe the role of the newly established 'Office for Fair Access'.

The first section examines the role of academic attainment within higher education, particularly academic attainment prior to entering higher education. It recognises that there is an under-achievement of many people who come from 'less advantaged

backgrounds’ and describes this as an historic problem within society. It notes the discrepancy in participation in higher education between those students whose family occupations are within the skilled (manual), partly skilled or unskilled sector, in comparison with those whose family occupations are within the professional and non-manual sector. The increase in participation from both groups has not grown proportionally and therefore the gap *between* participation from both groups has grown. The document notes that compared to 1960 levels when there were only 200,000 full-time students, the gap between both groups was better then, than with the current levels of participation. It portions the blame on attainment achieved within both groups before reaching higher education – ‘19 per cent of those from manual backgrounds gain two or more A-Levels by the age of 18 compared to 43 per cent from non-manual backgrounds’.

Section Two combines two of the ‘conditions’ – aspiration and application. The main thrust of the argument involves the efforts and activities of higher education institutions within the widening participation framework. The government believes that universities in particular should be working much harder in an attempt to;

- 1- raise aspirations among students who come from backgrounds where studying at university is not part of the family or community tradition;
- 2- encourage a broader range of application; and
- 3- understand why it is that students may be put off from applying to their institution.

The emphasis is placed mostly on higher education institutions to act and break down the barriers currently in existence.

The fourth section creates the newly labelled ‘Office for Fair Access’. The white Paper referred to an ‘Access Regulator’ whereas this subsequent document contains a ‘watered down’ version and no longer refers to it as a regulator but an office overseeing fair access across higher education institutions. As from 2006, higher education institutions will be required to produce ‘Access Agreements’ that will describe the efforts that they are making in order to widen access, and in return will be allowed to charge variable tuition fees with a maximum set at £3000 per annum. Higher education institutions will also be expected to provide substantial bursaries for widening participation students from the extra income generated by the increase in tuition fees.

The government pledges an increase in support for students within low socio-economic groups. It states that it will continue to pay the first £1100 of the tuition fees, depending on the income of the student’s family. A new ‘Higher Education Grant’ of up

to £1000 will be introduced as from October 2004 and these will be directed towards students from low income families. Interestingly, if a student opted to attend a university that charged the full £3000, both of these incentives would still not cover the full fee, meaning that these students would have to contribute towards their fees making them worse off than at present. The government is abolishing the need to pay tuition fees up-front, which will enable students to start paying their fees after they graduate. This, they say will be linked to the tax system and will only increase with the rate of inflation. Lastly, the threshold for repayment of the loans is raised from the current £10,000 to £15,000. The report once again highlights the government's view that 'those with a higher education qualification on average earn around half as much again as non-graduates', reinforcing the view that there is a link between higher education qualifications and economic attainment.

The document outlines the government's beliefs and strategies to encourage widening participation within higher education. Its fundamental position, stated at the start of the document is that 'considerations of economic and social justice both argue for ensuring that the opportunity to enter higher education should be open to anyone who has the potential to benefit from it, regardless of background'. Social justice is mentioned as a key consideration... possibly the first time such a concept has been raised in an official document in such an elementary manner.

#### 2.4.6 Widening Participation review

Regardless of the government's motivations, researchers have developed supportive views of the principles of widening participation, and have attempted to draw out various key themes in an attempt to aid and influence activities.

The first major issue identified by those in the field concerns students' perceptions of higher education. Hutchings and Archer (2001) conclude that students from within the lower socio-economic groups perceive higher education to be 'a culture dominated by the middle class'. Roberts and Allen (1997) found that working-class students knew less about higher education than their middle-class counterparts and they suggest that this is because the schools and colleges attended by such students are 'less effective' in supplying information about higher education. Bourdieu, Coleman and others can lead us to the established literature on social and cultural capital that appears to fit in very appropriately with the views put forward by the above researchers. Hutchings and Archer point out that social class may determine future opportunities such as

perceptions of higher education, whereas Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as an entry or access to institutional resources, i.e. automatic group membership to a source or network of individuals, and this may be related to social class networks. His work emphasises actual structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on gender, race and class. Social class is seen as a determinant of the type and quality of networks and resources that we enter and have available to us as individuals. This may be a crucial point when examining entry to higher education, as it may be that students automatically join different networks and these networks may control their aspirations for their futures. Therefore, a vital question to consider is how do students make decisions on whether to proceed on to higher education?

James Coleman (1988) measures social capital using indicators such as family structure, parent-child discussion, inter-generational closure and religious participation. This may be related back to Hutchings' and Archer's findings on the link between social class and participation in higher education. The view that we may live in a meritocratic society lies in sharp contrast to those views expressed by Coleman and Bourdieu and to Hutchings' and Archer's findings. Coleman indicates that there may be various differing types of measures that influence the overall social capital that individuals have at their disposal. He argues that the success of an individual is not necessarily accredited to the overall package that they offer, but instead related to financial, human and social capital. In other words, Coleman believes that family wealth and the overall support that such wealth may bring in terms of

- (a) access to facilities and resources,
  - (b) human capital in relation to the parents' education and life opportunities, and
  - (c) social capital determined by the relationship between parent and child,
- all act as key influences and determinants of future success.

Gorard et al (1999) found evidence of continuity between the learning paths of parents and their children. This is a significant finding since it implies that pupils look up to their parents as role models. It also suggests that pupils identify themselves with the particular learning trajectory that their parents took, and they may well base their own academic expectations on their parents' achievements. Hutchings and Archer (2001) identified several key factors within the social settings of an individual which they linked to progression on to higher education. They divided these factors into three categories, namely, 'class aspirations and expectations', 'family influences' and 'working class constructions of Higher Education'. Robertson and Hillman (1997) found that many working-class young people expect to enter employment early in their



life and have little if any expectations of proceeding on to higher education. Links can be made between the above-mentioned research findings and the concepts of human capital and social capital as described by Coleman and Bourdieu.

One fundamental question that remains unanswered by current research and debate is why we are engaged in a process of widening participation in higher education and, more importantly, what is the government's wider agenda? Widening participation may make a positive contribution towards the creation of a 'just' society, and it may be a valuable resource to invest in, but, are practitioners and educationalists involved in a much wider (governmental) aim to remould the social injustices of social inequality? Is it a process by which social inequality will be eradicated and thus create a balanced and socially just society? Should the educational system be used in this manner? Can it be used in this way? Is this a quick way of tackling some of the injustices of society, without having to make great efforts to address many more complex matters and issues such as poverty and crime, which will inevitably allow the public to measure government's successes and which could ultimately determine the future of the administration?

These papers followed on from the focus of the Dearing Report in that they identify how there is a need to work on aspirations and attainment throughout the education system, and they particularly focus on the need to address students' families in the quest to widen access. They no longer consider the individual as a separate unit operating in the world but acknowledge that if inroads are to be made with widening access to higher education, families would need to be targeted. This is the clearest statement made in a governmental report on the shift in focus and the need to allocate resources and attention to a larger community in order to widen access. It comes at a time when the UK government has made important pledges and placed targets on its performance with relation to widening participation, i.e. the 2010 pledge to have 50% of under 30s to have had some form of higher education experience. It is also a time when the UK is continuously compared on league tables to other countries in the EU in relation to educational experiences and attainment, through the OECD. Such comparisons have shown the UK to be lacking somewhat in general educational attainments and engagement from its population, and therefore the UK government has embraced policies which will encourage its citizens to participate in and value education.

The papers also highlight the introduction of the variable fees (top-ups to the current standardised tuition fees charged to each student). The fees, they express, will be charged on the condition that a proportion of the income will be used as means of

supporting students from the lower socio-economic groups through scholarships and bursaries. In addition, students would once again be offered non-repayable maintenance grants (abolished in 1997). Such grants would be targeted at students from the lower socio-economic groups. These policies advocate the belief that the individual no longer operates by themselves but is influenced by their immediate surroundings – family members, peers, etc. It is evident that government policies have now taken on the structural side of the continuum and believe that a package of measures targeting a wider spectrum of people needs to be introduced if inroads are to be made in order to fulfil their manifesto pledges on higher education.

We can see a transition in beliefs from examining government policies for higher education. In the early 1960s, the emphasis focused on the sector needing to reform in order to accept new students. The Robbins Principle advocated providing opportunities to all who were academically able. The belief was that by offering new places and providing an expansion of the sector, students from across the socio-economic groups would automatically engage in the process and the stigma attached to higher education (elitist) would be eradicated as a matter of course. By the early 1990s the expansion had taken place, but, the proportion of students from each sector had unfortunately not changed, and instead the elitist image had become instilled into the sector. By the late 90s, the Dearing committee now advocated the shift in focus to the wider community. Questions must be raised as to why it took thirty years to develop the understanding that targeting the institutions was at best only part of the problem, and instead, it was the community at large that needed attention. Moreover, with the emergence of the new government targets and pledges for 2010, is it realistic to expect such dramatic movements within the sector, or will the ‘goal posts’ need to be altered in order to achieve this goal? Lastly, given that this is a manifesto pledge, the key question come 2010 will be; what’s next? It will only be then that the government’s motivations will become clear and the wider community will learn whether the efforts of the years prior to 2010 were merely an attempt to reach a goal, or a genuine desire to diversify the sector.

#### 2.4.7 Critique on Widening Participation

Hale (2006) investigates the notion of widening participation within higher education. She begins by stating that the current climate within the job market expects individuals to have a higher education qualification, and notes that degrees are now required for

jobs and levels of employment that only a decade ago were open to non-graduates. (Keep and Mayhew, 2004, p.302). This, she claims, raises huge implications for young people, almost making higher education not so much a positive achievement in itself, or a positive experience, but a continuation of compulsory schooling in order to enter the job market. Whereas two decades ago, going on to higher education was seen as an achievement, and was attributed to academic excellence, there has now been a shift in society and it is now an expectation. Employers may now question those who do not achieve a higher education qualification, and such a group of individuals may now be seen as failures. The current Labour government's policies on higher education appear to have moved on from the initial Robbin's recommendations on participation within higher education – 'all young persons qualified by ability and attainment to pursue a full time course in higher education should have the opportunity to do so', (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.49) and seem to extend much further. They base their rationale for their desire to increase participation within higher education on the following;

- it will enhance the nation's economic well-being
- it will provide better employment and earnings prospects for graduates
- it will promote equality of opportunity.

(Hale, 2006)

This stems from the Labours government's belief in providing equal opportunities to all. Hale points out that this was one of the fundamental planks of New Labour's rhetoric, aimed at differentiating themselves from the 'elitist' Conservative party and used numerous times during their election campaign in the run-up to the General Election in 1996. In particular, Tony Blair advocated:

Not a society where all succeed equally – that is utopia; but an opportunity society where all have an equal chance to succeed; that could and should be 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain under a Labour Government. (Blair, 2004)

Therefore it is easy to see how the widening participation policies emerged and the emphasis on widening participation from this particular government came into play. However, this concept has its particular problems and obstacles. On the one hand, it is an attractive policy, designed to 'sound right' to the general electorate. The average individual out in the street wants to believe that everyone has an equal chance to

succeed. However, on the down side, this policy places the shift from a central government providing for its electorate, to responsibility for success or failure passing to the individual. It is no longer the fault of government or society for failure, but more so the fault of the individual. Widening access to higher education is a great concept. In theory, anyone reaching the age of 18 with the right qualifications can gain access to higher education regardless of social background. However, Hale argues that whereas this may be so, and whereas we have witnessed a massive increase in participation rates since the 1960s, the numbers of students from the lower socio-economic backgrounds has remained virtually static as a proportion of the total entering higher education (Mayhew, 2004, p.72). In response, the government has accepted that young people from poorer backgrounds achieve lower A-level results than their middle-class counterparts and they attribute this to a range of social and educational factors ranging from poor teaching and under-resourced schools, through to the lack of 'learning culture' at home. Hale links this concept to what Pierre Bourdieu (1974 and 1977) termed 'cultural capital' and states that the apparent solution coming from the government is to offer pupils from underperforming schools places at universities on the basis of lower A-level scores. In other words, in order to get able students from lower socio-economic backgrounds into higher education, universities operate a positive discrimination system. So, on the one hand, universities are expected to operate one system for students who have traditionally filled up their places, i.e. middle to upper class, and another for students from the lower socio-economic groups. How does this fair up for the individuals? What kind of justification can be provided to students who have the entry grades, but are rejected from institutions, when, at the same time, there are those who have achieved less than them and are accepted onto identical courses? Bristol University introduced such a scheme and it was immediately publicly opposed by parents and schools who traditionally made up the institution's intake on the grounds that it discriminated against their pupils (*Observer*, 9 March 2005). Hale argues that these schools and parents were essentially claiming that the admissions policy was unfair – i.e. that real scores should be taken into account as opposed to the circumstances in which they were obtained.

The emphasis on government's policy on social background revolves around the notion of educational attainment. However, there is a range of research from individuals such as Leon Feinstein (2004) or Raymond Illsley (2002) that suggests this not to be the case and introduces the notion that there are factors beyond children's educational experiences that play a part in future academic success. These include pre-school

experiences, television consumption and even nutrition. This presents many problems and militates against any wholly education-based solutions. In particular, Feinstein has advocated that cognitive ability is altered over the course of a child's schooling in particular with children from middle-class backgrounds who improved their academic achievement through schooling, as opposed to children from lower-class backgrounds whose achievement deteriorated. Whereas he does not investigate the reasons for this, he is able to suggest various reasons including parents' education, income, age, health, occupation, employment history, family size, values, aspirations, expectations, parental styles and educational behaviours at home as well as the quality of schools and pre-school provision, 'peer groups in the school and the neighbourhood', the child's own aspirations and experience of attainment, and 'their behaviour in the school and more general health and well-being' (Feinstein, 2004, p.226). The particularly interesting point of this list is that none of them can be tackled by higher education institutions!

The UK government countered this by stating that the 'single most important cause of the social class division in higher education participation is differential attainment in schools and colleges', (DfES, 2003b, p.68) although this is contrary to existing research within the field. Politically, it makes no sense to re-examine the roots of the problem, which coincide with the outcomes advocated by current research, as the problems are too deep, and could mean radical overhauls of social policies in the areas of parenting and society at large. The implications could be enormous and could mean a change in policies across the spectrum. Bynner and Joshi claim that 'whatever type of school children attend, their educational performance reflects the social position of their parents' (Bynner and Joshi, 2002, p.405). These findings are not new, and are a duplicate of what Halsley, Heath and Ridge (1980) and Douglas (1964) concluded. So why then are national policies on higher education not focusing on these issues, and instead continuing to promote intervention at late stages of the educational process?

The then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, set up a task force charged with looking at under-achievement in schools. The National Council for Educational Excellence examined, amongst other things, progression from schools/FE colleges on to Higher Education. The report was presented to the Prime Minister on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008. Amongst many recommendations, and in relation to higher education, it stated that;

- It is important that schools and colleges offer the fullest possible support and advice to students with the ability to enter higher education, including appropriate advice for those with the ability to apply for the most selective institutions.

- Every primary school should devote time to work on raising student aspirations to take up a place in higher education.
- Significant improvements are needed in the information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided in secondary schools.
- HEIs should consider how best to balance their investments in widening participation and ensuring fair access according to their specific institutional missions.
- HEIs should continue to use, and where possible expand the range of, all the information available to them to identify the best students with the greatest potential and ability to reach the highest academic achievement.

National Council for Educational Excellence, October 2008

Leaked reports in the media prior to its reporting suggested that the review group was recommending that a new league table ranking schools according to number of students they send to top universities be created, amid concerns that many schools are not putting bright pupils forward for the highest status university places. The report also endorses a range of systems already in place in several universities where admissions officers consider students' schooling and make lower offers to students at schools with little or no record of sending pupils to university. (*The Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008). The creation of the group continued to endorse the government policy that school achievement is one of the most important issues that needs to be tackled in order to widen participation of HE.

Hale identifies that the single most important issue for students from lower socio-economic groups when considering higher education is the issue of funding. She claims that potential students were sometimes deterred from considering higher education by a reluctance to be a financial burden on their families and a desire to be financially independent – i.e. in paid employment (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003, p.216). Forsyth and Furlong also found that there were cultural barriers to participation, not necessarily as a result of low aspirations, but through negative experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Again, these are notable points which seem not to be addressed in the current widening participation drive.

## 2.5 Social Class - effects

The bond between social class and educational achievement is both powerful and strong and this is acknowledged by Harris and Ransom (2005) as a fundamental issue within governmental policy both current and past. Successive UK governments have sought to sever the link through policy-making aimed at structural intervention in an effort to create a more equitable educational system and this has achieved varying levels of success. Circular 10/65 (DES, 1965) heralded the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1960s and aimed to break down class disadvantage as it was perceived at the time. More recently, in 1988, the Education Reform Legislation pursued a different notion of the 'good society'. It promoted a policy of individual rights which would better achieve equity and social mobility in the UK. Since 1997, New Labour has introduced a 'third way'. New Labour did not believe that poverty and class are inextricably associated with educational failure or that life chances continue to be dominated by social class (Halsey, 1972, 1974; Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982; Ball, 2003). Instead, New Labour invested heavily in forms of intervention designed to assist schools in challenging circumstances. Programmes such as 'Excellence in Cities', 'Educational Action Zones' and 'Aimhigher' amongst others have all provided additional resources, external support and specific programmes of interventions aimed at tackling the perceived deficit of students from particular areas achieving their full academic potential. These initiatives have had varying levels of success (Reid & Brain, 2003; West et al, 2003). These levels of success are attributed to various issues.

Socio-economic factors appear to be a strong determinant of success. Reynolds et al, (2004) identify them as powerful influences over a school's ability to improve. This obviously has a knock-on effect on the quality of the educational experience provided for different individuals. Parents and families in poor and disadvantaged communities are less able to work the system, leaving more and more students in high poverty areas grouped together in the same school, thus creating the kind of intake mix that significantly negatively influences a school's ability to improve its performance (Thrupp, 1999). In addition, recent evidence shows that whilst some schools in disadvantaged contexts are able to 'raise their game', others will struggle and fail purely because of the impact of parental choice combined with the powerful socio-economic forces that persist and prevail against improvement (Harris et al, 2005).

Social class also has major implications on the way individuals perceive their life roles and what they should be doing. Marks, Turner & Osborne (2003), carried out a

study focusing on adults' participation in higher education particularly focusing on social classes and gender factors. Interestingly, one of their findings in the area of social class surrounded the concept of identity and how members of the working class perceived higher education to be not merely explicit for the upper classes and/or highly intelligent but also explicitly not for the working classes. Even though there was some acknowledgment that this was slowly changing, it is interesting to note that there is a perceived role of what different socio-economic groups should and shouldn't do. In particular, many participants from a working-class background saw their own 'life-track' as being one where one 'works' rather than studies. To 'work' was perceived as being respectable, whilst to 'study' was perceived as an exercise in self-indulgence. We therefore have an emerging theme of higher education not for people from particular social classes, not so much as an established norm, but as a creation of those within those social classes who believe that they did not fit in, possibly with the established aims and purposes of higher education.

Hutchings and Archer (2001), also reinforce these views. They found that working-class young people who achieved the required entry levels are still less likely to choose to go to university than those from the middle class (Metcalf, 1997; Hatcher, 1998). They believe that such a phenomenon is not necessarily restricted to Britain and that in fact it occurs in all industrialized countries. Even though they acknowledge that government policies and interventions may have succeeded in raising the numbers of working-class young people entering higher education, the numbers of middle-class entrants have also risen dramatically thus the inequality between the two groups remains.

They attribute the under-representation of lower socio-economic groups in higher education to the following reasons:

- Institutional factors – Many schools do not believe that their students can make higher education and therefore do not encourage their students to aspire to these levels. Furthermore, many pre-1992 higher education institutions are less likely to accept applicants from ethnic minority and lower socio-economic groups despite their qualifications being equal to their middle-class counterparts.
- Financial factors – On completion of higher education, students from lower socio-economic groups have higher levels of debt than those from the middle classes.



- Low academic achievement – Social class is seen as a powerful predictor of educational attainment and a smaller proportion of young people from these groups achieve the minimum entry qualifications.
- Class aspirations and expectations – Working-class young people do not aspire to continue through to higher education and instead expect to enter employment early on.
- Family influences – Gorard et al (1999) found evidence of continuity between the learning trajectories of parents and children within post-compulsory education.
- Working-class constructions of higher education – It is argued that people from the lower socio-economic groups perceive higher education to be a culture dominated by the middle class and may assume that they may feel alienated if they attend.

All these factors indicate that social class plays a major part in the opportunities available to young people when deciding what to do with their futures. Interestingly, it draws in various other factors relating to social class, such as aspirations directly impacted by parental aspirations, expectations of what higher education may be about constructed through their perceptions of the sector rather than first-hand experience, and financial pressures being particularly acute for this socio-economic group.

Having identified various key issues that need addressing in order to fully understand and comprehend the complex exercise of widening participation in higher education, I now begin to examine what the problems are.

## 2.7 Research problem – refined

This chapter has provided an overview of policy and practice within the field under enquiry. It also gave a critical account of prominent theorists' views and ideologies behind individual actions and chosen life courses. Following this review, I can narrow the research problem by providing a clearer and more concise definition of what it is that the study is looking at.

1. I aim to develop a deeper understanding of who the under-represented student in higher education is. This will be done through examining the processes through which some are deemed eligible for widening participation intervention and others are not.

2. I also aim to make sense of the experiences and lives of some young people who have and have not been deemed eligible for widening participation intervention as they move through Year 11 and onwards into adulthood, and then consider my findings in the context of the widening participation agenda.

## CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by setting out my research questions and how these have evolved and changed as the research progressed from a short term study tracking young people over their final year of compulsory schooling (2003-4) only to a longer term study that involved tracking these same young people for a further seven years beyond their compulsory schooling (2004-2011). I then map the strengths and weaknesses of the research paradigm and methodological approaches selected to address my final research questions in order to provide a justification for the research paradigm that I have chosen to work in whilst acknowledging its limitations. Whilst examining these issues, I will outline my research design; describe how the data was collected and how this fits into my overall research aims. This chapter will also address the issues of ethics, validity and reliability within my research.

### 3.1 Evolution of the research and the research questions

When I began my doctoral studies in 2002 I was interested in the particular experiences, interests and priorities of three categories of year 11 student (traditional, widening participation with intervention and widening participation without intervention) as they moved through their final year of compulsory schooling and made choices about their post 16 destinations. At that time my main interest was in identifying whether there were discernable differences between these three categories and how these were influenced by their life histories and their future aspirations. My chief concern at this point was to gain new insights into why lower socio-economic groups are, and continue to be, underrepresented in higher education. I figured that by gaining a new understanding of the lives of the young people I interviewed as they moved through and out of their compulsory period of education, I would be able to use my data to draw out implications based on these new understandings for the widening participation agenda. At that time my research questions were as follows:

1. What are the experiences, interests and priorities of three groups of students (traditional, widening participation and widening participation with

intervention) as they move through their last year of compulsory school education? Are there discernable differences and how is it influenced by their life histories and future aspirations?

2. What new understandings emerge from widening participation amongst lower socio-economic groups in higher education, in terms of our understanding of these people's lives as they move through the transitional period?

It became apparent very early on in my study as I recruited my participants that identifying who the under-represented student in higher education is was far from straightforward. It thus became important to the study to keep this issue in my sight and treat the process of identification for intervention and the benefits of intervention as problematic issues within the research. I was interested in pursuing not just the question of who was deemed eligible for widening participation intervention but also who is likely to benefit from it and were these in the latter group the same as those in the former group? By implication, I was interested in who was not deemed eligible for intervention and the implications of this for them and their pathway to the future. But I was not just interested in the intervention but also in the optimal timing of the intervention in the lives of these young people so as to gain maximum impact on their future pathways into (or not into) higher education. I was also interested in investigating the effects on young people of problematising non participation in higher education as an individual problem rather than a structural problem with deep roots within the education system as a whole.

Although my original plan was to complete my doctoral thesis within a three year full time study period, a full time employment opportunity within the University of Exeter presented itself. I became employed part time in 2002 and full time in 2006 and had to quickly go through the process of becoming acquainted with my new responsibilities. My PhD studies took a secondary role during this period as I adjusted to full time work. By the time I went back to analyzing the data I had collected and I became embroiled once again in the lives of my participants I began to realize that time had passed not just in my life but in the lives of my participants. This set me wondering what had happened to them in the interim. I decided to track them in order to see whether they had accomplished their ambitions as stated during the third exercise of the interview cycle. Firstly, I contacted them via letter informing them that I wanted to make contact with them again to discuss what they had been doing since we last spoke. I also set up a

group on a popular social networking site called Facebook and invited them to join. Five participants instantly joined the group. The rest were contacted using details provided at their year 11 interviews. Where possible I met them face to face and had an informal discussion about their lives post GCSE stages. The rest were telephoned as they were now spread geographically throughout the country. We discussed their lives and plans via these telephone conversations. Although these subsequent interviews were not taped, notes were taken during the interviews and these notes incorporated into the dataset for analysis. As time elapsed three more rounds of data collection using this approach occurred and along the way several participants became unreachable although others were lost and refound using social networking media.

With the passage of time my interest had evolved into considering how I could use all the data I had collected during year 11 and subsequently to make sense of the experiences and lives of the young people in my study who had and had not been deemed eligible for widening participation intervention as they moved not just through year 11 but onwards into adulthood. Out of my early analysis of the three groups that made up my sample and the lengthening longitudinal nature of the study, the following research questions emerged as my final ones:

### *Research Questions*

3. Who is deemed eligible for widening participation intervention? Who is likely to benefit most from this form of intervention? What is the optimum point at which to intervene so as to achieve maximum benefit in terms of the aims of widening participation intervention?
4. From the perspective of a range of young people, what impact does problematising under-representation as a problem that lies within the individual learner have on young people and their life chances and life choices? To what extent is underrepresentation in higher education a structural and social conditioning problem and with what implications for individualizing the problem of underrepresentation? To what extent should diversity in career choices and non-graduate designations be valued by those seeking to widen participation in higher education?

### 3.2 Research paradigm

There are three research paradigms that I considered when approaching the design of this research; (i) the scientific or positivist paradigm, (ii) the interpretive or illuminative paradigm, and (iii) the critical paradigm. The main focus of this study is to develop an understanding of the individuals and how they live their everyday lives, what is important to them and what influences their choice of actions and paths that may shape their future. In effect what it is really researching is how the participants live their real lives and their concepts of reality. Reality may be interpreted in many different ways by different people. The definition of reality is therefore a conceptual one in that it is located within a particular situation or environment and can be altered drastically through what may be seen as insignificant events such as minor interactions with others, etc. Therefore, it is worth noting that the definitions and understandings that may develop are only significant and attributable to the time in which they were extracted and collated and may not necessarily remain the same throughout. Developing a strategy and adopting data collection methods that are able to extract this information is crucial if the main aim is to develop a theoretical viewpoint when summing up the results. In order to develop an understanding of the methodology, it is crucial to highlight and keep in mind both what the main aims of the study are, and what the researcher's approach towards carrying out research is.

An important issue when seeking knowledge is the process by which such knowledge is generated. If we want to use the label of scientific research, then as Stenhouse advocated, it should be made public – educational research is a ‘systematic enquiry made public’. Making a report public means that not only will it come under the scrutiny of other researchers, but general members of the public will have the right to examine the research and question its findings. Only large institutions with great social power, e.g. DfES, can afford to withhold public access to certain research projects and by doing so maintain James Callaghan's (1976) ‘secret garden’ of education. Therefore, we should always aim to tell the story as it is. The danger is that even though we may try to portray ourselves as objective researchers, questions arise about whether in fact we are subjective researchers. Many may argue that all our knowledge comes from the mind, therefore the only thing we know are our thoughts and ideas (idealism) and everything is related to what we think we are seeing (relativism). It is therefore difficult to state that we are telling the ‘truth’ and reporting on ‘reality’ since both of those terms will mean and be seen as totally different things to different people.

It is clear that this study lies within the interpretive paradigm and in particular, it adopts the relativists' viewpoint. This paradigm came into prominence in the late sixties/early seventies through researchers like Alfred Schutz (1967), and Berger and Luckman (1967), who argued for what Carr and Kemmis (1986) called a 'New Sociology' (p.84). The paradigm allows individuals to create meanings and interpret the world in which they live in allowing research to reveal the network of meanings in given situations. The emphasis within this paradigm is therefore not purely on recording and making observations from a distance but instead attempting to understand actions by interpreting actions and developing meanings. This study is in effect not aiming to make a major generalisation on its findings but instead develop results on the particular cases investigated, and if these are relevant and able to shed further light on other cases, then they may be applied. But it is not the intention to develop major statements that may be applied to a wider sample of people. It is therefore very much focused on the individual participants, and the stories that they have to tell about reality from their perspectives.

The study deals with empirical research focusing on the theoretical aspects of this research – i.e. the study's main aim is to develop an understanding of the individuals in question rather than to, for example, evaluate and change the way they may lead their lives, etc. There are numerous qualitative approaches that can be employed in order to extract quality data. Yin (2003) encourages the researcher to formulate answers to key questions in three key areas before adopting a particular methodology. These areas are:

- 1- Type of research posed,
- 2- Extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events
- 3- Degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

When looking at the type of research posed, he encourages researchers to consider what kind of research questions they have developed, i.e. are they looking at how and why things happen, or who and what, where and how, etc. 'The "how" and "why" questions are likely to favour the use of case studies, experiments, or histories' (Yin, 2003). The third point explores when the events are taking place, i.e. present or past, which is related to the second point, i.e. the degree of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events. However, it is crucial that should the events be occurring during the present time, that the researcher cannot influence or alter the course of events. If they can, then they are in effect running experiments, as opposed to developing case studies. For example, a researcher may be testing the effects of a product, and have a controlled group versus a non-controlled group and test out the effects of using different quantities

of the product, or exposure to the product to measure attainment, etc. Should they be running a case study, they will merely report what they see/are being told and will not be able to comment on changes in variables, etc, as this methodology will be unavailable to them.

### 3.3 The Case Study approach

This study has adopted a case study approach with its participants. This in itself does not rule out the ability for the study to make some generalisations, but it places the emphasis on the individual story that each participant tells. ‘Generalisations and application are matters of judgement rather than calculation, and the task of case study is to produce ordered reports of experience which invite judgement and offer evidence to which judgement can appeal.’ (Stenhouse, 1985 p.49)

The case studies allow for the stories of individual participants to be told independently of each other. In particular, as Robert Stake illustrates, they will be intrinsic case studies, whereby, ‘one wants better understanding of a particular case, not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but, because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest’.

Through using a case study approach, the study can;

- cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- rely on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefit from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection analysis.

(Yin, 1994, p.13)

The use of the case study approach enables the researcher to use a variety of data collection methods. Golby (1994) reminds us that ‘case study is not the name of a method; many methods are possible within a case study’. This is a useful reminder as adopting a case study approach does not necessarily restrict or confine the data collection approach to one particular method. There are various different data collection methods in use in this area of research, normally qualitative in nature, which include interviews, diaries, reports and questionnaires.



In this study, I use case study to answer my research questions by developing an understanding of the individuals and gaining an insight into their lived lives. There are obviously challenges attributed to this approach, and, as Webb (1996, p.23) points out, one of the most common pitfalls with case study is that it is easy to fall into the trap of producing a description of the case rather than providing an analysis. Another issue is that of presenting data and findings which as Webb (1996, p.23) states, 'are not generalizable to other contexts and thus cannot contribute to the development of theory'. Both these potential problems are tackled by Merriam (1995). The first issue surrounding the lack of analysis can be solved by ensuring that 'the results of the study are consistent with the data collected' (1995, p.56). In other words, the outcomes of the study must correspond to the interpretations made of the data during the analysis stage. As a qualitative researcher, I am seeking to 'understand the world from the perspectives of those in it,' (Merriam, 1988, p.170; in Merriam, 1995) and because there may be many perspectives and different interpretations, there may therefore be very few ways in which to establish reliability in the traditional sense. As qualitative researchers, we therefore aim for what Guba and Lincoln (1985, p.288) describe as 'dependability' or 'consistency'. Merriam (1995, p.56) suggests three different strategies for ensuring this:

1. Triangulation – The use of multiple methods of data collection;
2. Peer Examination - This strategy provides a check that the investigator is interpreting the data; that is, someone else can be asked whether the emerging results appear to be consistent with the data collected;
3. Detailed description of the methodology and methods applied to collect and analyse the data – 'In order for an audit to take place, the investigator must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the enquiry. (Merriam, 1998, p.172)

My study's design section will describe in greater detail the type of strategies used to tackle the issues of 'dependability' and consistency'.

Meanings of observations are constructed in the 'context of the ideas, thoughts and beliefs and values provided by the social and cultural environment'. (Radnor, 2002, p.3) These ideas, thoughts and beliefs will only be meaningful to those individuals, as it will only make sense to them. Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) developed a form of phenomenology called sociology phenomenology. Schutz focused his analysis on the notion of intersubjectivity in which he explained how different people all draw on a common set of social concepts, symbols and meanings. In other words, we all share a common knowledge of society, people and the world, but it is our interpretation of that

knowledge that makes us differ. Therefore, in Schutz's view, we are born with this knowledge around us and we each come to terms with it in different ways. People do what they do, not because they respond as machines to the stimuli of the environment around them, but because the world in which they live, both physically and socially is meaningful to them.

We can see how there may be very different approaches in terms of ontology and epistemologies. Realists seek knowledge that will enable them to apply their findings across a spectrum of other communities and cases; in mathematical terms, arriving at a generalisation whereby all future cases will lie within the parameters of this generalisation. Relativists, on the other hand, do not seek to make sweeping statements but find answers to the particular case studied. Their aims are not necessarily to find a model solution for the world to adopt. I believe that both methodologies are dealing with two distinct audiences and although both are valid, researchers at times may not be able to afford to make the selection between approaches, since the approach will already have been made for them by the remit set, possibly by an external funding body, institutional policy, or the expectations of the society in which they are carrying out their research and by the research questions they are investigating. This study did not have constraints or boundaries set by external bodies or organisations, and therefore, the purpose of the investigation and the methodological approach were set by the researcher.

One final issue to tackle is that of generalizability within my study – how well can we make generalizations that may be applied to a larger sample. However, in order to answer this, it is worth considering to what extent we require generalizations in the statistical sense of extrapolating from a sample to a population. Qualitative research does not seek data that enables sweeping generalizations to be made, but instead seeks to develop understandings of cases, which may be applied to other cases if appropriate. In addition, it is not up to the researcher to determine the generalizability of the research, but, up to the readers to determine how well the cases described within the study can be applied within their own environments.

### 3.4 Research design

The research design for the study was underpinned by the view that this was a longitudinal study tracking participants' lives, initially over the course of a transitional year, and then carrying out a follow-up in five years' time which was one of the

benchmarks set during the third part of the interview process. I was going to work with students who were working towards their GCSE examinations in Year 11. The year selected was a crucial year for participants – they would be sitting their GCSE examinations at the end and would then have to make a choice. At sixteen, students have two main choices, grades permitting, of either (a), continuing in the educational process, or (b), of leaving education aside and entering full-time employment. Option (a) would involve attending a sixth form of college of further education and following the standard AS/A2 level examinations, or the International Baccalaureate, doing some BTEC qualifications, or following the vocational paths and achieving GNVQs and/or training. It is therefore a junction in their lives which may be very influential towards future choices and it is for this reason that it was selected as a good transitional year to follow, and attempt to identify what the thought processes were, and the value of any intervention programme that they may have taken part in.

Keeping this in mind, the design incorporated three stages which would be tested during a pilot study, namely;

Stage 1 – a timeline – reflecting on the past and where they are now

Stage 2 – photographs – examining present life and what was important to them

Stage 3 – their future – looking ahead to where they were going and what they would be doing at key intervals in their lives.

The instruments used as part of each stage of the study will be reviewed further on in this chapter.

#### 3.4.1 Design - Participants

Throughout both the pilot and main study, I worked with participants from within three different sub-groups. The sub-groups are as follows:

- (i) Traditional students
- (ii) Widening participation students who are not engaged in an HEIs programme/activity/intervention that aims to encourage them to consider the HE option
- (iii) Widening participation students who are engaged in an HEI's programme/activity /intervention that aims to encourage them to consider the HE option.

### 3.4.2 Traditional students

The first group of students were defined as traditional students, i.e. students who were considered not to be from a widening participation background and who in addition were deemed, by the school, to come from a traditional family. A traditional family is one whereby their parents/guardians are in professional employment and thus may have had some form of higher education experience. Professions included in this group may range from teachers, doctors and lawyers through to managers in private businesses, etc. These are jobs which entail some form of further training and qualifications in order to fulfil the role. These families are normally considered to fall within the higher socio-economic groups of society.

### 3.4.3 Widening participation students who are not engaged in an HEI's programme

The second group of students were labelled as widening participation students who were not engaged in activities run by higher education institutions aimed at raising aspirations and further attainment within the educational process. These students, although considered to have the ability to proceed on to higher education, were currently under-aspiring and therefore placed within a target group of potential A-Levels and Higher Education progression. Their parents/guardians were considered to be in jobs which may not require further qualifications post-sixteen. Some of these students come from families whereby attendance at higher education is not common. Others will be from families who are receiving free school meals thus demonstrating that their backgrounds are from the lower socio-economic groups. Students from within these backgrounds would typically be achieving grades C/D at GCSE although they were identified as capable of achieving higher grades with the right support structures in place.

### 3.4.4 Widening participation students who are engaged in an HEI's programme

The third and final group of students were identified as students from a widening participation background who were receiving some form of intervention normally through programmes led by a higher education institution. These were all students who satisfy the criteria as per the students in the second group, i.e. having potential to achieve good academic results, and in addition were engaged in programmes aimed at

raising their aspirations and introducing the concept of further study with a view to progressing onto higher education. Higher education institutions are encouraged by the UK government to run intervention programmes in a bid to diversify the student population and increase participation in higher education from groups that are traditionally under-represented (lower socio-economic groups). These programmes are normally run and funded either by the institution itself or through the auspices of Aimhigher – a national scheme run and funded by the government in conjunction with higher education institutions. They may take the form of;

- Student mentoring programmes – higher education students providing role model figures to students in schools
- Summer Schools – school students invited onto campus for normally week-long residential providing them with an insight into higher education
- Student shadowing – students shadowing higher education students
- Visits to higher education providers – aimed at making institutions more accessible
- Talks delivered at schools and colleges
- Open Days.

This list is not exhaustive and programmes vary between institutions and regions according to participation rates and number of higher education institutions in the area. Higher education institutions and Aimhigher would typically provide criteria as to who was eligible to partake in the above activities. Normally, the criteria provided by both sectors would be the same as they are both working towards similar goals. However, although criteria are provided, it is very much up to the individual school to select students for the schemes, and an element of trust is placed on the system that schools would be able to provide the appropriate students for each programme. Specific information about the intervention programme will be included later on in this chapter.

#### 3.4.5 Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments were designed to attempt to develop an understanding of who the participants were and how they lived their lives. I designed a participants' booklet which contained background information about the project and details of all the activities to be used at the various stages of the interview cycle. The participants' booklets contained three different activities - activity one was a timeline activity.

Participants were provided with an example of a timeline, completed by a celebrity footballer. The timeline was divided into three different areas – social stuff, academic stuff and plans for the future. Under each heading, participants would be invited to provide information, focusing particularly on three different time frames; 1- from birth through to the start of primary school, 2- from the start of primary school through to the start of secondary school, and 3- from the start of secondary school through to present, and if possible making some predications on the future.

The aim of this activity was to gain an understanding of how the participants described and perceived their lives, from their viewpoints. It illustrates how their thinking on the three distinct areas may have changed through their lives, and provides an opportunity for further exploration on the causes for changes in their planning, and reasoning. The timeline activity would be used as the basis for discussion during the first interview.

The second activity involved the participants providing an insight into their lives through the use of images. Participants would be issued with a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of things that represented who they were or things that were important to them. These photos could be from any aspect of their surroundings or activities and did not necessarily have to be from their school environment. Participants would be asked to attempt to cover as many different areas of their lives as possible so that they could justifiably state that the photographs portrayed a good snapshot of their lives. Activity three involved looking at their perceptions of how they would be living their lives at three points – when seventeen, twenty and forty. Participants would be encouraged to describe their lives in relation to employment, living arrangements, careers and their futures.

### 3.5 Pilot Study

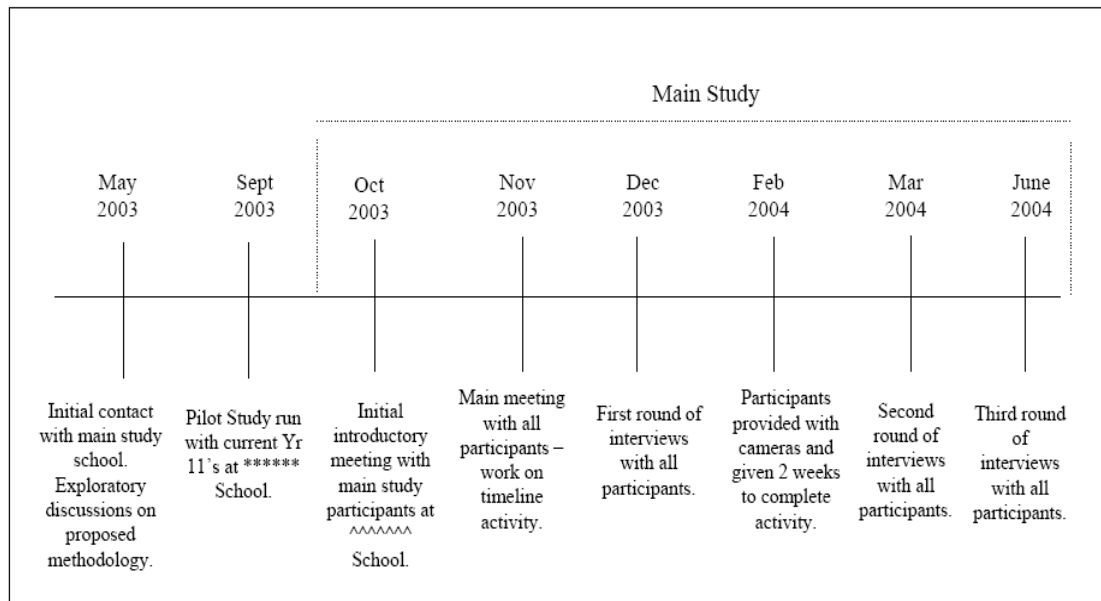
#### 3.5.1 Rationale for running a pilot study

Prior to conducting my main study, I decided that it would be beneficial to run a pilot study in order to test my research design and the proposed data collection instruments. The pilot study was in effect a trial run of the proposed procedures and therefore an attempt was made to mirror and create the same environment and interview conditions as those proposed for the main study. The pilot study was conducted shortly before the

main study was due to commence. Fig 3.1 provides the context and timings for each stage of the study.

The pilot study was aimed at testing out my instruments for data collection and in particular, ensuring that they would extract the quality and quantity of information sought after. I attempted to mirror my main sample of participants by selecting a pilot school which had a similar composition of students and offered a similar curriculum.

Fig 3.1 – Timeline of Activities



### 3.5.2 School

The pilot school was a school located around fourteen miles away from the school used in the main study. It was located in a large city sharing similar characteristics to the main study's environment, albeit on a slightly larger scale. The city has several secondary schools, from which most would have been suitable for selection as a pilot school. However, this particular school was chosen as the researcher had a good working relationship with the assistant head of the school, and therefore gaining access to the school was not an issue. The contact teacher acted as a school coordinator, and ensured that suitable participants were approached and selected.

The school was undergoing major refurbishment works and this meant that space was at a premium. Ideally, it would have been best to have conducted the interviews in an empty classroom. However, due to space restrictions, this was unfortunately not possible, and instead, the school's library was used. The library was a large room, divided into two sections. One half of the room was filled with bookshelves, holding

around two hundred books, whilst the other half had big square tables all aligned forming a straight column. The walls on the tables' side all had computer desks with computers logged on to the internet. The librarians were located at one end of the room, opposite the main entrance, whilst a Connexions office (careers information) was situated at the other. The interviews were conducted at the desk furthest away from both the librarian's desk and the main entrance to the library.

### 3.5.3 Participants

The study focused on the lives of fifteen current fifteen-going-on sixteen year-olds who at the time of the research during the academic year 2003/04 were attending their last year of compulsory schooling, at Year 11. These students were reaching a critical stage in their educational careers, as for the first time they were provided with the opportunity to decide what their educational futures would be. The participants are divided into three groups and selected by the school coordinator using the following criteria:

- (i) Traditional students
- (ii) Widening participation students who are not engaged in an HEI's programme/activity/intervention that aims to encourage them to consider the HE option
- (iii) Widening participation students who are engaged in an HEI's programme/activity /intervention that aims to encourage them to consider the HE option.

The rationale for drawing participants from the above three categories is that each group will be able to give me an insight into their perspectives on their future educational careers. By having three relevant but distinct groups, I would then be able to compare the different results obtained from each group and note whether there are any similarities.

Nine participants were selected, equally divided amongst the three study groups. All the participants received letters from both the study and the school, ensuring that parental consent was provided before participants were interviewed. Participants within the pilot study were provided with the opportunity to opt out, and three participants out of nine did not show up having said that they would attend. Their non-attendance did



not cause a big imbalance to the overall group dynamics as they were all from different groups.

#### 3.5.4 Design

Students were pre-allocated a date and time for their respective interviews by the school coordinator. They were provided with a brief introduction to the study, informing them that the study would be looking at the way that they lived their lives. However, they were not provided with any further information about what the interviews would be about, or the kind of activities that they would be asked to complete, in order to ensure that they entered the interview process with little or no pre-conceived ideas as to what they were about to be asked.

The purpose of the pilot study was to test all my instruments and ideas to see whether they would elicit the type of information that I required in order to be able to tell the story of how each individual lived their life, what pre-occupies them and what they consider to be important. With this in mind, I used this part of the study to test out how much a rigid interview would extract, and how flexible I would have to be in order to ensure that I would be gaining quality data.

#### 3.5.5 Data collection

I devised a data collection schedule which was separated into four components (see Fig 3.2). The first component was a general question and answer section whereby participants were asked specific questions surrounding three different themes – identity, aspirations and motivations.

The identity theme explored their thoughts on how they viewed themselves in relation to their peers, and their environment. The theme touched upon several hypothetical situations such as what aspects they would change about their lives if they were allowed to start from birth, amongst others. It attempted to develop an understanding on whether the participants were comfortable with the way they lead their lives and who, in their opinion, controlled what they did.

The second section looked at their aspirations and what they thought they would be doing in the future. It sought to establish where they saw themselves in a few years' time, and how they actually got to those places/positions. By doing this, I would be able to examine what kind of boundaries they saw in their existence and if there was any

communality amongst the participants. The third set of questions were still shaped around the issues of aspirations, but sought to identify what their main motivations for meeting such aspirations were, i.e. why did they want to pursue a certain career, lead a certain lifestyle, have a particular sized family, etc.

The second component involved participants completing a timeline activity. The participants were shown an example of a timeline, completed by a celebrity footballer. The timeline was divided into three different areas – social stuff, academic stuff and plans for the future. Under each heading, participants were invited to provide information focusing particularly on three different time frames; 1- from birth through to the start of primary school, 2- from the start of primary school through to the start of secondary school, and 3- from the start of secondary school through to present, and if possible making some predications on the future.

The aim of this activity was to gain an understanding of how the participants described and perceived their lives, from their viewpoints. It illustrates how their thinking on the three distinct areas may have changed through their lives, and provides an opportunity for further exploration on the causes for changes in their planning and reasoning.

The third component involved participants looking towards the future and describing what their lives would be like at three different stages; when they were seventeen, when they were twenty and when they were forty. At each point, they were asked to consider various aspects of their lives, and these were: what they were doing, i.e. education, employment, etc; type of salary earned, type of lifestyle led including relationships, family, siblings; where they were living and who with, and anything else that they considered important. The ages chosen were of particular significance because they are either on, or approaching, potential major turning points in their lives. At seventeen, participants would have chosen to either voluntarily continue within the education system and pursue sixth form at school or attend a further education college, withdraw from education altogether and seek employment, join an apprenticeship scheme, or follow an alternative career path through public services, etc. Therefore, it was important to establish where they saw themselves going at this important juncture, and, in turn, develop an understanding of the value attributed to each path and the reasoning behind their choices. This was also the most immediate change that would be occurring in their lives, so, there was a fairly good chance that they were already pretty clear what route they would be taking. At twenty, participants would again be approaching a major turning point in their lives. For those who would have continued through the

educational system and gone through both further education and higher education, they would most likely be approaching the end of formalised education and therefore making choices on their careers and lifestyles including where they were heading and how. Should they not have chosen to remain in higher education, they could have entered into direct employment post-sixteen and therefore would have been in employment for four years. At this point, it would be interesting to see whether they were still pursuing the same career that they had entered at sixteen, and if not, why the changes. By forty, the expectation was that their lives had somewhat settled and the transition of finding a suitable career, home, family, etc. had been made. Therefore, by then, participants were asked to fully describe their settings, including where and how they were living, salaries being earned, etc.

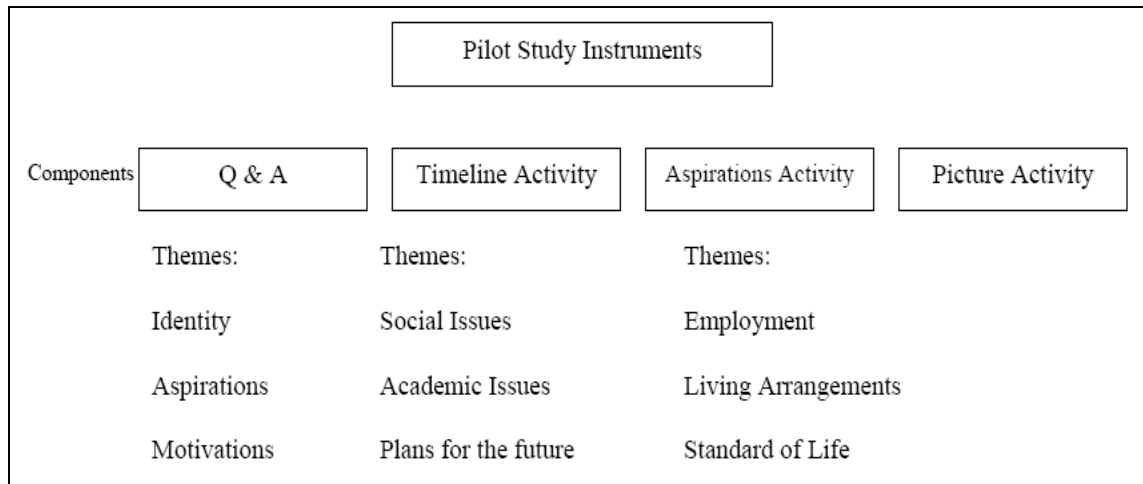
This exercise aimed to illustrate various aspects of each participant's life. Firstly, I wanted to establish what each participant's visions were for their futures, but, also, including what they saw as the boundaries in existence to stop them from aspiring further than they were at present. Through fruitful probing, it could be linked to their perceptions of how their immediate family live and earnings made by certain members of their families. It may also highlight significant role model figures, and how the participants may be influenced by different people.

The fourth and final component asked participants to explore the use of pictures and cut-outs from magazines and produce a collage of images which may mean something to them, represent who they are or something in their lives. Due to time restraints, not all participants were able to tackle this activity. The main purpose of this activity was to explore the use of imagery with the concept of identity and determine whether the use of such instruments encouraged self-reflections of who the participants saw themselves to be, and how they lived their lives.

All four components were intermixed in order to enable the interviews to have some fluidity. The first activity, completing and discussing the timeline, was normally done towards the beginning of the interview together with asking general questions about the individual and about their identity. The second activity, which explored their future aspirations by describing what they thought their lives would be at different ages, was used whilst discussing their aspirations. The third activity using imagery as part of the development of their perceptions of their identity was used at the end of the interview, solely because it was the most time-consuming activity, and time is an issue when conducting interviews with students within schools, as there are always constraints such

as breaks and lunch-hours, and limitations as to how long it is feasible to keep a student out of their lessons.

Fig 3.2 – General Layout of Pilot Study Instruments



### 3.5.6 Data analysis

The data in this section need not be analysed specifically for content with the aim of developing individual case studies for each participant. This is because the main aims of the pilot study were to identify whether the proposed instruments were able to collect and generate the type of data required, and not to develop individual profiles and case studies for each participant. Therefore, when examining the transcripts, I was looking for evidence on the following:

- 1- Were the participants able to express their views on their present lives and consider their futures?
- 2- Was the interview structure too rigid, providing little opportunities for additional comments and views to be considered and expanded?
- 3- When reading the transcripts, was there a life story emerging from the participants – i.e. was I able to gather enough information to develop an understanding of who these participants really were, and how they lived their everyday lives?
- 4- Were there any other issues emerging from the data that could help shape the data collection process for the main study?

### 3.5.7 Lessons learnt for main study

The pilot study was very useful in illustrating key issues surrounding the proposed data collection processes. The activities conducted during the pilot study were similar to

those planned for the main study with the exception of the cut-out exercise where it was proposed that the main participants would substitute this activity for their own photographs. This section will tackle each component detailed in Fig. 2 and examine what type of lessons were learnt and whether any modifications were required for the main study.

#### Component 1 – Questions and Answers section

This component was inter-mixed with all the other components. However, when conducting this particular section, I felt, as a researcher, that the structure was far too rigid, allowing very little flexibility both for myself and the participants concerned. It felt too much as if it were an interrogation as opposed to a discussion at an interview, and therefore the structure would have to be looked at so as to ensure that the type of environment created was conducive towards a relaxed and fruitful discussion. In addition, when looking at the transcripts there is little fluidity amongst the topics discussed and this may have had an impact on the type of responses received from the participants as some of the questions were very much out of context and asked at random. I definitely believed that the interview approach was very much like following a particular script, with a certain number of questions asked in each section, and this was not the type of interview that I wanted to conduct for the main study.

#### Component 2 – The Timeline Activity

This component focused on the activity which asked participants to reflect on their past, the present and look ahead towards the future. The main emphasis was on the past, and developing a discussion from the points raised by them during this section. The activity worked well in the first two sections where they focused on their past and present lives. The activity did not provide a good basis to describe the future, and therefore adaptations would have to be made for the main study to ensure that either, (a) the future was tackled in a more specific way, or (b) it was left as a focus for the third component.

#### Component 3 – Aspirations Activity

This activity looked at their aspirations for the future at three different points in their lives. The activity was particularly useful in providing a focus for discussion, as it highlighted some major differences in both short-term and long-term visions. Having conducted this activity, I felt that the problems encountered under the second component were overcome through this activity, and therefore there were no major gaps in the data-collection process with regards to their future plans and ambitions.

#### Component 4- The Picture Activity

As previously explained, this was an adaptation of the proposed task in the main study. The reason why we could not sample the activity which would be used during the main study was that it required participants to do some work in the weeks leading up to the interview, and this time and contact was unavailable with this particular school. Therefore, a similar task with the cut-outs from magazines was developed which in essence would be looking for features similar to those that would emerge from the photographs activity. This activity was probably one of the more enjoyable activities for the participants possibly due to the fact that they had never been asked to do something like this before, therefore the novelty factor came into play. Participants cut out various bits and pieces from the magazines, and developed a collage of materials on a sheet of paper which represented something to them. It served as a good starting point for discussions on the key points of their cut-outs, developing useful insights into the reasons for the inclusion of certain pictures and snapshots.

Therefore, there were a few points to consider when designing my data collecting instruments for the main study. Firstly, and possibly the most important feature to emerge, concerns the layout of the interview process, and in particular its style. It was noted that the interview structure was too rigid and it did not allow for any flexibility on the part of the researcher or participant. I therefore decided to develop an interview model that considered general themes instead of specific questions. This would allow for the same content to be covered, but in a different manner, allowing the interviews to flow into a discussion rather than a set of pre-determined questions.

The second adaptation came in the form of the timeline activity. Originally this activity was meant to incorporate a substantive section on their future aspirations. However, upon reflection, this would merely duplicate what the third activity was doing and it was therefore decided to reduce the importance of this section so that participants focused primarily on their past and present lives.

With this in mind, I also decided on the structure of the data collection phases. The first interview would deal with the past, the second would focus on the present whilst the third and final interview would look towards the future. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

### 3.6 Main Study

#### 3.6.1 School

The particular school was selected to take part in the study as the researcher had developed very good links with several staff members enabling easy access. It was also a school that worked very closely with the University through ITT partnerships and widening participation work, and therefore they were accustomed to having various projects and studies conducted at their premises. Their size meant that they should not have had much difficulty in finding suitable participants for the study and identifying students from different sub-groups.

The school is set in a large town with over thirty-five thousand inhabitants. It is situated around twenty minutes away from one of the major cities in the region, and there are good transport links between them. The school is one of the largest secondary schools in the United Kingdom. It currently has over two thousand students enrolled in Years 7 to 11. It describes itself as a school offering ‘a wide range of educational and recreational activities for the whole community’. As the school is located in a rural area, it has a large catchment area with students coming from many different villages around the town.

#### 3.6.2 Participants

The participants for this part of the study were selected on the same basis and using the same criteria as those in the pilot study. The participants are divided into three groups and selected by the school coordinator using the following criteria:

- (i) Traditional students
- (ii) Widening participation students who are not engaged in an HEI’s programme/activity/intervention that aims to encourage them to consider the HE option
- (iii) Widening participation students who are engaged in an HEI’s programme/activity /intervention that aims to encourage them to consider the HE option

### 3.6.3 The intervention programme

Widening participation students selected for this project were students who were currently engaged in an intensive mentoring programme run by the local higher education institution. They had originally been selected by the school using the criteria provided by the institution, following guidelines provided nationally by the Government. These criteria were as follows:

- 1- First generation within their families proceeding on to FE/HE
- 2- Under-achieving despite their academic ability
- 3- Lack of parental support for academic progression
- 4- Receives free school meals.

The students selected were part of a three-year programme starting in Year 9 (age 13/14) and working through to Year 11 (age 15/16). It consisted of weekly meetings of one hour with two higher education students (known as mentors). The sessions were unstructured and primarily led by the students from the higher education institution. Comprehensive training for the mentors was run both by the institution and by a team from the National Mentoring Pilot Project<sup>1</sup>. Student mentors would visit the school and discuss academic progress whilst in addition assisting with academic work. It aimed to introduce students to the concept of higher education and encourage them to aspire further. The scheme also included visits to the institution in a bid to encourage them to see the concept of higher education as something that was accessible to them.

The sessions took place during school hours, taking the place of a lesson in school. Students were asked to leave their lessons and attend their mentoring session. Attendance was monitored by the school coordinator, although this normally did not pose too many problems as students were all too happy to come out of lessons in order to attend. The scheme also sought to address social issues and broaden students' minds to consider life outside their immediate environment. As an example, mentors would at times take national newspapers and use several topical issues as points for discussion.

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<sup>1</sup>The National Mentoring Pilot Project was a national programme run from Cardiff University. The project worked with over twenty-five higher education institutions providing training and evaluation. It ceased as a pilot in 2004 and subsequently became the National Mentoring Scheme run as a widening participation programme as one of the Aimhigher programmes funded by HEFCE. It concluded in 2007 when funding was terminated.



Schools would provide details of academic attainment at the end of each year using exam results such as SATS (in Year 9) and end-of-year results in Year 10. Participating students would, at the end of the programme (in Year 11), be invited to attend a week-long residential at the higher education institution and this would conclude the intervention programme.

#### 3.6.4 Sample Selection - procedures

A total number of fifteen participants were invited to take part in the study, divided equally into the three sub-groups. The school coordinator provided the data in order to be able to place the participants into the respective sub-groups. Recruitment and selection of participants for the main study was done in a very similar fashion to that of the pilot study. Initial contact was made with the secondary school and permission sought from the nominated school coordinator. An initial meeting with the school coordinator laid out the main aims and objectives of the research project, and we drew up a time frame in which we would try to implement the study. From the outset, it was important to highlight the fact that the students working within the study would be entering an important academic year, in the lead up to their GCSE exams and therefore it would be in both their and my interests if the entire study would be completed before their examinations – their interests as they could then focus on their exams and mine as it would mean that I would have direct access to them whilst still at school rather than have to liaise with them once they had formally left school. The intention was also to track them and conduct a follow-up meeting five years after leaving formal education when they would be aged twenty-one.

The school coordinator was provided with a brief about the study, including the three different sub-groups sought after. The school is one of the largest secondary schools in the country with year groups of approximately three hundred and eighty students. It is for this reason that the school coordinator expressed no doubts in being able to recruit students for this study satisfying the three different sub-groups required. Determining a participant group size is always dependent on various factors – resources, access and time available to conduct the study are major factors when considering how many participants to have in a study. However, as a researcher, we must also balance these factors with the need to have a large enough group in order to make the study credible and well-balanced. Although, given the nature of this study, the intention is not to make huge sweeping generalisations and statements which can encompass large numbers of

people, it is important to have a decent sized number of participants which allow the researcher to be able to group themes and concepts together and link them to current theoretical models and literature. Therefore, identifying what is a suitable number of participants to have within a study is relative to the individual aims and objectives of the study encompassing the factors detailed above. For the main study, I decided that it would be beneficial to aim for a total of fifteen participants – five within each sub-group. Having fifteen individual profiles and life stories would provide a very useful and illuminative insight into the lives of these particular fifteen/sixteen year olds, and, in addition, would allow, if applicable, the development of models and theories which would firstly explain why these individuals live the way they do, and secondly, provide a basis for broader generalisations to be made which could be applied to larger groups of students. Having fifteen participants would also allow for a few drop-outs whilst still keeping a reasonable sized group. However, care would have to be taken to ensure that the overall group dynamics be kept as close to the original ratios as possible in order to enable cross-comparisons to be made between participants and their respective groupings.

As with the pilot study, students were provided with letters from the school and the study providing them with a brief introduction to the project and the projected timescale of activity. Participants were informed that it was an opt-in process where they would be required to commit to taking part rather than opt out. Parental permission was also sought and permission slips were distributed prior to the project commencing. In addition, potential participants were invited to an introductory session held during lesson time whereby more details were provided to them by the researcher and they were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

Participants were explained that the study would take up a total of approximately three hours of their time throughout an eight-month period. They were told that all the sessions would take place within the school premises, and during school times. This serves to reinforce two points – firstly that the school supports the study as it is providing the resources and facilities for it to occur within the school, and secondly, that the study will not impinge on their personal time outside school hours. It is important that these two issues are tackled early on as it means that participants are clear that they would not have to give up any of their personal time outside of school hours, and so they are more likely to agree to participate given that it automatically implies that there could be a possibility of some lessons being missed as a result of having to attend the

interviews, etc. For many fifteen/sixteen year olds, this is a great opportunity as many of them jump at the opportunity to get out of lessons!

The first formal session with the participants was held once all the parental permission slips were collected by the school coordinator. Participants were provided with another overview of the study, and were given the participants' booklets. These booklets were designed for participants to keep and store, and therefore had contact details about the study, and further information about the purpose and aims. However, after meeting the group, I decided not to let the participants keep the booklets, but instead I would keep them and take them to our sessions every time we meet. By doing this, I would ensure that these booklets were always accessible every time we met, and as a result, no data would be lost. The booklets contained all the tasks and activities that were planned as part of the study.

#### 3.6.5 Follow up

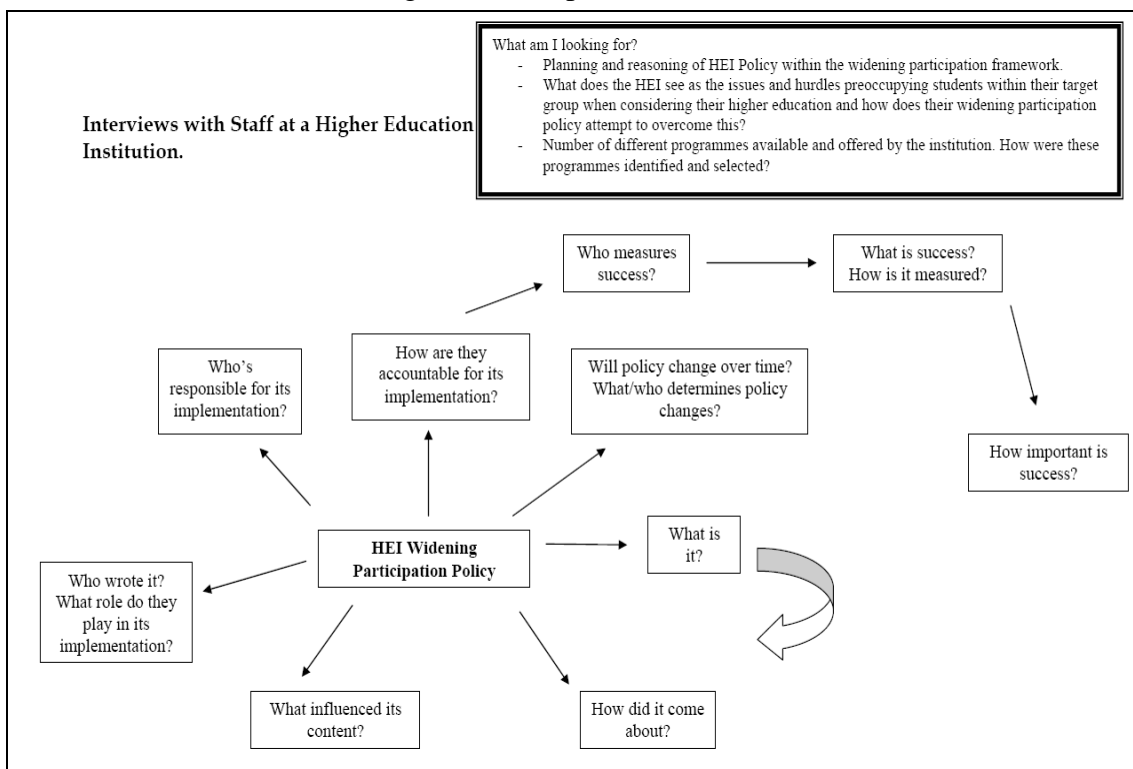
Following the interview schedule, data analysis commenced. I decided to attempt to track down the participants in order to see whether they had accomplished their ambitions as stated during the third exercise of the interview cycle. Attempts were made during three different points, when participants reached the age of twenty-one/two, when they had reached the age of twenty-three and a final contact point at age twenty-four. Participants were tracked down using various methods. Firstly, I contacted them via letter informing them that I would wish to make contact to discuss what they had got up to. I also set up a group on a popular social networking site called Facebook which they could join. Five participants instantly joined the group. The rest were contacted using details provided at their interviews. I met several participants face to face and had an informal discussion about their lives post-GCSE. The rest were telephoned and we discussed their progress via telephone conversations. Notes were taken from these interviews and incorporated into the data analysis section as a final stage of their story. As time elapsed, several participants became unreachable although others were found using social networking media.

#### 3.6.6 University Staff Interview

I choose to interview a key member of staff within a higher education institution. The institution was a medium-sized research-based institution that had engaged in widening

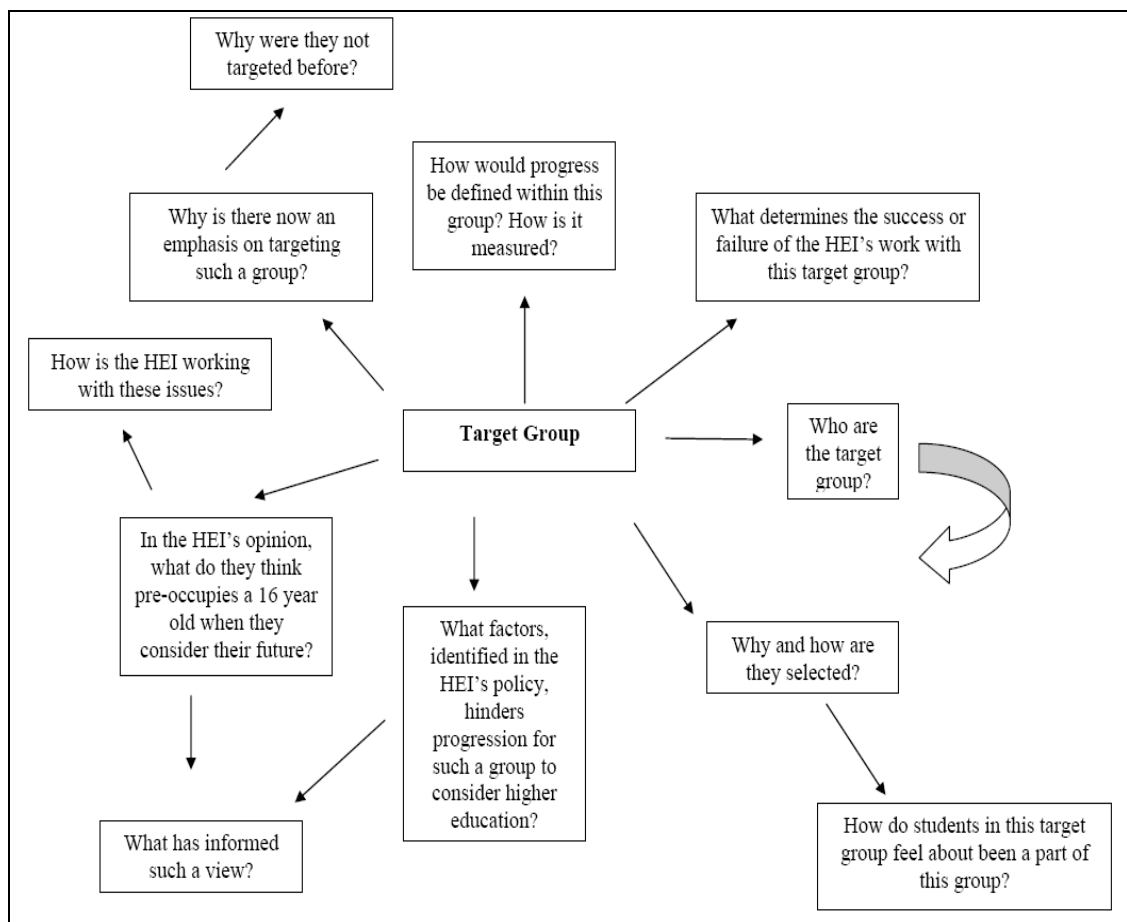
participation programmes since 2001. Prior to this time, ‘widening participation’ was a term considered alien to the institution. The individual was the Widening Participation Officer, who was responsible for the central efforts by the institution to diversify its student intake. The institution was considered particularly poor in this area, holding below benchmark figures for intake of lower socio-economic students. It was highlighted on numerous occasions by the national media as an institution achieving below average in this area, and it was therefore under pressure, not only from HEFCE, but also by the national press to increase the range of its intake and diversify its students. The widening participation officer had been in post for over two years, and was settled in their post. My interview was separated into two main sections. The first centred around the HEI’s widening participation policy and what it meant to the individual directing its implementation. My first aim was to establish what the policy was, and how it came about. This would identify the motives behind the policy and the commitment by the institution towards its delivery. I also aimed to develop an insight into how the policy was shaped, including the major stakeholders as seen by the institution. In addition, the interview sought to identify how changes to the policy would be implemented and who was ultimately accountable for its success. Figure 3.3 shows the model used during the first part of the interview.

Fig 3.3 – First part of interview model



The second section focused on identifying what the HEI saw as the issues and hurdles preoccupying students within their targeted groups. In particular, I wanted to see how the widening participation policy attempted to overcome these issues. The first key area focused on was the issue of the targeted groups – who they are and how they are selected. Once this was established, we then moved on to identifying the key issues, focusing on the targeted groups from the HEI’s perspective. The final part of the interview focused on the measurement of success, and what determines this. Figure 3.4 shows the model used for the second part of the interview.

Fig 3.4 – Second part of interview model



### 3.6.7 School Staff Interview

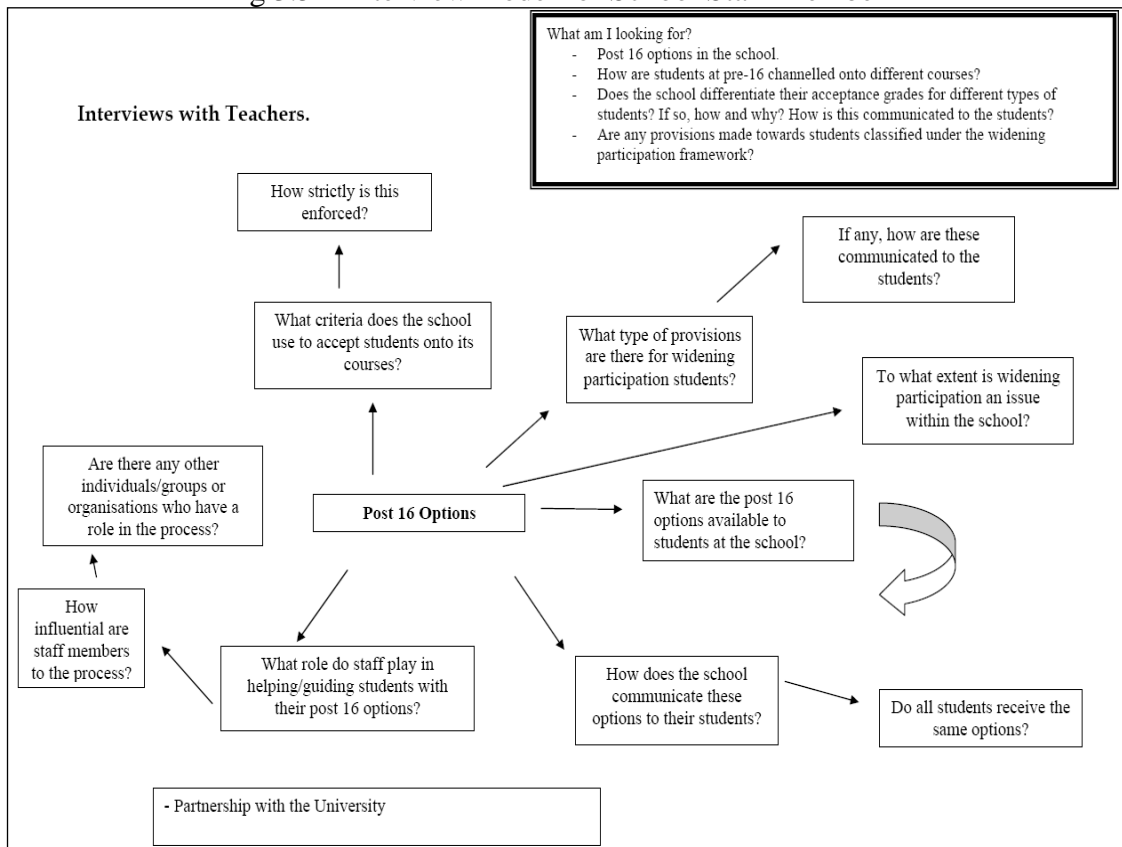
I felt it not only important to consider the views of staff within the HEI, but to also gather some information from the school, and its coordinator. There were several teachers holding influential posts within the school who could direct policy and its implementation within their institution. The head of the school is an obvious target, having an overall control of the school and its direction. However, for the purposes of

this study, I wanted to gain an insight from a member of staff with a more hands-on approach, i.e. someone who had a good knowledge of what their local HEI was doing and who was also in a position to influence what the school did. In addition, I wanted this particular staff member to have some knowledge of the students targeted and their needs. I held an initial meeting with a member of the senior management at the school and discussed my study and what I hoped to gather from an interview with one of their staff members. The member of the senior management team made several suggestions, and, after some consideration, I decided to interview the Assistant Head of Years 10 and 11 (the school had one member of staff carrying out both these positions). This member of staff was in a key position to (a) have a general overview of the school's policies, and (b) be close enough to the students to have an insight into their needs and views.

The initial part of the interview focused on the types of provisions available to students at the school at a post-16 level. In particular, it aimed at establishing the types of policies instilled at the school with regards to post-16 provision, and how these policies were communicated to students. The role of staff members was also explored, in an attempt to see who may be in a position to communicate to students what their options are, and whether students may be channelled towards certain areas. The second part of the interview focused on the issues of widening participation, and, in particular, how the school viewed this issue including what provision they may have in place to cater for students labelled as coming from a widening participation background. It also sought to identify whether widening participation was an issue that the school considered both important and valuable enough to direct resources and time to. Fig 3.5 highlights the model used when interviewing the member of staff.

The final part of the interview focused on the partnership between the school and their local HEI. This particular section aimed to look in greater detail at the relationship between these institutions, and attempt to match what the school's expectations were to those of the University. It also attempted to question the common ground between the institutions, with respect to the widening participation agenda, and whether the school had a different agenda from that expressed by the HEI.

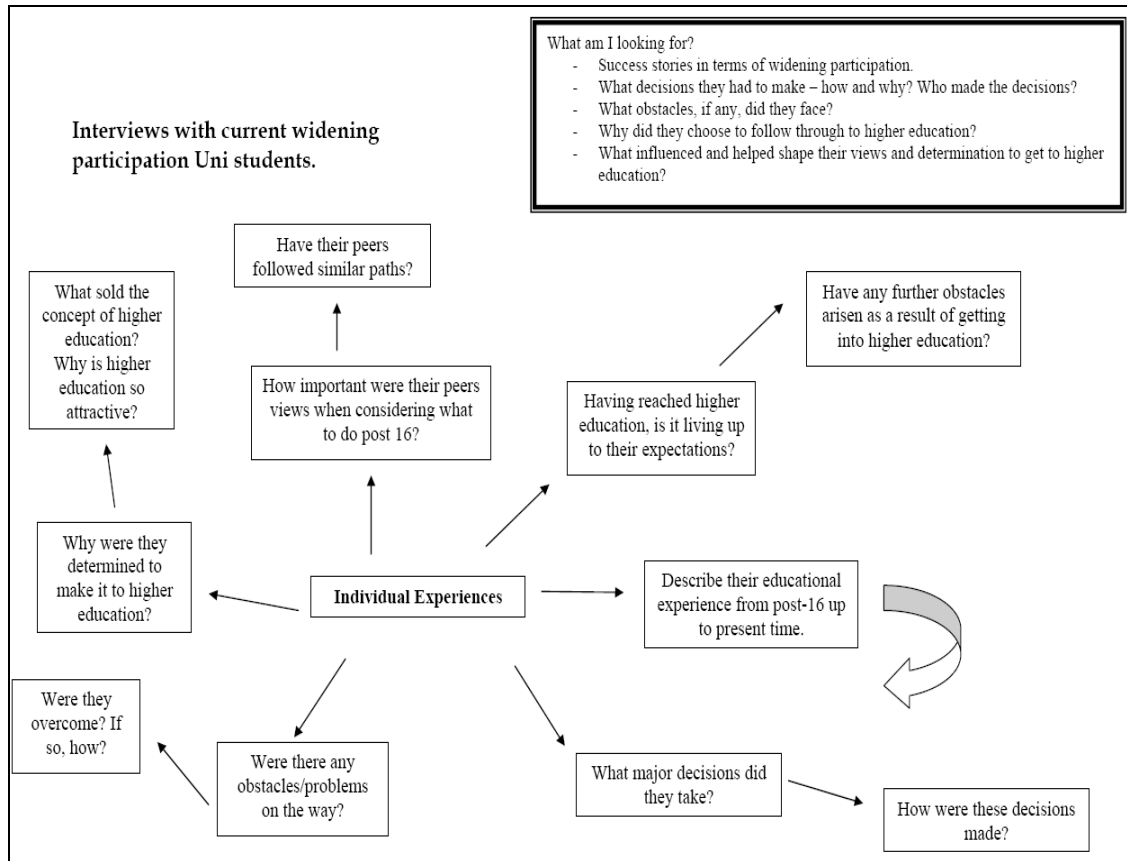
Fig 3.5 – Interview model for School Staff Member



### 3.6.8 Interviews with current widening participation University Students

My last set of interviews focused on the ‘success stories’ – students who were labelled as coming from a widening participation background, but who had got through their educational careers and arrived at an HEI. This was, after all, what government policies were promoting, and encouraging, and so I therefore thought it beneficial to consider the issues and generate a discussion with students who had gone through the process. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain their version of their life history, in particular the transition from school to college/sixth form and then to university. It aimed to focus on any particular obstacles encountered, how these were overcome, and what made their drive or ambition to reach higher education important. Figure 3.6 shows the model used for these interviews.

Fig 3.6 – Interview model for University WP students



A group of thirty students were contacted on my behalf by an officer within the University. They all received a letter outlining the study, and the reasons why they were asked to participate in the study. They were asked to contact me directly should they want to participate in the study. The reason for this was that they were all selected because of their particular backgrounds – i.e. data supplied about themselves to the University at their application stages indicated that they came from a widening participation background. This is very sensitive information which cannot be divulged to a researcher without the consent of the individuals concerned. Current data protection legislation does not permit such information to be shared to unauthorised people, and, in addition, I considered it to be unethical for me to be provided with such data without the participants’ consent. Therefore, only students who were happy to be a part of the study would get in touch with me, and I would never have data containing details for those who did not wish to be associated with or a part of the study.

Only two students volunteered to be a part of the study out of an initial thirty who were contacted. This represents a very low response rate. It is difficult to explain the reasons for the low response rate, given that I was unable to contact any of the students who had decided not to take part. The method of contact, although ethically correct, may have meant that they felt intimidated having been contacted by a senior member of the



University. It may also be due to a variety of other reasons, including the time of year, (end of year exams were very close), or for other unknown reasons.

Having conducted the two separate interviews, both of them were found to be inappropriate for this study. This is because both students, although labelled by the University as having a widening participation background, were in actual fact not from such backgrounds and had been judged to be so purely on the postcode that they gave at the application stage on their UCAS form. It was therefore interesting to note that the data used at the time by the University to identify students from a widening participation background was producing students who were nowhere near the targeted group. When questioned, the University officer openly admitted that the data they should have had was simply unobtainable, and at that time, they were unable to produce accurate statistics showing the percentage of students at the institution from a widening participation background. "The University has no method for defining or tracking a WP student." Serious questions arise from this as a result of this open admission. If the statistics are unavailable, how can higher education institutions be measured on the progress, or lack of, in the recruitment of students from low participation groups? How can HEIs claim to be meeting widening participation targets if there are no accurate instruments that are able to identify whether this is so? The system has since changed, and a new system which allegedly allows WP-labelled students to be tracked throughout schools, colleges and universities has been brought into place. However, serious questions must be asked regarding the lack of consistency with the data supplied to HEIs and the apparent lack of progression and tracking of students in the earlier years of widening participation activity.

### 3.6.9 Data Collection - procedures

As previously highlighted, the timeline activity contained within the participants' booklets was completed during the first formal meeting as a group. The first half of the meeting was used to clarify what the study was about and to allow the participants to ask any questions, and make them familiar with the process. Throughout the second half, participants were provided with their booklets and they were asked to complete the first activity. We worked through the sample timeline as a group, illustrating the type of information that was sought after in each section. Once we had examined what the fictitious character had written on his timeline, all the participants were then asked to complete theirs. By working together as a group, it enabled all the participants to

establish what the activity wanted from them, and how to complete it successfully. It also allowed the first interview to focus on a question-and-answer session whilst using the timeline activity to complement those questions, rather than having to use up time waiting for participants to complete the activity.

The first semi-structured one-to-one interviews were held shortly after the formal group session. All students were provided with a date and time at which to attend their respective interviews. This was coordinated by the researcher in conjunction with the school coordinator. Participants were reminded about their interview times through individual notes placed in their school registers on the morning of the interviews. The notes were distributed at the start of the day, and this served to remind participants of the room and times of their interview. All the interviews were taped both through a tape player and a mini-disc player. This was to ensure that no data was lost through possible human error by the researcher. Prior to every interview, participants were informed about the taping devices and asked whether they were happy to proceed. Initially, participants appeared to be slightly surprised about the taping devices, though in most cases they soon appeared to be comfortable with the devices and appeared to ignore their presence. There were a couple of instances where it became apparent that some of the participants showed signs of being very wary of what they said as they paused and looked at the devices, or indicated through sign/body language that they were unhappy to proceed with discussing the issue. As a researcher, it was important for me to acknowledge where the boundaries and rights for seeking information are whilst at the same time ensuring that the participants feel comfortable with the information that they divulge. Participants were therefore always informed that they did not have to discuss any issues which they felt uncomfortable talking about, or which they did not want to pursue whether it be because they did not want it on tape, or because they simply did not want to discuss it.

The interviews were always held in an empty classroom on the school premises. Both the school coordinator and the school secretary had a copy of the interview schedule, and knew at all times where the interviews were being held. In addition, all the classrooms used had at least one wall composed of glass windows, and a glass door enabling other members of staff and students to look in and observe the interview, and participants to look out. Lessons were always ongoing around the classrooms used. The classroom was set out so that the participant would be seated on one side of a desk in the middle of the room, and the researcher on the other. Both recording devices were placed on the desk to one side, but clearly visible to the participant.

It is important that participants felt comfortable and relaxed throughout the entire interview process. Important for two main reasons – firstly, if they feel safe and secure, they are more likely to return to subsequent interviews and cooperate fully with all the tasks, and secondly, if they feel comfortable, it means that they feel that they are in a trustworthy environment and are more likely to respond genuinely to questions. Therefore the type of environment created at interview is crucial to ensure that high-quality information is extracted from the participants. With this in mind, I chose to be as casual as possible when dealing with all the participants, whilst in keeping with both ethical and child protection policies, both prescribed by the University through the ethics committee and through the school adhering to their staff-student policies. In practice, this means that all letters sent out and all materials provided for the participants were addressed to them on first name terms, and accordingly they addressed me on first name terms. When conducting the interviews, I chose to wear smart casual clothes, i.e. jeans and a shirt, hopefully indicating that although we were in a relaxed atmosphere, I wanted them to take the whole process seriously.

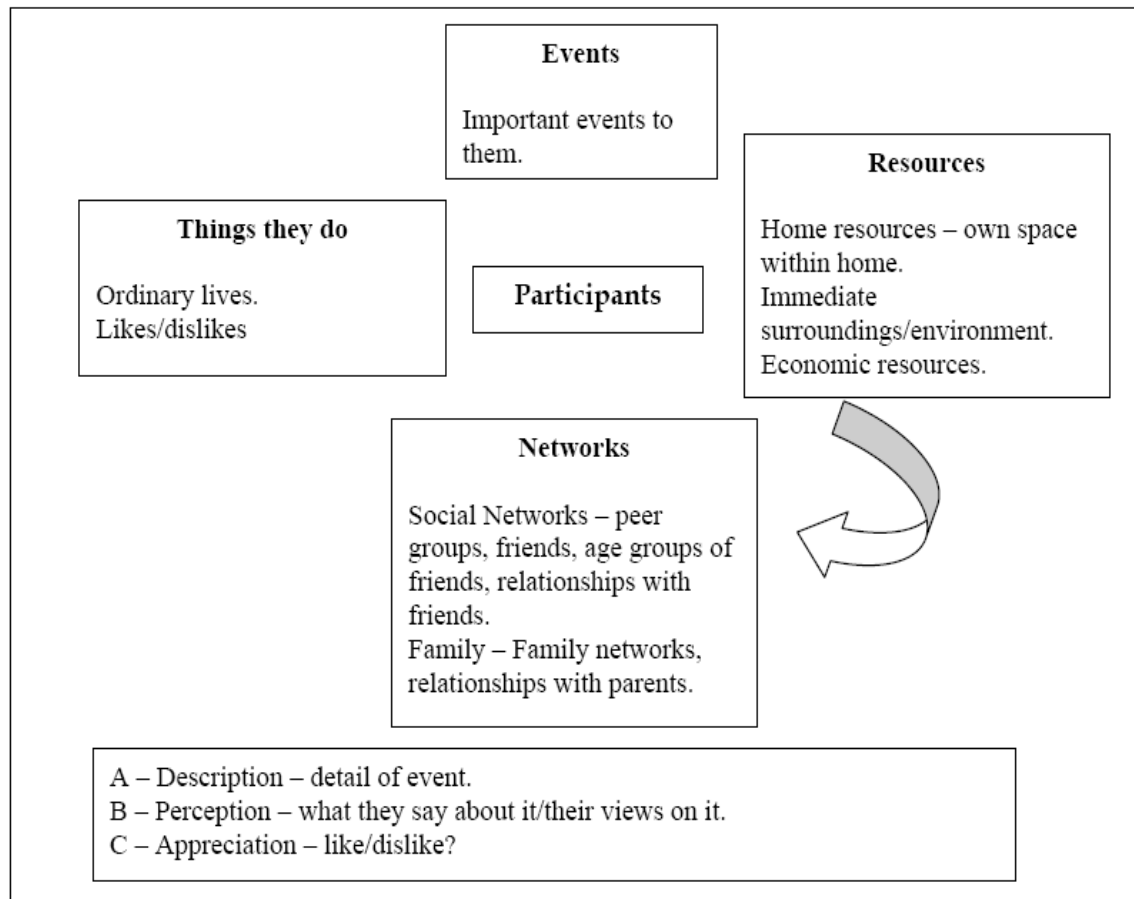
The first set of interviews were held over four consecutive days. The schedule was very much preset by the schools' general timetable, and so each interview was set to last no longer than one lesson. Each lesson was approximately fifty-five minutes long. Breaks were taken for mid-morning and lunch, ensuring that participants would only miss one lesson throughout the first stage, and I would not be intruding into their everyday school routine or social time with their peers.

The semi-structured interviews were constructed around the information that the participants provided on the timelines. This task was made easier given that I had possession of all their activity booklets since the initial meeting when they were all asked to complete the timeline activity. I designed a model which encompassed all the information provided whilst allowing flexibility for each individual participant profile. Fig 3.7 shows the model used.

The model shows the different areas to be covered during the first interview. It covers four main areas of discussion – access to resources, available networks, things they do and significant events to them. The first interview is arranged as a mini-introduction to each of their profiles, enabling each participant to provide further information about themselves, and how they lead their lives. It is for this reason that these four areas of interest are highlighted, each able to extract further information about the participants' lives, and each providing participants with the opportunities to further elaborate and clarify various aspects of their completed timelines. The essence of the timelines was to

allow the participants to start their introduction to their descriptions of how they lead their lives by using these as foundations in order to build on the information that they provide from the activity and allow the researcher to develop an all-round picture of who they are, as described by themselves. The intention was that a discussion could then be pursued through careful prompting and channelling of the data so that by the end of the first interview, the researcher could clearly identify each participant within the four main areas investigated.

Fig 3.7 – Interview Model for first interview



The second interview was scheduled to take place three months after the first. There are two main reasons for the intervals between interviews. Firstly, it is important to remember that participants' main concern during this academic year are their GCSE examinations, and therefore, it would be unreasonable to expect them to complete all three interviews in a very short period of time as it would mean that they would miss what could be crucial academic lessons all in a very short period of time. Secondly, by having these intervals, it allows for two things; for the researcher to (a) be able to reflect on the findings of the previous set of interviews and alter, if necessary, the proposed course of action for the next set, and (b) plan and organise the next batch of interviews.

Even though the school was cooperating one hundred percent, conducting interviews within school premises still requires you to find empty rooms, book them, ensure that students are not going to be away on field trips etc. on the proposed dates, and so forth. Therefore, appropriate time must be allocated to this process whilst also taking into account the half-term breaks and breaks between terms.

The second interview involved asking participants to do some preparatory work beforehand. Participants were given a disposable camera with which they were asked to take around twenty-five photos of things that meant something to them, represented the way that they lived their lives, etc. They were asked to take photos of different settings and environments so as to encompass as much of their normal everyday lives as possible. Participants were told that once we had finished working with their photos, they could keep copies of them. Perhaps because of the novelty value of being given a disposable camera which had been paid for, this activity got many of the participants very excited. They were very eager to receive the cameras and start taking photos of various aspects of their lives. The only flaw clearly identified by most of the participants once pursuing the task was not planning what they wanted to cover in their photograph selections. The subsequent chapter will examine this in greater detail.

The school were provided with some camera packs which contained a brief letter addressed to each participant with the instructions of what the task was about. It was a very brief synopsis asking participants to take pictures of things that represented something to them, or their lives. The letter contained no limitations or restrictions. However, all participants were reminded at the start of the project about the policies regarding illicit or illegal activity either being discussed or portrayed in any of the activities and the need for the researcher to have to report such activities should the situation arise. This was in keeping with both the school's policies and child protection legislation within this field. Having made this very clear at the start, I felt it unnecessary to have to keep reminding participants of this and so the letter did not come across with any restrictions. The letters did contain a specific deadline by which all cameras had to be returned to the school office for collection and development. Each participant was also provided with a sticky label with their names and details of the study so that the cameras could be labelled before they were returned. A few extra cameras were held by the researcher in the event of loss or damage. Two participants required replacement cameras – one of them went swimming with their camera whilst the other just lost it!

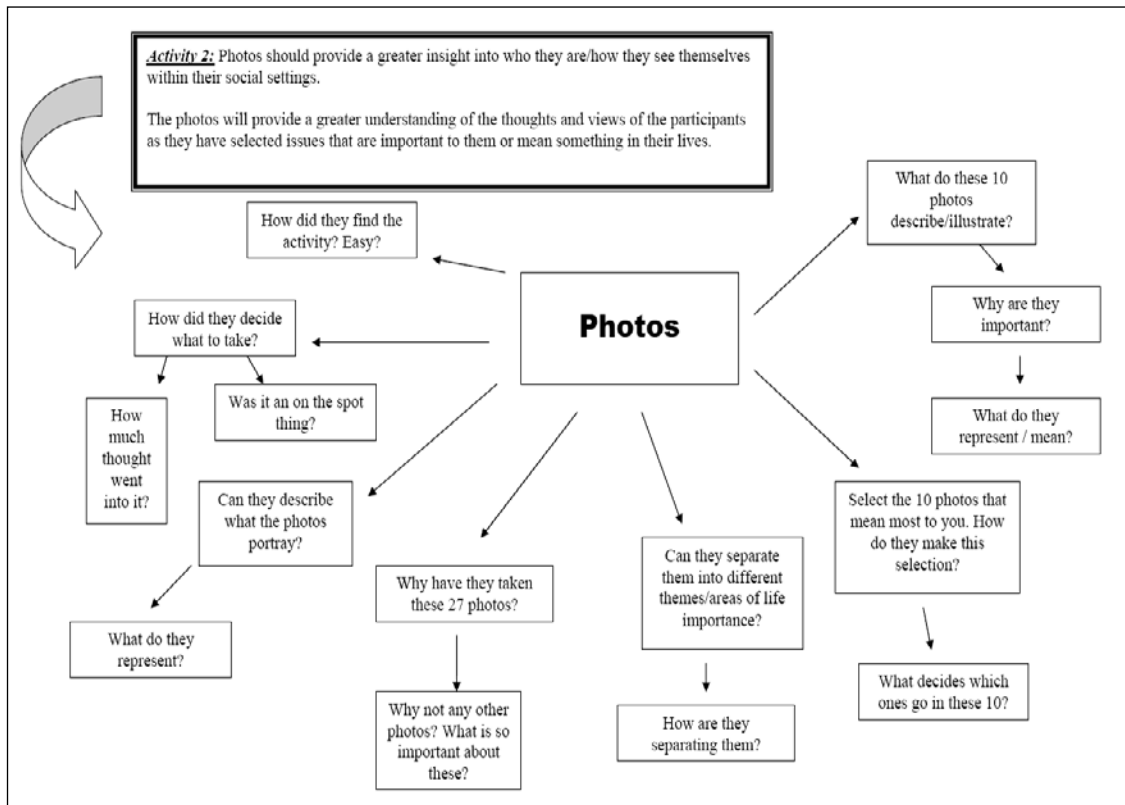
Once all the photographs were developed, interview dates and times were arranged. Following on from the procedure for the first set of interviews, students were reminded

about their interview slots through notes inserted in their register on the morning of their interviews. This set of interviews were organised as per the first set, using classrooms within the school, and scheduled around their lesson times. Therefore there were very clear time constraints that had to be adhered to and the interview structure had to be based around a fifty-five minute time slot. It is important to note that at this stage, I had not seen any of the photographs developed. There are two reasons why I chose to adopt this approach. Firstly, I had made it very clear that the photographs, although provided for and administered by the study, were the property of the individual participants, and they would not be viewed or opened by the researcher. At the end of the study, participants would be keeping these photographs and permission would be sought should I have wanted to reproduce any of them for whatever purpose. This is because I felt that the participants should feel that this was their property, and it would be inappropriate for me, as a researcher, to in effect invade their privacy or pass judgement on the photographs they had taken without them present to explain what each one represents. It can be argued that given that I had supplied them with the cameras, and developed the photographs myself, at no cost to the participant, that I had the right to view them prior to the interview. But in keeping with my overall approach of developing a mutually respectful relationship with my participants, I chose not to do this. Secondly, and perhaps more relevant for me as a researcher, viewing the photographs before the interviews would realistically not have helped me at all. I would be viewing hundreds of photographs out of context, and it was my belief that it would have been unnecessary.

I constructed a second interview model, centred around the photograph activity. This model aimed to develop a greater insight into how the participants lived their current everyday lives and sought to probe into the motives for taking each photograph. Each photograph in effect may represent a snapshot of their current lives, and may provide insights into their social settings, peer groups or important aspects of their lives as seen from the participants' point of view. Fig 3.8 illustrates the model used.

The model shows the different areas that I wanted to explore at this interview. Starting on the left and working around in an anti-clockwise motion, the initial stages of the interview sought to establish how they felt having done the activity. This is a reflective process asking the participant to indicate whether they were comfortable carrying out the task, whether they found it easy to do, etc. Initially, all the participants were very excited about getting a camera and taking photographs of their lives. The aim was to establish whether this enthusiasm continued as they went through the process.

Fig 3.8 – Interview Model for second interview



I was also interested in developing an understanding as to how they selected what to take, how much thought went into the activity, and their motives. Once this initial stage was over, we then went on to explore, in detail, what each of the twenty-seven photographs showed and what it meant to them. Why did they select these particular shots, and if they had a second opportunity to carry out this task again, would they have similar photographs in their portfolio. All these areas aimed at getting the participants to justify their selection of photographs and attempted to get them to develop some meanings behind their selections. The next stage of the interview sought to get the participants to consider whether they would be able to separate their photos into themes and areas of their lives. The selection of themes was left entirely up to them, and few hints or guidance was provided. Once again, it was up to the participant to choose how these areas would be constructed, and, once they had done it, we would be able to examine the thought processes behind their groupings. The final section of this interview asked the participants to select ten photographs that meant the most to them. Once that selection was made, participants were asked to justify their selection, in an attempt to develop a meaning of what is important to them, and why.

The third and final interview process was scheduled to take place three months after the second phase. The main factor when deciding when to hold these interviews was

that all the participants would be engaged in their GCSE examinations during the months of May and early June, and I therefore did not consider it appropriate to interrupt my participants' focus on their exams for the sake of an interview which could be held a few weeks later once they had completed their exams. In addition, schools become very inaccessible during exam periods, as space and staff are focused around exam schedules. My study was relying on the goodwill of both participants and the school, and I was not prepared to put that in jeopardy by making unreasonable demands. Having this interval also allowed me to reflect on the two interview phases conducted, and identify, if necessary, gaps in my knowledge that I could fill during my last interview cycle with the participants. Logistically, this provided me with a few problems which needed to be overcome. Firstly, the previous two cycles had been held during school hours, and during normal term time, when all my participants were still obliged to attend school. However, once students commence their GCSE examinations, they are in effect 'released' from school meaning that they no longer have to attend school other than to sit their exams. Contact, by the participants, with teachers and the school as an institution was therefore limited only to the few times when they had scheduled exams. My previous links with the participants were severely cut, as I could no longer place notices and reminders in their registers (they no longer attended school on a formal basis), and the school coordinator now very rarely saw the participants in order to provide them with a reminder. Secondly, participants would now have to give up some of their private time in order to attend the interview, and put aside any other commitments that they may have had.

Two steps were taken in order to overcome these issues. Firstly, participants were told that they would not be able to collect their photographs until the third interview cycle. This in effect meant that if participants wanted to have their photographs, they would need to complete the three cycles of the study. Secondly, participants were asked to voluntarily provide their contact details, i.e. home addresses and contact telephone numbers during the second interview stages so that letters could be sent to their home address informing them of the dates and times of their final interviews. In addition, participants were also told that they would be provided with transcripts from the three interview stages, and therefore a home address would be required. All participants were more than happy to provide these details, and therefore this issue was overcome.

The third interview aimed at focusing on the participants' future aspirations. In order to do this, I constructed an activity, using a task commonly used in this field. It entailed



asking the participants to highlight various aspects of their lives at different stages. Fig 3.9 illustrates the activity.

The activity centred around participants predicting what their lives would be like at three different stages of their lives. The first juncture was when they would be seventeen. This was selected as it would be only a year away from their current age. At this point, their decisions would have enabled them to either continue within the educational system, enter the job market, or do something else. Although it was not too far away from where they currently stood, it is an important stage in their lives

Fig 3.9 – Activity for third interview

The image shows a worksheet titled "Activity 3 - My Future" from the University of Exeter. The worksheet is designed for participants to predict their lives at three different stages: age 17, age 20, and age 40. The layout includes the university logo, the title "Activity 3 - My Future", and a brief instruction: "This activity will be carried out during our third interview." Below this, there is a table with three columns, each representing a different age stage. The columns are labeled "When I am 17...", "When I am 20...", and "When I am 40...". The table is currently empty, intended for participants to write their predictions.

When I am 17...	When I am 20...	When I am 40...

whereby future actions could be determined through their choices. The second juncture was at the age of twenty. Once again, in educational terms, this is an important stage of their lives, as at this point they could have either withdrawn completely from the system, or proceeded through into higher education. Again, this is quite close to their current age, so it could provide some useful insights into their short-term plans. The third and final juncture is when they are forty. By then, participants would be half way through their life expectancy, and have undergone two-thirds of their working lives. At this stage, it is anticipated that participants would have some sort of view as to what their lifestyles would be, where they would be based, etc. At each of these stages, participants were asked to describe the following;

- what they are doing
- where they are living, who with, etc.
- financial aspects to their lives – are they receiving any income and if so, how much and where from
- what kind of environment they in, marital status, etc.

These would be the initial points from which further discussion could be derived and explored. In addition, any further points that may have arisen from the previous two cycles and which needed clarification could be dealt with.

The three cycles aimed to deal with the past (cycle one), the present (cycle two) and the future (cycle three). It is of paramount importance to note that the data collected at each cycle would be data provided by the participants, and therefore it would be reflections as they portray them. In other words, they are the projections of their lives as they would like them to be seen, given that it is them providing the information. There may be a difference between their actual lived past, and the one they describe, and this will be discussed later on in this chapter.

I originally started the project with fifteen participants – five in each of the sub-groups. Throughout the first stage of the interview process, one student dropped out. She declined to attend the interview scheduled at the school and expressed a desire not to continue. This participant was from the non-widening participation group. Although not ideal, by the time we discovered the reasons for her non-attendance, it was too late to attempt to recruit an extra person onto the project so I decided to run with one less in this group. At the photographs stage (second stage of the interview process), one person from the widening participation non-interventionist group failed to return their camera and hence provide photos for this interview. Great efforts were made by both myself and the school coordinator to track down this student and get him involved. He was provided with a new deadline, but unfortunately failed to meet it. A decision was then taken that he would be excluded from the project as his actions demonstrated a lack of commitment towards it. This was slightly surprising as there had been no indication from him of a desire to withdraw up to this stage. However, I felt that there was little value in attempting to keep someone on-board who clearly was not willing to fulfil the requirements. It was in the third part of the interview cycle, when students were no longer formally at school and their ties with the institution were no longer in existence, that I suffered a major setback. Four of the participants (one from the non-WP group, one from the WP non-interventionist group and two from the interventionist group) failed to attend their interviews. Although not unexpected – students had now

completed their GCSE examinations and were making a specific effort to come in to school purely to attend my interview – it meant that their case studies would remain incomplete. Fortunately, by chance, it left each group balanced out and so each group was now narrowed down to three participants.

Having reviewed the data collected at each stage, I decided that I would eliminate participants who had not completed all three stages of the interview cycle. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. The third part of the interview was designed to provide an insight into their future aspirations, looking towards the future and where they saw their lives in five, ten and fifteen years' time. It also provided a useful opportunity to reflect on the first two interviews and tie up all their views and opinions in order to be able to write a clear case study of each individual.
2. It was for this reason that I considered that it was perhaps the most valuable part of the cycle given that I was able to compare and contrast how they had changed their views and opinions over the course of a year. Not having this data left a very incomplete picture of who they were and what they were about.
3. Although it was frustrating to have collected meaningful data which remained incomplete, I considered it of little value to incorporate these individuals as there was little to say about their aspirations particularly when attempting to reflect on the impact of the interventionist programmes.
4. Although not through design, it would make it easier to handle the data if I had equal numbers of participants in each group and therefore having a final sample size of nine in which the groups were balanced was actually beneficial towards the project, particularly when analysing the data and drawing comparisons amongst each group.

In addition to the main participants, several individuals were also interviewed by means of collecting further background information about views held by HEIs and the school on widening participation. These interviews aimed at understanding the viewpoints of these parties in relation to the issues being tackled and the methods employed by each of them with respect to dealing with the government's drive and policies for education. Even though government policies have been reviewed during earlier chapters, it is important to consider how these policies are actually put into practice by those responsible, and how it is perceived by them in an operational perspective.

I also attempted to collect further data from students labelled as having come from a widening participation background and who were currently enrolled at the institution. Information about data collection with these three groups is contained later in this chapter.

#### 3.6.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis took various shapes and forms throughout the study. Most of it was concentrated once all three stages of the data collection process were complete. However, there was some analysis conducted after the first two interview stages, in order to identify any areas of weakness, or areas which needed further clarification or focus. All the interviews were fully transcribed, and imported onto a computer, all following similar styles and presentation. After the first set of interviews, I developed short bullet point profiles of each participant. This helped me identify areas in which I was confident that I understood each person, and highlight areas which I was unsure about and needed further clarification. Each interview cycle did have its own focus although I had enough flexibility within the structure to incorporate additional questioning that may have covered areas where I thought information may have been lacking. Therefore, during the second cycle, although it primarily focused on the photographs activity, I also had opportunities to fill in the gaps highlighted when developing the individual profiles from the first interview. Similarly, during the third cycle of interviews, I was able to reflect on the character profiles and try to complete any gaps that were evidently missing. Each character profile aimed to cover similar themes and topics although it is important to acknowledge that they are all different in nature given that each participant will have a different story to tell.

The main bulk of the data analysis was conducted through the NUDIST Vivo (NVIVO) qualitative software package which allows for a comprehensive data analysis approach. Each participant was placed into a project with all three interviews forming part of the individual project. The initial analysis took the form of placing every significant section of the interview transcripts into particular themes or topics. These themes were created as I went through the interview transcripts and were not prescribed prior to the analysis. Each project (individual) developed new themes and topics dependent on what the transcripts highlighted. The key questions when examining the transcripts is, what exactly is it that I am looking for? When looking at the transcripts, what makes me highlight particular areas and how are these groups being formulated?

The study is primarily developing an understanding of the individual as a separate entity and the relationships that they develop and create. It is looking at what these individuals consider to be important to them, and in particular what they highlight as issues and events that may have shaped the way they see their lives, or the way they choose to live them. It is therefore worth noting that when examining the transcripts, I will be looking for key aspects of the interviews that will describe or portray the individual and the way that they live their life. However, it will be my interpretation of the content of the interview that ultimately will determine where each section of the interview is placed within the themes and concepts.

### 3.7 Ethical Issues

A research process should become a transparent process where non-participants can follow the researcher's actions and identify reasons for the different courses taken. All participants should be made aware from the start what the project is seeking to establish/find and they should all be allowed at least the right to confidentiality if not total anonymity. As a researcher, we need to realise the consequences of what we are doing, 'There are duties of respect to those who are being researched, often people in positions of vulnerability' (Pring, 2000). I believe this also represents the open autocratic research approach advocated by Scott and Usher. Morals and values play an important role in the development of a research study. Carr, (1992, p.244) describes values as 'choices or preferences which are rooted in rational principles and considerations of a kind that have distinct ethical implications'. Researchers' values have the potential to steer projects in different ways. However, most importantly are the principles behind such values. Does the researcher believe that they have the right of obtaining access to data, and for the circulation of such data without looking at and understanding what the consequences of such actions will be on the participants? Research seeks to get at the truth, when at times the truth might hurt. Moral complications arise as a result of seeking information and knowledge. Firstly, as a researcher we must never forget about the consequences of what we are doing; as a researcher, we need to balance the right to know against the possible harm that might follow from the research. Secondly, we need to be aware of the possible clash between the right to know and the commitment to confidentiality of the source. Even though it is the interviewee who makes the revelations, it is always the researcher who ultimately decides what is made public. Thirdly as researchers, we must always carry 'health

warnings' on our publications – an explanation of the limits and tentativeness of the research findings and indeed if applicable highlight the possible errors.

When considering the ethical issues and dimensions to this study, I inevitably balance two important aspects of educational research – the right to know versus the right to protect the participants. Although I am seeking very rich data from the participants, I acknowledge that the dignity of and respect for the participants must always prevail. Pring (2000) describes two different virtues that guide researchers – moral and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues are dispositions like courage, kindness, generosity of spirit, honesty and concern for justice, whilst intellectual virtues describe the belief that the researcher is out to find the truth, whilst being open to criticism and not wanting to cook the books. I strongly believe that both these virtues are vital towards the development of a fair and beneficial study – fair to all the participants, whilst beneficial to all the stakeholders. In practical terms, this means the following:

1. Participants will be asked for consent before they take part in the study. They will be informed of the purpose of the study and will have the opportunity to request any further information.
2. Parents/guardians will be informed of the purpose of the study and will be provided with contact details in case they do not wish to allow their sons/daughters to take part.

Christians (2003) in his code of ethics for social research describes the need for informed consent by all participants within the study. In particular, the right to be informed about the nature and consequence of any activities must be provided so that the participants may make an informed judgement of whether they wish to continue in the study. Christians states that 'subjects must agree voluntarily to participate – that is without physical or psychological coercion'. For this reason, I will contact the participants directly to avoid figures in positions of power over them, e.g. teachers, putting undue pressure on them to take part in my study.

3. Participants will be allowed to withdraw from the study at any given point.
4. Participants will be guaranteed confidentiality when analysing and presenting their data.

All participants must be assured that their data and references will be concealed in order to ensure that no comments may be attributed back to a single individual. All photographs will be 'owned' by the participants and I will seek permission if I wish to

use any photographs for illustrative purposes. I will not make and/or keep any copies of their materials without their consent.

5. *All information will be checked for accuracy before it is analysed.*

Transcripts will be checked so as to ensure that they contain no fabrications or omissions as these would be unethical and non-scientific (Christians, 2003). It is crucial in such a study to ensure that the data used for analysis is as close to 100% accuracy as possible. All participants will be provided with copies of their transcripts and asked to notify the researcher of any omissions or errors.

6. *Current widening participation students at university will be contacted by a third party and asked whether they would like to participate in this study.*

*The current WP undergraduates are being invited to the study because they come from a very specific background. Some of these students may not want to disclose such a status to a researcher, and therefore may object to receiving direct contact. By introducing a third party, who already has access to this information, I believe that it is dealing with the matter in a sensitive and responsible manner whilst at the same time providing me with access to those who are happy to be identified as widening participation students.*

7. I will adhere to the guidelines provided by the Graduate School of Education and put forward a proposal for consideration by the ethics committee.

## CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS

### Characterising participants' experiences

#### 4.0 Introduction

As set out in the preceding chapter, the final research questions and theoretical framework employed meant interviews were the method chosen to capture the experiences and meanings of school and university personnel and those of the young people themselves who had been identified by school practitioners as fitting the three sampling categories of traditional, widening participation and non intervention, and widening participation and intervention. Data relevant to answering research question 1 were collected from school and university personnel as they reflected on how they go about the process of using criteria to identify and recruit young people for widening participation intervention. Data relevant to answering research question 2 were collected from the young people themselves.

The grounded theory analysis used in this chapter does not strive to name a core category that encapsulates and relates the main categories revealed by analysis. In this sense my approach differs from stricter grounded theory analysis (e.g. Glaser, 1992). Instead of this arbitrary type of selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the final steps of analysis were focused upon understanding the main categories of analysis and investigating the extent to which they held across participants. Final analysis also more directly compared all participants, regardless of the sampling group to which they belonged. This led to particular participants being identified as apposite examples of individual categories. Rather than try to force categories under a superordinate core category, I sought an organisation of key categories under several themes which could then be logically presented. This is in keeping with similar research in the field (e.g. Ball et al., 2000) and allows for an engaging narrative to be written that incorporates all of the key findings.

Atkins' (2009) also presented data in a narrative form. Narrative analysis is often descriptive as it presents participants' stories (Kane, 2004). However, narratives have been used in interpretative post-16 transition research (e.g. Ball et al., 2000; Lawy, 2002; MacDonald & Marsh, 2001). In these studies narratives aid in illuminating the interpretations made, providing evidence, often in young people's verbatim words, for the theoretical analysis given. Atkins' (op cit) use of narrative was to provide the story



of the experience of young people upon particular courses in particular colleges. On the other hand, Ball et al.'s (2000) use of narratives of particular participants allowed for an appreciation of participant's backgrounds and the part this plays in shaping young people's experiences. Unlike Atkins, the narratives provided by Ball et al. also effectively demonstrate the similarities and differences amongst young people. It is in a similar vein that in this chapter I use narratives from participants to highlight the constant comparative analysis, used to show similarities and differences in young people's views and experiences.

The analysis and narratives presented in this chapter are presented under five themes: non-participation as an individual or structural problem; learner identity and its origins and effects on participation; imagined futures; constrained and informed choices; life after year 11. To arrive at these, I drew upon thematic analysis, particularly in the style of presentation of the findings. Thematic analysis is a broad analytical technique referring to the move from open coding of qualitative data to a small number of themes that highlight the main findings of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the coding and analysis I employed drew upon grounded theory and other analytical frameworks, rather than thematic analysis techniques (Attride-Stirling, 2001) as such, presenting the key findings under five themes as per thematic analysis, allows for the key analytic categories to be included in the discussion of the analysis. Verbatim extracts from interviews are included in the analysis to exemplify the themes and explore the variation across participants within the theme, that is, constant comparison. Rather than rigidly attempt to reach an authentic grounded theory which would have one core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the more flexible presentation of the findings under themes allows for a range of interpretations and theoretical understandings to be discussed in the chapter.

#### 4.0.1 Section 1: Non-participation: An individual or structural problem?

Widening participation is generally taken to mean extending and enhancing access to and experience of higher education for people from under-represented groups (e.g. Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). The purpose of this first section of the analysis is to begin the process of teasing out and problematising the assumptions behind widening participation in higher education interventions by examining how the target audience for the widening participation intervention in this study was identified.

A major theoretical issue underpinning the selection process is the extent to which widening participation is seen as a structural rather than an individual issue. From an analysis of recent government reports it would seem that successive UK governments are confused about this. On the one hand they use criteria for identifying eligible students that are code for the working class poor, and on the other hand they treat widening participation as an individual problem of low aspirations and low motivation (see, for example, Mentor, 2008 for a more detailed critique of this position).

This is evident in the most recent list of possible causes of non-participation given by the Dearing Report (1997): individuals' aspirations and attitudes, peer pressure/influence, family backgrounds, quality of schooling and financial circumstances. However this more recent list suggests that there has been a shift of emphasis away from factors within the individual student towards structural factors that are external to the individual. The emphasis of earlier reports tended to be more on raising the aspirations of individual students who come from backgrounds where studying at university is not part of the family or community tradition (HEFCE, 2001a). It was the earlier reports with their emphasis on a problem which lay within the individual student (see Chapter 1) that were influencing policy when the widening participation intervention in this study took place.

#### 4.0.2 Identifying the WP student

There are in fact no set criteria for defining who is eligible (see Gorard, 2008 for a detailed analysis of this issue). The issue of identifying who the under-represented groups in higher education are is complicated by the fact that admission to higher education institutions is dependent on prior qualification. As Gorard (2008) put it:

The best available datasets appear to suggest that there is no simple and consistent pattern of under-representation among socially disadvantaged groups in attendance on HE courses, once prior qualifications for entry are taken into account (p 436).

As the issue of widening participation has been problematised (at least up until the recent past) as predominantly one of motivation alone residing in the individual learner, the issue of identifying target individuals becomes paramount. But this brings with it potential dangers. As Gorard (2006) pointed out, the process of selecting who actually

enters higher education is about selecting out those who have a track record of being good learners within the formal education system and rejecting those deemed less good or poor learners. Put differently, who is represented in higher education and who is not represented is about selecting out those who are already socially included within the education system from those who are not.

Given this situation coupled with the highly complex admissions process in higher education establishments, there is a real danger that the actual process of deciding who is eligible for intervention itself could reinforce rather than alleviate problems of motivation. This is particularly likely to be the case if there is an 'us' and 'them' mentality underpinning the eligibility identification process. It is precisely this issue that the current section seeks to examine empirically using data collected from my informants in the school and university and my young participants. To achieve this I ask the following questions of my data: Who was selected? How were they selected? Why were they selected? And, by implication, I consider why those not selected were deemed ineligible even although the intervention may have been beneficial to them.

I begin by considering what the university was hoping to achieve from its widening participation outreach work that included the intervention in this study. This is how the Widening Participation Officer at the Higher Education Institution interviewed put it:

We [the university] are not doing much to change the balance of students who are recruited from poorer socio-economic groups ... we have to address two areas as a matter of urgency ... we need to try to target students who come from the state sector [the university had a track record of disproportionately recruiting from the independent sector] and poorer backgrounds. [The purpose of outreach work was to get at students] from pockets of disadvantage in the inner city; from working class backgrounds; young people from poorer backgrounds; from 'ghetto' schools, to get them to apply to university.

A major problem she faced was that the hinterland of the university was more rural:

Some of the schools we work with will have a huge range of backgrounds; there are fewer 'ghetto' schools, as such, you know, if you're in a rural school, there'll be children who are from families who are reasonably well-off, some very well-off, and there'll be some from the poorest, poorest backgrounds - you know, rural poverty is a significant factor.

She describes with more than a hint of irony how many in the university view the widening participation target group:

They're WP oiks who walk round with shell suits with hoodies on, and probably have graffiti cans in their bags - cans of spray paint - rather than books, and I think the girls are probably going to get pregnant at sixteen so they can get a council house. That's probably an image that some people have about the young people they're working with, and anyone who has worked on a HEFCE summer school probably know that's true! No, it's not!

Her own view of who was eligible was somewhat vaguer but became clearer when she drew on externally set criteria which varied according to who was funding a given outreach project:

Well, it can vary, depending on which particular project you're working on [and who is funding it]. ..... If the project funder for that is as it is the European Social Fund, we are very, very strictly limited in who we can work with, and we have to be absolutely 100% confident that the people who are benefiting - the beneficiaries - satisfy a criteria that's determined by some external body, i.e. Europe ....there has to be evidence that they have little or no - preferably no - family experience of higher education, and if they have got family experience of higher education, then there have to be other factors that indicate they are likely to be under-aspiring, for example, the parents are not encouraging them, or they have significant peer group pressure, or there are some other mitigating family circumstances, etc etc.

#### 4.0.3 'Othering'

A useful framework to explore the extent to which the widening participation target group was positioned as 'other' by those charged with the responsibility of identifying them and intervening in their education trajectory is othering theory. Weis (1995, p17) saw othering as a process that 'serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself'. The process of othering used in this way is the means by which we define and secure our own identity by distancing and stigmatizing an(other). The main purpose is to see ourselves as 'normal' and to set up those perceived as different from us as a point of deviance from the norm. Those who are othered experience a sense of marginalization, social exclusion, and disempowerment. In effect the process of othering creates a separation between 'people like us' and 'people like them' with an 'in group' that feels empowered to make decisions that have far-reaching consequences for those outside the boundaries of the 'in group' (Aleinikoff, 1995; Peck, 1995).

Othering theory is cross-disciplinary but has been used largely in the cultural and geographical sense to examine social understandings of belonging amongst displaced people such as migrant workers and asylum seekers (Aleinikoff, 1995; Peck, 1995).

Peck for example noted that foreigners and refugees in Germany were ‘constantly reminded in everyday life that they are not Germans and that they do not belong’. He concluded that the decision (of belonging) resides with the nationals and not with the refugees who may do whatever they can to assimilate but ultimately ‘can do nothing to become German’ (p 122).

The ‘other’ of interest to my analysis here are the under-represented groups in higher education. The individuals that make up these groups are frequently referred to in the widening participation literature as non-traditional students, (Fryer, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; NCIHE, 1997) with traditional students representing the typical higher education student. It is apparent from my thesis that dualisms such as traditional/non traditional, representative/under-representative have become ways of talking and writing about widening participation. As Mentor (2008) argued this can quickly become code for placing oneself in relation to others who are not like oneself. This positioning of ‘us’ in relation to ‘them’ in the context of widening participation can quickly evolve into talking about ‘our education’ and ‘their education’. And this can too easily become problematic since dualisms tend to consider other or difference from self as opposite to oneself rather than part of a diverse tapestry. In this way those who belong to the establishment (in this case the education system) define who they are not only by the groups they are in but also by who is excluded. As Littlewood and Lipsedge, (1997, p 27) put it;

We forget that the outsiders are part of our definition of ourselves. To confirm our own identity we push the outsiders even further away. By reducing their humanity we emphasise our own.

Mentor (2008) was critical of Macrae et al’s (1998) diagram on how to identify who is eligible for widening participation intervention. This diagram was made up of co-centric circles with the well-educated in the centre, gradually working outwards towards groups of people who are less and less educated. Mentor’s argument is that this tells us more about ourselves as academics than about who should be targeted for intervention. As he put it:

The concentric circles diagram is one which appeals to those who are at the centre – those who tend to be well-educated, white, middle-class people, and this gives it a narcissistic element. As we work outwards through the circles we pass through groups of people who are less and less like ‘us’ until we reach the outsiders who are the most different. (p248)

Mentor argued that if we accept this model as a guide to identifying who is eligible then we unquestionably accept the current dominant understanding of what counts as learning. Behind this is a view that offering strategies to change the status quo are about bolting on specific bits rather than seeking to change the system that caused the problem to arise in the first place. This is an argument that will be returned to in later sections of this chapter with respect to critiquing the packing of the problem of non participation into neat strategies that can be disseminated to universities and schools.

#### 4.0.4 Our education and theirs

Below I consider how othering of the widening participation target group manifested itself in various guises and at different points in the selection and intervention process. Later on I will consider how this might have influenced the way those targeted were perceived and how they perceived themselves and ultimately how this may have had consequences for their educational and career plans beyond the compulsory phase of education.

First let us consider whether the Widening Participation Officer considered the widening participation target group ‘other’?

...I happen to come from a very working-class background, so my own personal experience has influenced me, and I know lots of people who are from a working-class background. I grew up on a council estate; however, what was interesting from my experience was that we were a working-class family with middle-class bits, if you like, in that my dad’s mum was a teacher, and although my dad did kind of very low-grade, clerical-ish type work, his mum had got aspirations and wanted what she perceived to be the best for her grandchildren, which, basically she wanted them to go into teaching or nursing. Interestingly again there was a gender bias there, because she supported my two brothers by paying for them to go to independent school, but she didn’t support either myself or my two sisters to go to independent school, so she thought they needed the education - we would probably get by and be nurses. But I think that was one of the reasons why in the group of children I went to school with, I actually ... my family were more likely to go to university first time round, because we had a bit of middle-class influence in our family, although we lived in a very working-class environment.

In this interview extract the Widening Participation Officer drew parallels between her own personal background and upbringing, and the experiences that she felt would describe the WP target group. In this way she brought some sense of familiarity with their circumstances. The description of a working class family with a bit of middle-class

influence could be construed as an attempt to make direct links between the targeted group and her own background as a justification of why she is working in this field and her understanding of the issues, thus breaking down any us-and-them barriers that may exist between the ‘them’ and university. But she is also clear to differentiate her position in relation to their position when she points out that although her family of origin could be described as working class, they had very different aspirations to the WP target group’s families. This was especially in regard to considering higher education as a credible option. Her account of her own upbringing also recognises a difference between her perceptions of what are middle class and what are working class values and beliefs in terms of career aspirations and academic qualifications. This could be seen as ‘othering’ the values and beliefs held by the students’ and their families’ values when considered in relation to her own and her family’s values and beliefs.

As the Widening Participation Officer hinted at above, the first stage in the selection process was the eligibility of the school attended. The decision to select the school that participated in this study as a site for intervention was entirely the responsibility of the university that participated in the study. It was part of the university’s partnership arrangements with local state funded schools to whose progression rates from school to higher education was deemed low and was also deemed by national league tables to be underperforming. All schools that fitted these criteria were eligible and as such were invited to participate. If they agreed, as the current school did, then they were given funding by the university to cover the administrative costs of running the WP intervention programme. In return the school was charged with the following responsibilities:

- The selection of students who would benefit from the intervention
- Agree to release selected students from lessons to attend mentoring (intervention) sessions
- Agree to support the programme by making resources available within the school to ensure that the programme ran in an effective manner
- Agree to assist in the organization of visits to the university’s campus.

The guidelines that came from central government and were given by the university to assist the school in the selection process were as follows (HEFCE 2001a):

- 5- Participants should be within the first generation of their families proceeding on to FE/HE
- 6- Participants should be under-achieving despite their academic ability
- 7- Lack of parental support for academic progression
- 8- Participants should receive free school meals.

It should be noted that whilst the second of these criteria makes reference to selecting students whose aspiration level falls short of their ability level, this criterion stops short of making explicit the fact that targeted students need to demonstrate that they have the potential to proceed on to higher education if not the inclination. If they have the potential then it implies that they are either on or can easily be transferred on to a trajectory that would make university a viable option for them.

Eligibility required that students fulfilled only one of the above four criteria. It was entirely up to the school to ensure that participating students met this selection requirement. Data protection laws did not permit the university to check on whether this had happened. In other words, the university was entirely reliant on their partnership schools to select appropriate students for intervention.

From the school's perspective putting this criteria into practice meant selecting those students on the C/D borderline and who also presented themselves as difficult in the sense of not fitting in to the school regime. The school's intention was on the face of it to improve the behaviour of those pupils as well as raising their grades and aspirations. Here is how the Head of Year 11 put it:

Now looking at what we call 'widening participation' people, with no family history of higher education – these families come from lower socio-economic groups. [To select them] we did C/D borderline looking, which tend to be from poorer backgrounds. .... We don't label them as coming from these backgrounds and [that] sort of family history. They are not given a star on their name or anything like that, or an underlined name; they come to [our attention] through issues .... So you will find that there are uniform issues, or equipment issues, or ...there are some issues that we actually pick up on, so it comes through general knowledge of the year group, of understanding where they're from, so yes we can tell you who they are. We never tell them they are labelled [as] widening participation students. We find a nice reason [to tell them why they have been selected for the WP intervention], "You are chosen because you've got the potential and you are a C/D borderline, and we think you could progress and get higher [grades]." We never tell the kids, never.  
(Year 11 Head and WP Co-ordinator, June 2003)



Although hardly in keeping with the university's requirements and expectations, using exam grades as the key selection criterion might seem an obvious choice for a school that is under pressure from its funding bodies and the publication of league tables and OFSTED reports to raise its A-C grades at GCSE. Perhaps more deeply worrying is that the second selection criterion used by the school is the selection of pupils who do not fit in by conforming easily to the school regime. These are the students who have 'issues' which come to the attention of school staff on a regular basis. Such issues include losing school equipment and not wearing the school's uniform. These are the ones the Year 11 head wants to 'bombard with motivational stuff'.

The university member of staff interviewed, the Widening Participation Officer, was all too aware that partnership schools who participated in outreach activities were autonomous institutions with their own agendas, ideas and reasons for selecting students:

Interesting to see how many people who get involved in the work that we do, who have had parents who've gone to university; the teachers might be targeting that kid for different reasons. Interesting also that we have been involved in mentoring some students - you know, university undergraduates mentoring students who perhaps have not got university potential, but the schools have got their own agendas of why they want to give support to that student. So it's a difficult one, and we just do the best we can.

This member of the university staff recognised how imperfect the selection process was and that all she could hope for was, as she put it, "to be constantly trying to work towards a best case scenario". However Gorard et al (2008) argued that in order to have the greatest possible effect on young people engaging in school-based WP intervention programmes, there is a need for higher education institutions to oversee the targeting of participants in an explicit manner.

Later I examine my participant interview data to see if intended beneficiaries have been excluded and others included in their place, (Thomas and Slack, 2000; Woodrow et al, 1998) but first I turn my attention to considering aspects of the intervention programme itself.

#### 4.0.5 The WP Intervention programme

Eligible students were selected when they were in Year 9 (13/14 years old) with the intervention running on a weekly 1-hour session basis for three years until the students had completed Year 11 (15/16 years old). In this way the intervention was scheduled to run throughout the last three years of the compulsory phase of schooling. The sessions took place during school hours. Participating students were asked to leave their normal lessons to attend the mentoring sessions instead. The mentoring sessions were run on various days and at different times of the day each week in order to avoid students being withdrawn from the same lesson each week and thus significantly disrupting their education. Their attendance was monitored by the head of year. Generally speaking, students were all too happy to attend mentoring sessions as it meant a break from their normal routine.

The school had to provide the university with details of the academic attainments of all participating students at the end of each year. In Year 9 the SATS exam results were used for this purpose, in Year 10 the internal end of year exam results were used and in Year 11 the GCSE results were used. These exam data were intended to monitor student progress at key points during the mentoring period. This was the main tool used by the university to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention programme. In practice, the programme was never evaluated in any formal way that could reach some sort of an objective judgment about its impact. There were numerous reasons for this. Firstly, there was never a need for the university to measure the outcomes of its WP outreach activities. The government, through HEFCE, required only that HEIs produce annual reports on their input aimed at improving widening participation. This input included identifying the resources that were committed and the amount of funds that they gave to widening participation initiatives. No reporting was required in relation to the processes and outcomes, such as success rates, in terms of either progression or other impact factors. There was a realisation that it is very difficult to measure outcomes in the short term. For example, getting WP students to progress from school to college to university would take several years to measure. The difficulty with the defining of what success means in the WP context may be one of the reasons why questions were never asked about the impact of this intervention programme and other WP outreach activities.

Also the university, in common with other HEIs, was required (and wanted to be seen) to be doing something to make their intake more representative of the wider UK population. On a more cynical note this meant that if they were over-zealous in their evaluations of interventions such as this one, problems would be uncovered and

alternatives would need to be provided. Most other institutions were delivering similar programmes to this one which were supported by a centrally managed mentoring scheme funded by the government. In other words, HEIs preferred to keep to the strategies the government were promoting to widen participation. As the university saw it, as long as HEFCE was satisfied that an appropriate proportion of funds was spent on widening participation initiatives in relation to overall HEI income, then all parties were happy to continue with the work they had all conspired to agree was the right course of action. So although the university went through the motions of evaluating this intervention (in common with other outreach activities) by distributing questionnaires and evaluation sheets and collecting and retaining data, nothing was ever done with these data in terms of offering feedback or writing a report.

The Government's response to Lord Browne's Review of Higher Education (2010) indicate that this is now about to change. A written response to the Brown Report states that the Director for Fair Access has been instructed to follow a new set of guidelines that would place additional expectations on higher education providers. Firstly, institutions would be asked to submit annual Access Agreements (up from the current 5-yearly expectations), which would detail how higher education institutions would be making greater efforts to increase social mobility, extend fair access to higher education and the professions, and attract a higher proportion of students from under-represented groups, particularly those most able but least likely to apply, which it stated are priorities for the Coalition Government. The government stated that it was particularly interested to track the outcomes of outreach programmes and activities rather than the input. This represents a significant shift from what has gone before. This written statement also asks that institutions be measured on how they will attract students from under-represented groups to their more selective courses, and retain them.

The aim is, they argue, 'to make Britain a more open and meritocratic society, in which talent is not wasted'. In particular, it states that it seeks to:

- 'increase social mobility by enabling more people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education, and subsequently gain employment in the professions and other rewarding, well-paid occupations;
- make greater progress in extending fair access for applicants of the highest ability to the most selective higher education institutions; and
- continue to make progress in widening participation to higher education at large, attracting a higher proportion of students from under-represented groups.'

Guidance to the Director of Fair Access, February 2011, p2

Undergraduate students from the university were recruited as mentors to run these sessions. Recruitment of mentors involved sending out a general invitation to all undergraduate students to apply to join the university's student ambassador scheme. Successful applicants had to have a good knowledge of the UK educational system and be able to empathise with younger students (presumably also students who were from very different backgrounds to themselves). At interview applicants were questioned about their knowledge and understanding of different progression routes into higher education. The interview questioning was primarily designed to ascertain applicants' awareness of and empathy with individuals who (presumably unlike themselves) may not have considered higher education as the natural option. All the student mentors were paid an hourly rate and all their travel expenses were reimbursed.

Undergraduate students were chosen as mentors as they were perceived to be good role models in the sense that they were on the kind of trajectory to which their mentees should aspire. The more recently launched document (Aimhigher Associates Scheme, May 2009), builds on criteria previously used by national mentoring schemes (National Mentoring Pilot Project, 2002-2004; National Mentoring Scheme 2004-2007) maintaining that undergraduate mentors would have encountered similar obstacles and challenges en route to higher education as the young people they were mentoring would encounter. In its brief, the Scheme stated that it would:

... recruit undergraduates from a state school background and, as far as possible, from the same backgrounds as those identified as the Aimhigher target group, to be Aimhigher Associates.

(HEFCE, Aimhigher Associates Scheme 2009 p2)

Because of this they were perceived as being in a good position to encourage and engender enthusiasm in bright but under-aspiring young people. Although student mentors were meant to have shared similar experiences and thus be able to show empathy towards the school students, in practice, in particular in the case of the university in this study, most undergraduates came from very privileged backgrounds. So instead of expecting to recruit those from similar backgrounds and who faced similar challenges, the mentors in this study were expected to demonstrate that they were able to empathise with the students they were working with. This ability was primarily judged during the selection and interview process. It was therefore highly likely that the

relationship between mentor and mentee in the context of this study could be construed as 'other'. For the undergraduate student mentors, predominantly from privileged backgrounds (and some highly privileged backgrounds), going into schools and talking to students predominantly from other backgrounds were hardly in the best position to talk about obstacles and challenges encountered en route to university. It is unlikely that many of them had had first-hand experience of issues such as debt or lack of commitment over progression to further and higher education. It is also unlikely that training could very easily be used to replace a lifelong experience of disadvantage.

Prior to taking up their role as a mentor, successful applicants were trained by the National Mentoring Pilot Project Scheme (National programme run between 2001-2004 by a consortium of universities led by Cardiff University). Their primary role once trained was to encourage their mentees to see higher education as something to which they could aspire. The scheme also sought to address social issues and broaden students' minds beyond their immediate environment. Amongst other things, this involved using newspaper extracts from the broadsheets as a way in to discussion of issues in the national news. Other sessions involving role play were designed to encourage students to consider different employment options by, for example, getting them to take part in a simulated job-searching exercise, drawing up their CV, and taking part in a mock interview session. Other sessions were designed to help students perform better in their exam work by teaching them revision techniques and exam writing strategies. Towards the end of the programme (Year 11) the students were invited to participate in a week-long residential on the university campus. This residential was seen as the culmination of the programme and was attended by mentors, mentees and representatives from the school and university.

#### 4.0.6 The students the school deemed eligible

Zane, Luke and Ryan were three students identified as eligible for WP intervention and who also participated in this study.

#### **Luke**

Luke is an only child who lives with his mother and has always lived in the same town. He has a lot of relatives living on the same street, in particular his maternal grandparents to whom he is very close. His father has lived in Birmingham for all of

Luke's life. His mother does not work. Neither of his parents has attended university as both left school at 16. Luke dislikes school, does not get on with his teachers, and is longing to finish. Although he showed very little enthusiasm for continuing in formal education beyond the compulsory phase, he talked the talk about 'maybe' going to college and university but with little evidence of conviction. Instead his main aspiration for the future was on gaining an HGV license at the age of twenty-one and becoming an HGV driver. Both his uncle and grandfather had been lorry drivers and had taken him out with them when he was younger. It was, he said, an enjoyable and easy job. Between now (leaving school) and then he would like to have a steady job such as working part-time at the local Tesco store. He sees this type of work as easy and sociable.

Even if Luke had wanted to stay on at school post-16 he would be struggling to meet the progression criterion "cause I need 35 points [to continue at school], and I might not get 35 points". Despite this when asked what his life would be like at age 20 he unexpectedly says he might be at university. When asked where this has come from he answers by recounting his experiences of attending the WP intervention programme on how this might influenced his post-16 plans:

That's why I'm on this course. Mentoring. Cause if I wouldn't have been on this course, then I wouldn't have known what the ins and outs of being at university were, but being on it just ...we did a game about student life and stuff – it makes you open your eyes a bit more 'cause you get loads of student debts.

This man comes into school and he picks us out of our lessons and at first we have a talk about things that happen in the world, and then in Year 11 we did quite a lot of revision – in Year 10 and 9 we just used to do school work and stuff, and he used to help you with your work in [the course] ..., just helped you to look at like a wider range of things ..., just given you a picture of what university life would be like. So [whether I go to university or not] depends on how well I do in post-16 – if I've got a job offer after post-16, like a steady job or something, then ... 'cause I'll be like eighteen when I leave school .. I'll be nearly nineteen ... so I think if I had just two years of working normally, if I didn't go to university, I could start when I am twenty-one getting my HGV licence. (June 2004)

It is not clear from Luke whether he is confused about the link between the trajectory he is actually on and its probable outcome in terms of post-16 opportunities, or whether he was playing along with me as the interviewer and mentor. As I was both his WP mentor as well as the interviewer, he might have felt obliged to display raised, though

quite unrealistic, aspirations for the future. I suspect the latter is the more likely explanation, as later in the interview he says;

I don't think the university thing will happen, to tell you the truth. That's why I put 'maybe'.

Maybe this was his way of questioning why he as someone who had no realistic prospect of going to university in the immediate future had attended a course once a week over a three-year period that was designed to show, as he put it,

University could open up more doors for you so you could get other jobs, better paid jobs, more things that you enjoy that you don't know about at the moment.

Perhaps he was articulating what many academics have articulated before that opportunities were being both opened up for him and closed down at the same time. It is also worthy of note that throughout he uses the third person 'you' probably meaning 'one' rather the first person 'me' or 'I'. This implies an awareness at least at some level that whilst university may open doors for some others, it was not going to for him.

## **Ryan**

Ryan lives with his elder sister, mother and her partner. Ryan's dad left the household when he was five and Ryan has lived in his current home set-up since then. He feels close to his mother's partner as they share common hobbies such as rugby. Ryan's mother works in a local chemist. Neither she, nor her new partner (or Ryan's dad) had been to university as they had left school at 16.

In Year 11 Ryan wanted to become a fireman. He said he had had this ambition since he was six or seven after watching fireman cartoons on television. He believed that this is an ideal job for him as he enjoyed being active and being outdoors rather than sitting in an office all day long. He does consider education to be very important though;

it's [education] a really big part of my life. It's basically setting me up for the rest of my life.

He was confident that he would see his education through until the end of further education at age 18 as this would set a solid foundation for the rest of his life. Having said this, Ryan describes how he does not enjoy school and given the option of choosing between remaining in education or getting a job, he would:

go and get a job, but because [of] the job I want to do I have to get an education, that is why I am still getting an education.

He believed that further and higher education were options at this point although he said that he was not willing to commit to this until the end of his fireman training course as he felt that he would not be in a position to fully assess the benefits of attending university until then.

Whilst looking ahead to what he would be doing aged 20, he described a situation where he would have (hopefully) finished his fireman's training course. By the time of the third Year 11 interview (June 2004), Ryan had begun to dismiss the idea of proceeding onto higher education:

Well, I just wanted to go into fireman training as soon as I can, and I don't really think that ... I know university will help me get a better education and give me more options to do, but I don't really think I want any more options, 'cause I think that'd make it even more difficult to decide what to do. (June 2004)

Ryan did not intend to consider higher education from an early point in the study. During the third interview activity examining where he would be at age 20, he was confident that he would be completing a fireman's course. If he was, on the other hand, planning progressing directly onto higher education he would have been still studying for a degree at 20. During the third interview, he indicated that gaining a degree would have provided too much choice for him to contemplate. His plans for the future were set and he did not want to veer from becoming a fireman, although he said he was aware that entering the fire service with higher qualifications may result in promotion to a better position:

You've got more chance of being in the Fire Service [if you have good qualifications], 'cause now they need smarter people as well. You can get high positions in there if you get some better grades. (June 2004)

Although he knew that staying on in education and being educated to a higher level would be beneficial for his future prospects, this did not deter him from his wish to leave school at the earliest possible opportunity. He was quite sure that he did not want to go to university as this would delay his progression into the fire service and he did not want this to happen:



I don't want to go to University for three years when I could start training that early. (June 2004)

If he goes to college he would like to study PE, Computer Science, Media, and Leisure & Recreation. This selection of subjects was based on identifying things he enjoyed doing rather than a deliberate linking of his course choices to progression onto a higher education course or career.

### **Zane**

Zane originally lived in the Midlands and only moved to the South six years prior to entering Year 11. He lives with his father and elder and younger brothers (aged 21 and 8). His mother and father separated two years prior to the first interview and his mother lives in the area although not in the same house. The rest of his extended family still live in the Midlands. Zane's father is a warehouse employee. His elder brother was in employment, having left school at age 16. Zane has support from his uncle and aunty who regularly drive down from the midlands and take him out shopping or on holiday. He enjoys playing football and has had relative success at an early age winning many individual and team trophies. Faced with the hypothetical choice of either playing football or going to school, he states that "I take football more serious. If I had a choice to play football or stay at school I'd choose football". He reinforces this by stating that he knows "I can get a job without GCSEs but I couldn't stop playing football". During the second interview he showed me a photograph of the trophies he had won which he has on display in his bedroom.

He does not like school as he dislikes his teachers although he recognises that school is an important part of his life at the moment. He attributes his successes (and failures) and likes and dislikes of school subjects to whether or not he gets on with his teachers:

I don't like German, but I didn't really get on with the teacher that much. Like always getting into arguments and things like that, and English, the teacher's too stressing with us and I just can't get on with my work. But like in Technology I can get on with my work 'cause I get on with my teacher, and I done quite a lot of coursework and he said it's really good and that. (March 2004)

Higher education was never something that Zane considered as an option. His aim was to get out of school as quickly as possible. College was seen as a transition between school and employment but the notion of proceeding onto higher education was something he was not contemplating.

I don't know. If I'd been to college and I'm earning enough money, not much point in going back to do some of that just to get more money at the end of it, which I won't need that money... it would be good in a way 'cause you could have more money, but I don't know. We had, it's hard to explain, I don't want to be doing education for loads of years 'cause I've found school boring, and I'll probably get bored at college but I'm just going to work, 'cause I hate studying. (June 2004)

He wanted to become either a fireman or a chef. His interest in the fire service stems from watching a popular children's television programme. But he is vague and uncommitted about the fireman plan:

I want to be a fireman but I don't know if I ever will be one... I just don't reckon I'll get the right grades for it, but I don't know what you need to have. (June 2004)

On the other hand he shows greater conviction about entering the catering trade. His uncle was a chef and he had some insights into the profession whilst doing some work experience. This led him to believe that he could do this kind of work. He would try to take a course at FE which would enable him to become a chef.

During our discussions about progression onto college, Zane mentioned two courses that he would be interested in pursuing. Both involved pursuing a vocational rather than an academic route:

Catering course. I'm going to be a chef... 'cause I like cooking and I've worked with my uncle before, and that's what I want to do.. [or] Mechanics... I like cars and bikes... Lots of practical work, like cooking, and I just enjoy it. (June 2004)

He sees academic qualifications as irrelevant to pursuing his chosen career. He is not particularly concerned about his forthcoming GCSE examinations and says he just wants to finish school. He is aware however that both the career moves he mentions would require both qualifications and further training, but this would be something new and a fresh start.

#### 4.0.7 Non-traditional students

This group of participants could be seen as meeting the widening participation selection criteria but were not selected by the school for the intervention.

## **Chris**

Chris lived with his mum, dad and nineteen-year-old brother. His father was a paramedic. His mother did not work. Neither of his parents had attended higher education and both had left school at 16. He talked about having a very close relationship with both his mother and father. He places great importance on his home environment, which is described as “safe and secure”. Chris’s brother was about to begin studying Engineering at Cardiff University in the following academic year. Chris wants to continue his education and follow through from further education into higher education. He talked about the benefits of attending higher education in terms of giving him the sort of lifestyle he wanted, “better money, better education so you can get a better job to get more money. Basically have a better life”. He saw higher education as a means through which he could develop skills and prepare for his future life:

If you’re better educated and you know more stuff – to run your own business and that. You know the skills. If you didn’t go to university – if you just, like, got up and started your own business, I don’t think you’d have the right, like, skills. (June 2004)

He makes a link between achievement and gaining the respect of others, “If you are educated then people respect you”. Chris appears not to mind attending school and does not see it as a chore. He feels that it is important to continue within the educational process and is encouraged by his immediate circle of friends who also feel the same way.

In the first interview he talked about wanted to become a helicopter winch man (December 2003), but this changed to a graphic designer by the third interview (June 2004). He was also considering. Most of what Chris knew about higher education came via his elder brother. He talked about the process (and importance) of selecting the ‘right’ course at the ‘right’ university. In this respect he showed some awareness that the prestige of universities vary as do courses – and it was the process or matching up the two that he considered was important. Much of this knowledge and awareness seem to come from having seen how his elder brother went about selecting a course and institution.

Chris thought that, at age 40 he would be working as a graphic designer and living in the south-west of England with his wife who would be “sophisticated” – she too would need to be someone who had attended University and obtained a degree.

His past academic achievements meant he was on a trajectory that would take him to higher education:

...in the last year of [name of school] I did my SATS and I got all level fives, so that's quite good, and then at the age of 11 I went to Community College and I thought it was quite good; had my SATS in Year 9 and I got levels 5, 5 and 6, I think, so that's quite good. (December 2003)

He was focused on doing his best in his GCSE examinations and indicated that he had stopped several of his hobbies in a bid to fully concentrate on these.

... I gave up [hockey, cricket and swimming] because my GCSEs and that are coming up, so I thought my mum said it was better if I revised and stuff, so I sort of gave it up, but I might get back into it later on. (December 2003)

After his GCSE he wanted to study Media Studies, Biology and Geography at A level.

Well, Geography, 'cause I've always liked Geography – I find it a very interesting subject. Media I haven't done GCSE, so I thought I'd try that one for A-Level and see what it's like, and I want to be a graphic designer as well, so I need to go down that path, and Biology 'cause my dad's a paramedic and I've always been interested in how your body works. (June 2004)

Going on to higher education is an obvious next step for Chris as he sees little point in going to College if the aim is not to go to University.

There's not really any point in going to college if you're not going to university. Can you actually go to university if you don't go to college? (June 2004)

## **Jenny**

Jenny has always lived in the same town. She lives with her mother, step-father and her younger sister (aged 11). Although she has an elder step-brother and step-sister they do not live with her. She is part of a large extended family. She talked about having seven aunts and uncles who all live either within the same town or within a short distance of it. Her step-father has only lived with her for the last six years. She describes having a very good relationship with her mother although does not share such positive thoughts about her step-father. She feels this is because she has lived for a large part of her life without a father figure so does not 'need' one. Her step-brother is in the RAF so they only see each other at weekends. Jenny has had a steady boyfriend for the last 18

months whom she sees as a 'security blanket'. She feels that she has not only gained a boyfriend but a new family network.

Jenny does not feel very positive about school. She thinks it is boring although can see its importance and is willing to stick with it to further education. Her main ambition is to join the RAF as a physical training instructor and therefore needs to be able to do A-Levels at sixth form. At this stage, higher education is not an option for her as she has heard too many negative stories, via her friends and family members who have been to university, about the accumulation of debt and she would not like to be in debt.

I don't want to get into loads of debt and have loads of student loans and stuff. That's kind of scary, 'cause [graduates] leave with ten grand's worth of [debt], well I think that's really scary, having to pay all that off. (June 2004)

But she would probably go to university if there were no fees:

Yeah, I probably would, I'd probably go. Because I don't have to pay to do my A-Levels, so that's why I'm doing them. (June 2004)

At age 17, Jenny considers that she will be undertaking A-Levels in PE, Psychology, Biology, and Leisure & Recreation. She links the need to study PE and Biology to wishing to join the RAF and feels that these courses will help her in this profession. By age 19, Jenny thought that she would still be in the RAF although thought that she may have become a physiotherapist within the RAF, moving on from the physical training instructor role.

## **Matt**

Matt has lived in the South West since he was seven. He lives with his two brothers (aged 18 and 12), mum and step-family (step-dad and sister). His home is owned by his uncle and aunt. His mother has never worked. He finds it difficult to talk about his relationship with his family. During his earlier years, he describes how the family went through financial hardship "cause we always used to get like Income Support and that for school dinners". He talked about maintaining a distance from his family members and preferring to spend time alone or with his peers rather than with the family. He sees his peers as his main support structure.

Matt considers schooling to be quite important. He wants to do well in his GCSE exams but dislikes having to do homework as he feels that he works hard enough whilst

at school. During the second interview he reflected on his elder brother's experience of school. He (his brother) had not done as well as expected in his exams. Matt put this down to him not having done any work at home. He also talked about his step-dad who left school at fifteen with few qualifications and because of this, according to Matt, he did not earn much money and the family had to rely on Income Support.

He does not want this to happen to him and therefore is determined to continue in education and follow through to further and then higher education.

My step-dad finished school when he was fifteen and got a job, so he has no, like, qualifications, and I just want to do better. (March 2004)

Matt was able to make a direct link between acquiring qualifications and leading a better life in the future [than his current one] both for himself and his future family;

When I was younger, we couldn't do stuff, we had, like, Child Support, and all that kind of stuff so I don't really want my kids or family to do that. (March 2004)

There is an internal drive not to replicate his childhood and this has meant that Matt has given thought to his future and the role education plays in achieving that. At seventeen, Matt plans to be taking A-Levels in PE, Law and Media Studies. He wanted to study Biology but his sixth form college has withdrawn this course. He is unsure whether he would have been able to get good enough grades in Biology anyway to have continued studying it – "I'm not sure I will get a good enough Biology grade in GCSE, to be honest".

At age 20, he envisages that he would be in either higher education or full-time employment. He considers that it is likely that he will proceed on to higher education and already has some views on what and where this will be;

Bath University, 'cause I've been there before, I've seen it all, and there's good facilities, and I've seen a brochure of some of the courses and stuff and they sound really good. (March 2004)

#### 4.0.8 Traditional students

These were the three participants in my study that the school had identified as belonging to families where previous generations had attended higher education. They were therefore not part of the widening participation target audience.

### **Clyde**

Clyde had moved to the South West from Swindon five years prior to entering Year 11. He lived with his mother, father and elder sister. His elder brother lived in Portsmouth and had graduated from Portsmouth University. Clyde's dad worked in the computing industry and his mother was a teacher at the school he attended. (In fact she became the Year 11 head and the Widening Participation Co-ordinator in the school when Laura's (another of my participants – see below) mother left in December 2003). Clyde describes a very positive relationship with both his parents and talks about trusting them and confiding in them. His grandmother also lives nearby and he describes his relationship with her as close.

Clyde's parents are also interested in renovating properties and they have renovated and moved from property to property in the last few years. Clyde has developed an interest in this aspect of their lives and considers that he would like to do this in the future.

Education plays an important role in Clyde's life. He considers that gaining qualifications is a necessity if he is to have a good job and a good lifestyle in the future.

Well, I reckon that if I want to have a good job, then I should have good qualifications telling someone that I can learn and understand quickly. (March 2004)

In addition, he feels that having good qualifications will enable him to demonstrate to employers that he is willing to commit and will put him in an advantageous position when faced with competition.

Even if I got a degree in something like Business and I went for a completely different job, it would still show the employer that I can work real hard for something that I want, so it would give me a step up over other people who didn't get a degree. (June 2004)

He feels that his GCSE results are very important as they are going to determine whether the last 10/12 years of life at school have been wasted or not. He also needs to achieve good results as he wishes to follow his elder brother's and sister's footsteps and

proceed onto further and then higher education. Higher education is seen as a natural step to take and this is partly due to the fact that he feels there is an expectation placed by his mother for him to do so.

Probably because I think that my mum deep down wants all of us to go to university as a backup, and I think that, saying that you have been to university, sort of lets out your life really, cause if you go straight into work then you are going to be a bit miserable I think, rather than having a good time. (December 2003)

At age 17, Clyde expects that he will be doing AS Levels in Business Studies, ICT and Media and will follow these through and take full A-Levels in each subject. At 20, Clyde hopes to be at university. He showed that he has a knowledge of the system and funding arrangements presumably because he has seen two of his siblings go through the process. He says that he does not want to fully rely on his parents for financial support and therefore would be seeking a part-time job whilst studying full-time. At age 40, Clyde has aspirations to be very wealthy, worth over one million pounds. This he says he will have achieved through the renovation of properties whilst at the same time running his own business.

### **Laura**

Laura's home situation was complicated by there having been several house moves in the recent past due to each of her parents changing their jobs. Laura's father was a car salesman and her mother, when I first interviewed Laura, was a teacher at the school Laura attended, where she had also been head of Laura's year since she had been in Year 9. Her mother had also been the Widening Participation Co-ordinator in the school before she (her mother) left to take up a post at a school in North Devon in December 2003.

Up until December 2003, Laura lived with her mother and younger sister whilst her father worked away from home during weekdays and came home at weekends. From December 2003 through to June 2004 both her parents were working away from home during the week and only returning at weekends to the family home. During this period, her elder sister (who had been living with her partner in the town) moved back into the family home to look after Laura (and her younger sister) until she completed her GCSE examinations. At the time of the third interview in June (2004) Laura was about to move to her new home in North Devon where both her parents would now be living full time.



Perhaps not surprisingly, Laura comes across as a very independent person who does not want to rely on any of her family members. She enjoys the independence her family situation has given her and feels that it is preparing her for future life. She is interested in politics and at the time of the interview talked at length of her concerns about how the Labour Government was handling foreign affairs.

Laura sees education as something that she has to do rather than something she necessarily enjoys. She does not enjoy many of her lessons as she is in different classes from most of her friends and also feels that she gets picked on as she is the Head of Year's daughter. She talks about taking a pragmatic approach to her examinations;

Well, it would be great to get all A's and stuff like that, but, if I don't get them, then I shall just work around them, they are not..., a barrier is always put in front of you for a reason, and it is just like a challenge, you've got to get over that hurdle, it would be great if I could get like good marks and all that, get into colleges and that, but if not then I'll just go somewhere else. (June 2004)

She does however place much value on obtaining qualifications and is able to make a direct link between gaining qualifications and getting on in life;

If you're in an interview with someone and it's between you and another person, and you've got a load of qualifications and they haven't, then there's more of a chance that they're going to pick you over the other person, so it just gives you an advantage. (June 2004)

She aspires to become a film director and she feels that this is a viable career to follow. She has researched how to enter this profession and is determined to follow into further and then higher education in order to fulfil this dream.

Even though Laura demonstrates that she is committed to her education, there is a very casual commitment to the process as she feels that if she does not make it something else will turn up. She is heavily reliant on her parents to fund whatever path she follows in the future as she believes that they have good jobs so should support her with whatever she decides to do.

At age 17, Laura imagines that she will be taking her A-Levels in Media, Films Studies, Photography and Religion. These would assist her in entering into the film industry. By 20, Laura hoped that she would be living in the USA and studying New and Old Film Studies in association with Media at a university near Los Angeles. She has looked into various courses via the internet and considers this one to be the appropriate one for her. By 40, Laura dreamt of living in a mansion in Beverly Hills

having by this time had great success in the film industry. Laura considered that her aspirations were realistic and she was determined to make them happen.

### **Tina**

Tina lived in a nearby city for twelve years before moving to her current town four years ago. She says that the move was necessary as her previous home was located in an area that she considers was not overly pleasant. It was a council estate with a bad reputation. She lives with her mother who works as a carer in a private home, her father who is a wholesale company worker and two younger brothers aged fifteen and twelve. Neither of Tina's parents has attended university. Tina considers herself to be a good student and believes that she is a straight A student though at times can dip down to a B or C. Her main aim was to obtain at least a grade C in all her GCSE subjects so that she would be able to proceed on to further education. Having completed her A-Levels a year or two hence, she would then reflect on what she wanted to do. At this time she does not think she will take up the option of proceeding on to higher education;

For some people, they've lived their lives by, I've got to go to high school, got to go to college, go to go to university, got to do this, got to do that, and then it seems they don't make their own decisions about themselves because it's always their parents or somebody else like giving them information and telling them what to do, whereas me, I'm going to do my A-Levels definitely but I don't think I will go to university. (December 2003)

But her views changed during Year 11. At the last interview, she was saying that she would be going to university as there was a need to gain qualifications in order to move on in life.

'Cause I want to get the qualifications and the degrees I need to move on further in life, 'cause if you ain't got that you can't do much, can you? (June 2004)

This plan for the future was linked to her wish to gain qualifications in order to have a decent lifestyle:

You can go out and get a good job, get enough money and enough friends and family around you that you can live a decent life and not have to work until the age of about eighty, just to pay off bills, 'cause what's the point? If you're able to go to college and university and get good degrees, you can live the life you want to without having to worry about debts and mortgages and everything like

that. If you get good friends around you as well, you'd be set for the rest of your life. (June 2004)

At age 17, Tina thought that she would be staying on at college taking French, Psychology and Computer Science. She was developing an interest in becoming a language translator and was keen to pursue her French language in order to do this.

I think I'll really enjoy being a translator, working with all different types of people in differing countries, I think that would be a really good job 'cause I know that I could put my heart and soul into it. (June 2004)

By age 20, Tina believed she would be studying French and possibly Business at university. She was currently looking into courses and setting up meetings with various admission tutors in order to find out what subjects she should be studying at college. Her parents were currently saving some money in order to support her whilst she was at university. By 40, Tina was hoping to have moved to France and be enjoying a successful career as a language translator.

#### 4.0.9 Conclusion

Several issues need to be highlighted from the analysis presented in this section. First it must be noted that none of the three candidates selected for a substantive Widening Participation intervention course, in the sense that it had weekly hourly inputs lasting three years, had any hope of entering higher education, at least in the short term. The reason for this was that they were not on an academic trajectory that would allow them to progress to higher education. This is because entry into higher education is dependent on prior qualifications. One could, of course, speculate that the extensive input these three young people received will encourage them to gain qualifications later on and enter higher education as mature students. However this evidence is particularly worrying given that there was also evidence from those deemed ineligible that young people who were likely intended beneficiaries and who might have benefited were excluded, and their places given to others who probably would not.

The reason why this happened in this study was the selection criteria used by the school to identify eligibility. But it may be that distinguishing between those who are able but are not aspiring from those who do not aspire because they are not able is far from easy. The widening participation agenda assumes that this is a relatively

straightforward and politically uncomplicated issue. The evidence presented here suggests otherwise.

A second and related point is the lack of accountability that was required of both the school and university for all widening participation outreach activities including this one. All that the higher education institutions were required to do was to appear to be doing something to make their intake more representatives of the wider UK population. This ‘appearance’ was measured by the amount of resources they threw at the problem, i.e. inputs rather than outputs. This may go some way to explaining why the university cynically collected evaluation data and filed it. More recent legislation, as pointed out above, intends to take a more rigorous approach to institutional accountability when it comes to issues concerning ‘fair access for all’. The issue of competing agendas between institutions, which emerged as an issue in the selection processes in the course of this analysis, is unlikely to be resolved by the new legislative framework.

Thirdly, the analysis highlighted the ways in which the widening participation target group was ‘othered’ and excluded by the very policies that were intent on helping them. An obvious example of this is the way in which they were withdrawn from their normal lesson routines and by so doing were separated (marginalized) from their peers. Concerns were raised regarding the knock-on effect this may have had on their education. Whilst the analysis focused on the process of othering that took place at the individual student level, implications need to be drawn at the collective level and how individual and collective level othering may interact. This issue will be returned to in the next chapter.

It was found that the very process of identifying the widening participation target audience using individualized selection criteria is in danger of perpetuating the problem it was intended to alleviate. It may therefore be that the dominant discourse that sees the problem of under-representation as being the responsibility of the individual student rather than the system may be counter-productive. Identifying those who are under-represented but who would be ‘susceptible to becoming learners’ (Maguire et al, 1996, p1) is individualizing what is essentially a structural issue. By focusing on this, attention is taken away from the structural barriers that are inhibiting the groups to which individuals belong from participating.

#### 4.1 Section 2: Learner identity and learning in and out of school

In the previous section I considered which groups are under-represented in higher education which, by implication, makes them eligible for widening participation intervention. It emerged in the course of that discussion that those who actually enter higher education are selected on the basis of having a track record of being good learners within the formal education system, with those deemed less good or poor learners being rejected. This strongly suggested that if there is a lack of fit between the values and beliefs about learning that are being engendered by the educational institutions and a given student's values and beliefs then they are deemed to be a bad learner (and, by implication, a bad student). In the previous section this was evidenced by one of the two criteria that the school used to select students eligible for widening participation intervention. The students who had been selected, according to the year head, were those who had 'issues' which had come to the attention of school staff on a regular basis. Such issues (misdemeanours) included losing school equipment and not wearing the school's uniform and thus needed to be 'bombard[ed] with motivational stuff'.

In this second section of my analysis chapter I attempt to characterise how the young people I interviewed saw themselves, and particularly how they saw themselves as learners in school and in their everyday lives. I was especially interested in the comparison between their everyday learning identities and their school learning identities. I wanted to consider their identities, and learning identities in particular, in the informal and formal arenas as I was not just interested in finding out how their identities in different arenas of their lives impinged upon their learning in that arena, but also on how their learning in that arena impinged on their identities and with what consequences. Above all I wanted to know how their view of themselves as learners in the formal institution of school impacted on their pathway beyond Year 11. By way of introduction to my analysis and discussion around this learning identity theme, I begin by outlining the theory that links identity and learning.

#### 4.1.1 Identity and learning identity

Within the fields of education, sociology, psychology and philosophy, there are different theoretical traditions and related research studies on identity. The modernist approach to theorising identity is to see it as operational (specific), measurable, ordered and generally stable (e.g. Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This tradition has spawned studies that have approached the analysis of identity in terms of social categories such as gender,

class and ethnicity (e.g. Howard, 2000). From this traditional perspective identity is seen as a single social issue. In contrast, the postmodernist (or what is sometimes called late modernity) perspective on identity takes the approach of theorising identity as ‘multiple, processual, relational [and] unstable’ (Howard, 2000, p. 387).

This conceptualization of identity is best illustrated by drawing on its use in the literature. Two literatures of relevance to my study that have utilised a postmodern perspective when considering how an individual’s identity is formed are studies of young peoples’ lives and studies of lifelong learning. Both these groups of studies tend to see learning identities as multiple and not located solely in the individual. They see identity as something that has to be negotiated in social interactions that take form in cultural spaces (e.g. Nasir and Saxe, 2003). Put another way, identity is seen as a multiple concept developed through social practice (see also Boaler and Greeno, 2000; and Halland et al, 1998).

This analysis, in keeping with researchers of young people’s lives in recent years, takes as its starting point a view that the process of identity formation and the developments and changes in identity that young people are expected to experience are constantly changing. As such this analysis sees the processes of identity formation as somewhat more complex and more compromised than the modernist (traditional) perspective. Young people from this vantage point are ‘attempting to live with and through the contradictory combination of a variety of possible social classifications, possible identities’ (Corrigan, 1990, p 114).

This analysis and theorising is also in keeping with lifelong-learning researchers who have applied the postmodern notion of multiple identities to their theorising about learning and learner identities (e.g. Rees, Fevre, Furlong & Gorard, 1997; Wortham, 2006). In the lifelong-learning literature the term ‘learning identities’ is generally used to refer to the way in which people understand their experiences as learners (see Weil, 1986 for a discussion on the use of learning identity as opposed to student identity).

Both groups of researchers (those researching young people and those researching lifelong learning) have used the terms ‘learning identities’ and ‘learner identities’ to explore how inequalities and social injustices have been reproduced across the generations. In this regard the terms have been used to signify the development of values and beliefs about learning, schooling and knowledge in response to encounters with these (e.g. Colley, 2003; Hodkinson, 1996). This argument derives from the Bourdieuan notion that one’s learning identity is part of the wider habitus and dispositions young people or lifelong learners hold (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu uses the word 'habitus' to describe 'the mediating link between individuals' subjective worlds and the objective world into which they are born and which they share with others' (Jenkins, 1992, p. 75). At the centre of the concept 'habitus' is an interplay not only between past and present but also between the individual and the forces acting upon them. This interplay is commonly referred to as the interaction between an individual's agentic powers and structures they inhabit as they live their everyday lives. Reay, (1998, p. 59) for example, saw 'habitus' as incorporating a tension on the one hand between what was possible and what was probable given the social constraints bearing down on the individual, and on the other between replicating familiar social practices and transforming these into something new.

#### 4.1.2 Learning identity, future pathways and future learning

Before embarking on an analysis of the values and beliefs about learning held by the young people in my study, and the extent to which these were either forced upon them by their circumstances or transformed by their agentic powers, I will briefly review studies that have already considered this. In my analysis I am not just interested in the sources of values and beliefs but also in the consequences of these for future pathways and future learning.

Archer and Yamashita (2003) looked at the complex social and institutional factors that affect young people's participation in post-16 education. Their findings led them to claim that issues of identity and structural inequality leads to the low participation among some working class, inner city, minority ethnic groups. According to them, such young people have clearly defined limits that they place on themselves, and a negative self-image that they are 'not good enough' for post-16 education. In a similar vein, Kinder et al. (1996) used the evidence from their research to claim that the major causes of disillusionment with school are a mixture of social and institutional factors; peer identification, relationships with teachers, curriculum content, family factors and classroom context. Other work of relevance is Ball et al. (2000) who also saw identity as being the main cause of learner disillusion with school learning. Likewise Furlong (1996) argued that 'an elaboration of learning identities, how they are constructed and how they change over time, is central to an understanding of the learning society for they will influence the way an individual will engage with the structure of opportunities that are available' (p 2).

Given the evidence-based arguments summarised in the preceding paragraph about the link between identity, future pathways and learning, it is not surprising that those researching lifelong learning consider the school years as the most crucial in both forming learning identities and predicting disposition towards future learning encounters (e.g. Gorard & Rees, 2002).

Yet identities, according to postmodern theorists, have the potential to change and be reconstructed (e.g. Waller, 2004). From the vantage point of this conceptualization, learning identities are highly individualistic as they are constantly in flux depending on a given individual's personal encounters, experiences, and understandings. And it is through this process that individuals shape, deconstruct and reconstruct their learner identities in the context of wider and deeply embedded social structures such as race, gender and social class (grand narratives). (See Archer, 2003 for an elaboration of this argument.)

This means that there is an important link to be made between the individual's capability to respond (their individual agency) and the social structures in which their everyday lives are embedded. This means that young people through their agency have some leeway to construct their own learner identities. (See Waller, 2004 for a discussion on this point.)

The educational institution a young person attends aspires to engender certain learning identities in its students (e.g. Rees et al, 1997). In the previous section it was revealed that those who did not take on board the school's 'master narrative' of what it is to be a good learner, were deemed to be difficult and lacking in motivation. In a similar vein, Swain (2007) highlights the tensions that may result between the learning identity a young person holds and the one promoted in the school attended. Likewise Bloomer (1997) refers to the 'studentship' expected of young people that typically stresses the acquisition of qualifications and skills as well as progression to what is deemed to be a desirable destination.

### **Laura**

Laura fits the master 'studentship' narrative that is being engendered by her school and her mother. She knows about the importance of acquiring qualifications and skills as well as progression to what the school and her mother deem is a desirable post-compulsory destination.

Although when I first interviewed Laura in December 2003 she said she found school 'annoying', this was not because of her learning identity vis-à-vis school and education,



it was because ‘lots of people don’t like me because my mum is Head of Year.’ Especially because of her mother’s position in the school she was in the ‘in-group’ as far as the school’s establishment was concerned. Laura knows this; ‘In some ways it is really good because I know exactly what is going to happen beforehand and things like that’. Her privileged position also meant, unlike the WP students discussed in the previous section, she knew how to flout the rules without it becoming an ‘issue’ to be brought to the staff’s attention. She was aware she had to remain a ‘model student’ – an example to others:

I am not meant to wear any jewellery ... but I don’t quite abide by that rule. I am not meant to have any sort of heels on my shoes, ‘cause you are only allowed two inches, and all that sort of thing, and like she [her mother] expects me to set an example for the rest of the year group, which I don’t do most of the time ‘cause it annoys me. But, everyone always says, “well, Laura is allowed to do it so surely we should be”, and I just, things like that, well I am actually not allowed to do it but I do it, it is just things like that. (December 2003)

Although in some ways a rebellious teenager, as far as academic work is concerned Laura is in little doubt of what is required to get on in life:

I try not to take my subjects too seriously, I do my best in them, but if I don’t get good marks at the end of the day, I don’t get good marks, so I just get over it and carry on and face the next challenge that is going to come along. (December 2003)

Despite this defensive attitude towards her possible exam results it is important to Laura to try to get as good marks as she can so that she can continue in the formal learning arena in order to gain qualifications that would increase her chances in life:

Well, it would be great to get all As and stuff like that, but if I don’t get them, then I shall just work around them, they are not..., a barrier is always put in front of you for a reason, and it is just like a challenge, you’ve got to get over that hurdle, it would be great if I could get like good marks and all that, but if not then I just go somewhere else. I would really like to go to college because I think that it will be a really good sort of social experience as well, just to..., and also it is also good to umm, you need certain things to be able to get to certain jobs, so it is just always better to go to college, ‘cause you can get your degree and that, ‘cause then you will have a higher experience than say someone who did not go to college ‘cause that might make an employer pick you over them. Because I want to be a film director and you need to have certain things to be able to do that, and you don’t learn that in school so it is not a sort of a career that you can go in without knowing anything about, you actually need to know certain things. (December 2003)

By the time I interviewed Laura at the end of Year 11 in June 2004 she had already been accepted for college and was planning her next move which would be into university. Nor did she envisage that she would have any difficulty getting accepted:

... I'll go to university here and then go to the US. There's always universities willing to accept people as long as they're prepared to put the effort in, 'cause my sister's got rubbish A-levels and she still got accepted into about six universities. .... It's [university is about] getting you to understand things better; understand the world you live in better. If you go to university you meet loads of different people, and the same with college, and you understand how they see things – how the world works for them and that. You get a much wider view of things. (June 2004)

In some respects there are similarities between Laura's school experiences and that of Clyde's. Like Laura, Clyde's mother works at the school and it was she that took over Laura's mother's Year Head role when she (Laura's mother) left the school to take up another appointment in December 2003. So, like Laura, this gave Clyde an 'insider's' perspective on how the system works and to forge what he described as friendships with other teachers.

Well, it's more of a mate than a Bossy Person. But he [form tutor] just helps you with the day and whatever, and I help him with his day – if anything needs doing – any problems, he'll sort it out. If there are no problems, no questions asked or whatever. (March 2004)

Despite this Clyde has mixed views about his schooling. He does not come across as over-enthusiastic about attending school, saying that it is more something that he has to do rather than something he enjoys:

It is ok, you have to do it really, you've got no choice, some subjects are better than others, some subjects I wish I didn't pick, but it is all learning really. (December 2003)

But he is able to make a direct link between the achievement of qualifications and future career success;

My brother went to college and then Uni and my sister is planning to do it, but she wants to take a gap year, umm, even though, even though I do not think that it is necessary, I think that showing someone that you have actually been to university and got a degree, even in anything, they will understand that you've

tried and got something, what you've wanted, even though I might not want to work for someone, it is still a backup, if anything else happens. (December 2003)

Like Laura, he associates academic success with success in life more broadly. This is a major motivating factor in his desire to proceed within the education system. By the end of Year 11, Clyde had applied to study various courses at the school's sixth form college and was looking ahead to studying at university. He explains why he has chosen this pathway:

If I want a high job, then I've got to prove that I can do the job properly or better than someone else, so having a degree would mean maybe I'm higher up than the people who just left at A-levels. (June 2004)

But not all my participants thought about their education in the way that Laura and Clyde did. It seems that from my data (see later) as well as those of others, whilst some young people may conform to the expectations of the schools they attend, others reject the aims and methods of learning prescribed by the school and form negative learning identities. Where this happens it is likely to have implications for their future learning careers (see, for example, Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997 and 1999). Ball et al (2000) also made a direct link between what they called 'damaged learning identities', adverse experiences during the compulsory phase of schooling, and a desire to get out of education. Where a student in Ball et al's study was deemed to have a damaged learning identity as a result of their formal learning experiences, Ball and his colleagues found that the last thing these young people typically wanted was more schooling. As with Willis' lads (1977), Ball et al's study found that some young people preferred to work rather than continue to engage in school learning.

While Willis's lads did not seem to think of themselves as learners at all, I was interested in whether the young people in my study were able to separate their everyday learner identities from their school learning identities, particularly if the latter had been damaged in some way. I was also interested in examining the extent to which they felt they fitted in at school in the sense of reflecting the image of studentship that their school promoted and encouraged. Were my participants, in keeping with some other researchers' findings such as Kelly (2007), willing to marginalize themselves from school learning coupled with a deep-seated desire to leave school at the earliest possible opportunity? It is having this disposition that has been described in the literature as

having a damaged learner identity. And it is in this literature that one finds evidence of the far-reaching consequences a damaged learning identity can have for a student's future education plans.

### **Luke**

For Luke there is a lack of fit between the identities and priorities the school promotes and encourages and his view of himself as a learner. But although Luke may have a damaged learning identity as far as school learning is concerned he is able to distinguish his identity as a learner more broadly from his identity as a school learner:

Well, I enjoy learning and stuff – it's like a new experience every day – things you learn, but actually coming to school in the mornings and staying at school 'til quite late does take up a lot of your time and energy and stuff, and the teachers I don't get along with all the time either – doesn't make it a lot easier. (June 2004)

Although he puts his dislike of school learning down to not getting on with teachers and the sheer amount of time and energy he has to devote to it, he is willing to put up with it since it is just for another few months:

It's not so bad – 'cause it is only a few months to go but, I would not like to re-start it like in Year 7, another five years in school and stuff. (June 2004)

Away from the formal arena of school learning, Luke is keen to learn and has a positive image of his capabilities as a learner. He is a keen angler:

It's (angling) quite good fun. Me and my uncle and my cousin go whenever we can, at the weekends and stuff, and stay overnight sometimes. It's just good – to get away 'cause you're not like in the city or nothing like that – all the hustle and bustle – it's quite good, you just sit there relaxing. My uncle has been going since he was my age – and about three or four years ago he took me once, and I haven't stopped going, really. (December 2003)

As buying fishing equipment is an expensive hobby he not only says he has had to have a summer job but also a part-time and Saturday job whilst attending school to help him maintain his fishing equipment and keep up to date with the latest angling gadgets.

Bought lots of things – spent money - probably about two thousand pounds on it. All my wages from my job over summer – I spent it on fishing. (December 2003)

He is also learning about friendship and trust from his everyday experience:

I've got my close mates and I've got – other people. Some people you just like tell something and it'll be round the school, and they are not really friends, but people that are quite close, like Ryan and stuff, like important stuff I could tell them anything – it's, like, a close relationship. We know each other's business which is quite good to have because you know that you can trust them, it is like trustworthy. Which is quite good in a relationship even with a friend. (June 2004)

He has learned about what is right and what is wrong from the adults in his family, especially his mother:

If it's good advice I'll listen, but if it's like bad advice, I'd probably tell them, that is the wrong thing to do 'cause it's no good, like, taking bad advice. She's [his mother] usually right 'cause she's lived a bit longer and found out from difficulties, but you, like, learn from your mistakes in life, so you just got to pick up from that, really. If you, like, make them, then you've got to get on with it. Well, it's quite good [mother's advice], because she's, like, she's obviously lived longer and she's had more experiences in life than us 'cause we're only fifteen, but I think because I've been brought up with all adults and no kids, really, it's sort of like taught me in a way how to solve things out and live, like, more grown up probably in my personality – a bit more, like down to earth, and having a laugh, or whatever, but you sort of know when there's a point to stop [behaving badly], really., 'cause I lived with my nan for, like, 'til I was seven, so it's been like me, my nan, my granddad and my mum, and then I've just lived with my mum ever since, 'cause I haven't got any brothers or sisters, so it's just been, like, an 'adult' world, really – how to, like, deal with things. (June 2004)

For the past eight years he had played football for a local team which has won several trophies but recently quit because he had fallen out with the manager. He then took up rugby. This inevitably involved him in learning a new set of rules but he had no trouble transferring what he already knew and appeared to enjoy the challenge:

Only been doing that [playing rugby] for – nearly three months – but it's quite good. Picked up the rules quite easy, so it was like there is not many things I didn't understand, but it's quite easy when you get to go. Pretty much the same again – there's like Ryan and people like that – they've been playing for like six or seven years now, all together, and now I've just joined, and so they don't mind, 'cause they know it's like learning things still, for, like, the newer people, but they help you out if you go wrong and stuff, which I think's quite good, 'cause you just can't know everything straight away. But it's quite good – I think we're going to win the league this year, 'cause not all the teams are that good in it. I like it, as well.

I play basketball, as well, for the school. With Ryan and other people. Just starting that, as well. It's quite hard to pick up the rules of that, because of rugby and stuff – you just want to get in there and tackle them, but you can't, like, touch them or whatever, so that's quite irritating. (December 2003)

Unlike school, where he does not feel valued, he feels a respected and valuable member of the team. Luke is not alone in this respect. Both Ryan and Zane, the two other widening participation intervention students, expressed similar reservations about their learning in school whilst demonstrate that they are willing to excel in areas outside school that require skills and commitment.

Zane for example is quite open about the fact that he dislikes school and is waiting to leave as soon as possible:

Well, I don't like school at all, but I am going to have to just cope with it and get the best results I can and just don't come back! (December 2003)

Outside school he has of his own volition developed skills playing football that have made him a crucial member of a team that has won several trophies year after year.

Well, one year I won like 'Player's Player', when I used to play up in Birmingham – that's like where all the players vote for who the best player in the team was, and I won that, and that just made me feel I was the best player in the team. And one year I won – well, two years on the trot – I won 'Top Goal Scorer', the last two seasons. That's made me feel like I'm the one who can score like all the goals as well. (December 2003)

These skills will have developed informally as a result of playing with others and learning from coaches and managers. This clearly demonstrates that Zane, like Luke, is not averse towards learning per se. He, again like Luke, is just not willing to do so within the classroom environment where he does not feel a valued member of a community.

Ryan, the other WP intervention student, began playing football at school but realised that he was not very good at it but was prepared to reflect on this and learn from it by moving on to a different sport where he could experience a degree of success;

Most of my friends play football at school, so I started to play but I was shit, so I did not play it anymore, so I played rugby and it turned out that it was good for me. (December 2003)

This perseverance meant that by the end of Year 11 he was looking forward to competing at a higher level with individuals who were older and much bigger than he was. Whilst he realised that this meant he would face a much bigger challenge, Ryan appears to be relishing this prospect:

It's quite intimidating at first, when you first think about it, 'cause you're going to have some huge monster trying to kill you! But I think it's going to be good 'cause it's something I enjoy doing, and I think I'll enjoy the challenge of knowing I've got to go up against them, and I think it might bring out the best in the way I play. (June 2004)

From this it is reasonable to infer that facing a challenge within the rugby environment does not daunt Ryan. He seems eager to build on his current skills through investing time and commitment to something he enjoys and values. His reward is the prospect of playing at a higher level. But for Ryan, mirroring this progression in school learning does not seem to be a prospect he either wants or is likely to achieve. Unlike school learning, he is able to see the longer-term benefits of his learning investment in his preferred sport.

#### 4.1.3 Conclusion

In this section I have considered the learning identities held by the young people in my study. I have attempted to show that the experience of compulsory schooling is often more complex than a simple lack of fit between young people's learning identities and the school identities engendered by the institutions. Wald & Castleberry (2000) argued that schools were failing to promote an ethos that values lifelong learning in a fast-moving society. In Wald & Castleberry's study they were learners who had strong learner identities but the way they were being taught at school damaged their school learning identities. There was some evidence of this in the above analysis.

First, in the previous section, we saw how the school had little regard for the continuity of Luke, Ryan and Zane's education by allowing them to withdraw from classes to attend an intervention that had little meaning or consequences for them. Second, in this section we saw Luke's experience of learning in the informal arena contrasted with his experience of learning at school. Learning outside school for these

young people was a social collaborative event where they learnt alongside significant adults in their lives – growth and change was encouraged through pursuing shared dreams, a shared focus and a shared responsibility to learn to do things better, to be a good team player.

It seems then that there is a problem inherent in focusing on the link between learner identity and the habitus of individual learner when what is being offered as learning in the formal arena is often inadequate. It seems that the same old assumption that schooling is good but some learners are inadequate does not hold water when it may well be that school is inadequate for potentially good learners. This analysis has demonstrated yet again how the education and school system needs to change to accommodate the different experiences/identities young people hold.

This draws attention to a major flaw in the widening participation agenda, since these targeted young people's damaged learner identities stemmed largely from their experiences of the system. Problems that are deeply embedded in the system that have the effect of turning young people off learning need to be addressed. It is therefore not enough just to focus on young people's problems with school learning as though the problem resides within them rather than within the system.

#### 4.2 Section 3: Imagined Futures

In the previous section I looked at my participants' sense of self in the present. In this section I consider how that sense of self in the present compares to their sense of self in the future. Here I am particularly interested in pursuing how their sense of self in Year 11 impacted on their imagined self in the future. My interest therefore is to trace the processes through which the young participants in my study planned to choose a pathway to a future they imagined for themselves.

In the third and final interview in Year 11 (June 2004) I asked each of my participants to think forward in time to their lives two years on when they would be 17, four years on when they would be 20, and 24 years on when they would be 40. My intention at the time was to ask the question as openly as possible so it would not be interpreted as narrowly as 'What do you want to do when you grow up?', although I do not know exactly how my questioning about the future was actually understood and the extent to which different participants might have understood it differently.



In analyzing and characterising their responses I was especially interested in whether they were able to make the connection between education/training/qualifications and future employment. More generally, underpinning this was a desire to tease out and trace the extent to which young people at this crucial stage in their lives embrace their future with intentionality and the extent to which they display signs of foresight and forethought. By way of introduction to my analysis and discussion around this theme, I begin by outlining the ‘imagined futures’ theory.

#### 4.2.1 Theorising young people’s imagined futures

I borrowed the term ‘imagined futures’ from Ball et al (1999) who used it, as I intend to use it, as a way of making sense of young people’s experiences in their final year of compulsory schooling. Since then others have used the term ‘imagined futures’ to refer to the plans young people hold for the future particularly in the context of education and work (see for example Lawy, 2002). This latter use of the term often carries the assumption that young people hold plans for the future that are unrealistic and unrelated to their current lives (see for example Quinn et al, 2008). The literature around this theme also evidences that young people hold lifestyle aspirations as well as career aspirations (see for example Atkins, 2009). The evidence suggests that young people’s aspirations are both short-term such as the next stage in their education career (e.g. Ball et al, 2000) and longer term such as attending university or long-term careers (e.g. Walker, 2007).

In the context of youth transitions, Ball et al (1999) first theorised ‘imagined futures’ as three typologies: those who were able to articulate a realistic future and who had clear views of what their future held for them; those who were uncertain or unrealistic about their future lives and who had unstable or vague views of what the future held for them; and those who were unable to articulate their future plans and could not imagine what the future held for them. According to this, young people’s imaginings about the future can be organised on a continuum from clear and stable to undefined and unstable. Ball et al argued that those who are nearer the undefined and unstable end of the continuum, unlike those at the opposite end, lack a focus for decision-making. To explain the imaginings of some young people, Ball et al drew on Bettis’s (1996) concept ‘fantasy future’. These were young people who had distant dreams that were typically unplanned and relatively unobtainable. Atkins (2009) also evidenced that young people often dream of sudden transformations of wealth and celebrity. Lawy (2002) however

argues that such obfuscations amongst the youth indicate a lack of both narrative of self and access to normatively defined success criteria. Others researching this area include Brennen and Nilson (2002) who, like Ball et al, also identified three ideal types in the way young people talked about their future selves: deferment, adaptability and predictability, which they argue are shaped at least in part by their social location.

Whilst Ball and his colleagues freely admitted that that their typology was heuristic and flexible, they were able to make a link between typologies, post-16 decision-making, and young people's habitus and their social horizons (Hodkinson et al, 1996). Others have argued that young people who refuse to imagine their future are rejecting the future in favour of the 'here and now' (Lewis et al, 1999, p 212). Du Bois Raymond (1998) argued that the present and living life now is of greater importance for many young people than planning their future lives. This suggests that for some young people their focus is on the present rather the future and that this needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting young people's imaginings (or the lack of imagining) of their lives sometime in the future.

### **Zane**

Zane provides a modest narrative for his future. His short-term vision is to proceed on to college where he would be taking a NVQ course in catering eventually leading to him qualifying as a chef. He has had prior experience of working in this trade having helped his uncle who is also a chef. This is the main reason given for this choice of career.

...I like cooking and I've worked with my uncle before, and that's what I want to do. (June 2004)

He was also thinking about getting a part-time job alongside taking this course in order to earn some money. He wants money not just to live but also to buy a motorbike. And if he wants to ride his new bike he will have to take lessons which also cost money. He sees this as essential if he is going to be able to get around and get to places that he needs and wants to be at – "work, college, down town and friends' houses". He would like to have a steady girlfriend in a year's time although he rules out having any children until sometime in the more distant future. He has other things he would like to experience first like going on holiday with his mates. This is evidenced in his reflections on how having children whilst still very young has limited their freedom somewhat:

I look at people who are my age and younger who've got kids and they have to look after their kids and they can't go out and meet their mates as much anymore, and they won't be able to go on holiday because they'll be looking after their kids, and they won't be able to go out and do all the stuff their friends are doing. Like, you'd be getting really bored just looking after your kid. It's different when you are older, like, I don't know, over twenty or something and you've got kids 'cause you would have probably done most things like going on holiday with all your mates and that, and you know what it's like, so you're not going to miss out 'cause you've done it. (June 2004)

Zane seems to know what he wants his life to be like in the short term and realises that having a child at an early age could curtail this. He has developed this viewpoint having seen first-hand the impact it can have. This seems at least on the face of it to be an informed decision based on how he does not want his life to map out.

At age 21, Zane believes that he will have completed his three-year catering course and will be working full time as a chef in a restaurant possibly in the local area. He believes it is important not to go too far from his home as he recognises that this will increase the amount of money he will need to pay on transport to and from the workplace. He thinks that he will be earning in the region of £200-£250 a week although quickly reflects that he should be earning a lot more upon reaching the age of 21. At this age he plans to own a car which he will use to get around.

At age 40, Zane hopes that he will have saved up a lot of money from his earnings. When pressed about what this would be;

I dunno – a couple of grand saved up, just money what I haven't touched really. (June 2004)

It is important for Zane to have saved some money as this he believes will enable him to be able to spend money as and when he wishes rather than having to save money specifically in order to be able to do something, e.g. going on holiday, etc. At 40, he is hoping to be earning in the region of twenty-something thousand a year. This reflects what his dad is currently earning at age 40. On reflection he ups this figure a little though to thirty thousand;

'Cause my dad just works in a factory – nothing good – and a chef's like a career, I know I'll get somewhere. Money gets good. (June 2004)

Zane's views of the future seem grounded in his current experiences and insights gained through his social networks. Atkins (2009) describes how young people conceptualise

their aspirations based on both careers and lifestyles and Zane is an example of how he visualises his future in these two aspects. His plans are related to his current lifestyle and he is able to articulate what he will be doing in twenty-four years' time based on his experiences of his life now. In this way his future plans are based on the familiar.

### **Laura**

Laura's views on the future are fanciful and rather unrealistic. Both in the first interview in December 2003 and again in the third interview in June 2004, she was focused on becoming a film director – and not just any film director but one based in Hollywood. Fulfilling this ambition was an all or nothing issue for her.

At age 17, she plans to be studying at a FE college ten miles away from her current home town. By this time, she would have moved house and be back with her parents at their new home approximately sixty miles away. This will inevitably involve quite a lot travelling to and from the college of her choice. She plans to take her A-Levels in Media, Film Studies, Photography and Religion which will be the first step towards preparing her for her chosen career – to become a film director in Hollywood. Her rationale for selecting Religion amongst the other more obvious courses was:

... I want to be a film director, and you can't really direct something if you don't know how any of it works...Religion's directly involved in films. You can't make a film that's going to annoy hundreds of people all over the world, because you're going to get mobbed or something, so you have to look at those sort of things, and that's a big aspect of film-making – you have to think about how you're going to affect people and whether you're going to offend anyone. (June 2004)

On the face of it she appears to be demonstrating foresight and intentionality in her choice of subjects. She has given thought to the link between what she studies and her career choice.

At age 20 she plans to be attending university in the US as the next stage in achieving her lifestyle choice and career ambitions.

There's more opportunities to make films over there. They've got an average of about four hundred film studios in America, and we've got about twenty-five, so there's more chance to make films over there... (June 2004)

Financing these plans would come through her well-off extended family;

My grandma. My grandma owns a lot of property over there (in the US). If she sold her property, she'd have about £4m and she's more than willing to do that because she's done it for my other sister – she's just bought her a house; she's paying for my other sister to go to Australia for a year and just travel round the world, and she says if I want to go to America, she'll pay for it. (June 2004)

So it seems that Laura is already thinking practically about her future, how it will be financed at least in the short-term and where she would be living whilst in America. She claims to have done research, via the internet, on the locations of flats and bedsits to stay at whilst studying.

At age 40, Laura plans to be living in a “big mansion in Beverley Hills”. This would be after having earned billions making films. Although this might be regarded as over-ambitious and unrealistic, Laura remained adamant throughout the interview that this would happen. She talked in detail about her plans by explaining that she would not sell off rights to films and would therefore keep on earning money from them. This she believed would enable her to buy the big mansion she hopes to be in by age 40. She will also have a nice car and no money worries.

She has no plans however to get married. This is a lifestyle which she describes as annoying:

I've no idea why people get married or have kids – I think it's ridiculous. It's just a stupid idea! I'd hate to have children. They just nick all your money, you've got to look after them... stay up worrying about them and that... and you're expected to know how to do everything, that sort of thing, and if you do it wrong, then your kids get taken away from you. So what's the point in having them? Just a big hassle! (June 2004)

When asked to reflect on how realistic her plans were she answers by making a direct link between hard work and success:

I think they are realistic because as long as I put the effort in – I think you can achieve anything you want as long as you work hard at it, so I think as long as I work at it and keep going, I think they are realistic. (June 2004)

And if it all fell apart and didn't happen the way she planned, what would she do then?

[I would be doing] absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing, 'cause I don't want to do anything else. (June 2004)

Laura, it seems from this account, is determined to be a film director. In some important respects, her account fits the notion of an 'imagined future' put forward by Lawy (2002) and later by Quinn, et al (2008) as one where plans are unrealistic and unrelated to current lives. Laura's aspirations are not grounded in any particular lifestyle or career path that she is currently in contact with. Instead, her choice is based to some extent on an abstract viewpoint – although she has had some concrete experience through her interest in watching films and seeing the screen titles and director's name appear. Her hopes are that it will be her name one day.

### **Tina**

During the first interview in December 2003, her views could be classified as more about continuing what she enjoyed in her life now. At this point she dreamt of becoming a world famous wrestler.

I want to move to Portsmouth and start wrestling, like an amateur. I can travel the world that way, and how much I love wrestling anyway – it would just be perfect – it's like my dream job. (December 2003)

She got the idea from watching amateur wrestling on television. Tina sees this as a 'dream job' which suggests that she did not understand what 'amateur' meant or had given the future any serious thought. Wrestling was part of her life here and now in that she attended wrestling training sessions in the evenings and at weekends. She said that she had only just told her parents about her plan to become a wrestler as she needed their support to go to a wrestling training camp over the summer. Shortly after this interview took place, however, she had sustained an injury during a training session and this forced a rethink. By the third interview (June 2004) her ideas about the future had altered.

... [wrestling] stopped when I had a very bad back injury last December... If I took another bump I probably would have paralysed myself – it was so bad. I'm still very much in love with it, but I've got other things. Like my music's taken over as well – started getting more into playing my guitar, listening to more music... I'm glad I had this injury - however weird that may sound, because it's made me realise how much of a dangerous sport it is. (June 2004)

Her new plans were about focusing on staying in college and studying French, Psychology and Computer Science. She had chosen to study these subjects as she

considered that they would help her with her future plans. These were still rather vague. She talked about possibly entering a large corporate firm and becoming a language translator. This desire to join a large corporate firm was seen as comparable with her work experience in her dad's work place. In this sense her plans for the future are still firmly grounded in her present life in the sense that she wishes to carry on doing the things she is enjoying now:

It's 'cause my dad works in a big business and because I've been like his secretary and done all his paperwork and everything on computers, I've just sort of learnt a lot from him, so I want to kind of carry on doing that. (June 2004)

Whilst at college she hoped to get a part-time job via one of her dad's friends. Her intention was to earn enough money doing this job to "take [her] to college and university". University is a new objective that she mentions for the first time in June 2004 but it fits with her new plans for the future. By age 20 she wants to be studying French and Business at a higher education institution. It is important for her to be in a position to move into a well-paid job after completing her degree as she does not want to be like her parents are now, always in debt:

A job that you can live off the money that you earn, 'cause if you spend your life just working to pay off debts or a mortgage, then you're not really earning any money to kind of live your life. If you don't have any time for yourself, which is what I've learnt from my parents 'cause they're doing it now. (June 2004)

A well-paid job was one where she would be earning in excess of £30,000. When asked whether her parents expected her to go to higher education, she says that there was some pressure although qualifies this by saying that it was a non-issue given that she always wanted to go to university anyway. Although going to university was not her preferred option in December 2003, by June 2004 going to university was now a given.

By age 40, Tina considered that she would have settled down:

Big house, big garden, nice car, sort of thing – just a comfortable environment to live in, with like husband, kids, whatever. (June 2004)

Because she would be in the language translating profession this would have taken her to a foreign country, probably France. Living abroad was something she said that she had always wanted to do anyway. She also hopes that she will be able to retire by age 40:

Hopefully as I work my way up through the company I work with, hopefully the pay cheques would get bigger and bigger, so I'd be keeping it all back, so that when I do get to that age I'd be able to think I've got enough to feed myself, feed my family and then pass on when I die. (June 2004)

Throughout Year 11 she is unrealistic, uncertain or vague about her future plans. Although she seems to have a clear vision of where she wishes to end up, this again is possibly unrealistic. But there is hope in her account, hope for a different future from that of her parents' life. However, the process of getting there is the part which does not appear to have been thought through in any detail.

### **Clyde**

At school Clyde wants to be a surveyor. His narrative for the future at this point in his life is an example of a very clearly mapped-out plan for the future with intentionality, foresight and thought for what is needed at every stage of his educational career. Throughout the three Year 11 interviews, he remained consistent in his intent on fulfilling this ambition.

At age 17, Clyde plans to be in the process of completing his AS levels in Business Studies, ICT and Media. He will also be working part time at the local Tesco's. It is important for Clyde to earn some money as he wants to be financially independent from his parents and not have to have to rely on them to provide funding for clothes, going out, etc. Staying on at college is important for Clyde as he wants to gain qualifications. He feels this is an important step to his future lifestyle:

Well, I reckon that if I want to have a good job, then I should have good qualifications telling someone that I can learn and understand quickly, and two years at college can give me rewards. A bad [job] to me would be low wage – sort of what I don't enjoy; whereas a good one would be ...I like it – I'd rather go to work than do something else ...and have fun, really. (June 2004)

His aim is to leave university and enter employment earning a wage that will give him the lifestyle he wants.

A low wage to me would be like £12000, 'cause that's £1000 a month then, and if you've got your own house, that's quite a lot, but most of the money would be gone so you can't afford sort of new clothes and whatever, whereas a high wage



to me, at seventeen or a bit later, I don't know ... would be ... twenty-something – the low twenties maybe, 'cause I'm quite young. (June 2004)

At age 20, he would be at university. He knows a little about this as his elder brother is currently attending university and he has conveyed to Clyde a very positive image of what it is like. He is interested in experiencing university as well as obtaining a degree:

To show off maybe! That you've got a good award or something! To have fun – my brother's had real good fun at university. He passed the course and that, but he still had a good time. He said it was a good experience. (June 2004)

He is also aware of how he can develop others skills that are marketable whilst studying for a degree and that this will help him get a job:

Even if I got a degree in something like Business and I went for a completely different job, it would still show the employer that I can work real hard for something that I want, so it would give me a step up over other people who didn't get a degree. (June 2004)

Clyde wants to become a surveyor so that he can enter the property market, both as an owner and working within the industry. The course he will be following at university will be directly relevant to achieving this. This ambition has come from his family who have made money from buying, sometimes developing and selling the houses they have lived in:

There's one [course] in Property Development that I might be interested in, but it all depends at the time. I haven't really made my mind up yet... I've moved quite a lot – I've moved to a lot of houses ... we've always sort of done them up and then – well, not done them up, just tarted them up – and then moved on, so I'm just interested in doing up properties what no-one wants and the selling them being a property that people would want, basically, and then making money out of it. (June 2004)

At age 40, Clyde will be;

... married, have a child and home. I'll have lots of houses that I rent; have a nice big home for my family; be worth more than a million; maybe have my own business. (June 2004)

Making money from property seemed to be a major driver for Clyde whilst he was in Year 11. He had seen how his parents had made money renovating homes and selling them on and is very keen to use this knowledge to his own benefit.

At age 40 he thinks he will still be working, although considers that once he owns several houses, the income provided through these means he may alter his way of living:

I'll probably still have a job or my own business – probably more likely to be a job until the mortgages are paid off of say four houses, and then I can just live off the rent of those four houses. (June 2004)

Although he later revises the number of houses required in order to maintain a good standard of living, it is the knowledge and understanding that he has in this field that makes his aspirations a credible one. Clyde reflects on whether things could be different when he reaches forty but dismisses it instantly.

I doubt I'll be in debt, 'cause I don't like being in debt. No, I reckon I'll be close to a million [pounds], if not a million or more. But it's forty – it's quite a long way. (June 2004)

Clyde's confidence comes having the full knowledge that he has parental backing both emotionally and financially to support his aspirations. His account fits in with Ball et al's first typology, an individual who is able to articulate a realistic future and who has clear views of what his future holds.

#### 4.2.2 Conclusion

What emerges from the above analysis of the futures imagined by my participants is that their hopes and plans for the future is by and large a matter of choosing a kind of life and lifestyle with which they felt comfortable. This in most cases meant staying within the bounds of familiarity by mirroring what they already knew. This is an issue that will be returned to in the next section. Here I want to turn my attention to considering the link between aspiration and lifestyle and, in particular, the role of higher education in achieving the sort of future life one envisages for oneself. Some of the lifestyles that the young people wanted for themselves did not recognise any benefit afforded to higher education whilst others did. Put another way, some of the young

people in my study had different (rather than low) aspirations that did not involve doing a degree to get there. And if the lifestyle they wanted for themselves in the future did not require a degree then going to university did not figure in their plans. For Tina this changed because her lifestyle plans changed.

Sen (1992, 1999) argues that resources, including educational resources, are only valuable to the extent that they enhance individual wellbeing. Wellbeing, in turn, he argues, stems from being free to choose and lead the life one values and has good reason to value. Considered from this perspective, the above analysis is not seen as necessary by some young people to achieve those things they value and in which they find meaning. (See Watts and Bridges, 2006 for an elaboration of this argument).

From Laura's and Clyde's perspective university education was both to be valued intrinsically for the broader experiences it presented whilst one was there and an instrumental value for what one could do with a degree once it had been obtained. But for Zane, Ryan and Luke the intrinsic and instrumental value of higher education remained unrecognised for either its academic or social manifestations as their chosen careers did not require them to have a degree. A degree would not give them more freedom to pursue the career they aspired to follow. But were they free to choose in a more informed way? This question is considered in the following section.

It is important to listen hard to what young people have to say and to take account of the diversity of lived lives and subjectivities. This diversity however is to a large extent the result of the social inequalities that impact upon experiences. It does not necessarily follow that some young people would choose higher education even if they could see beyond the constraints and barriers and be given a clearer understanding of its benefits. What if, after all possible steps have been taken, there remains a sector of the population that do not value (or see value in) what the educated (the more powerful who are responsible for the widening participation discourse) think they ought to value. This issue will be returned to later in the thesis.

#### 4.3 Section 4: Constrained and Informed Choices

I have shown in earlier chapters and in Section 1 of this chapter how successive UK governments' drive to expand access to higher education assumes that higher education is the desirable option and that it will benefit both the individual and wider society. I have also highlighted the assumption that low aspirations and low achievement by the individual learner present a barrier to increasing participation rates amongst under-

represented groups. But I have also demonstrated in earlier sections of this analysis chapter how some of my young participants wanted to leave school at the earliest possible opportunities and move into paid work. These young people showed little or no desire to enter higher education. I also evidence that, because of their previous achievements at school (or rather the lack of these) these same participants were on a trajectory that made higher education not only an improbable option but an impossibility at least in their immediate future.

The second section of this analysis began to posit the question that there might be an alternative reading of their low aspirations as far as school learning and school achievements were concerned. That alternative reading involved seeing the problem as, at least in part, located in the education system rather than putting the sole blame and responsibility on the individual learner. In the previous section I examined the aspirations they held in Year 11 for their future lives. It emerged from that analysis that whilst some had lofty aspirations others were more modest. It also emerged from a theoretical consideration of my data that there is a danger in putting too much store by what they say about their plans at this point in their lives because young people's imaginings of the future are themselves in transition. Their imagined futures are far from fixed and this was also inherent in previous studies (e.g. Atkins, 2009; Ball et al, 1999).

For only some of my participants there appeared to be a 'strategic link' (Ball et al, 1999, p 223) between their current lives and their imagined future lives. For others, their imagined futures could be deemed as unrealistic and containing flights of fantasy. This may have been because some had contemplated their future in a way that others had not yet done. This may be because they do not yet know what they are good at and are thus reluctant to commit themselves. Instead these young people may prefer to maintain a liminal state (Bettis, 1996). Most however embraced, rather than refused, the prospect of adulthood and an independent future. It is with that immediately preceding analysis in mind that I turn in this section to the theme of 'choice'. Again, as in previous sections, I introduce my analysis and discussion. The theory is that choice links to agency and structure.

#### 4.3.1 Choice, agency and structure

If the choices that Luke, Zane and Ryan were making (see the previous section) were deliberate then it is interesting to consider by drawing on theory why they kept on

making the 'wrong' choice, at least as far as the proponents of widening participation in higher education were concerned. Of theoretical relevance to this consideration is Ulrich Beck's concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity relates to reflection (Beck, 1992, 1994). Whilst at some points in his early work Beck's conceptualization of the biography seems close to Anthony Giddens's (1991) version of the self as a project, seemingly undertaken by relatively self-aware actors, Beck's reflexivity is not about reflection. On the contrary, Beck uses the term to describe how decisions in life frequently have to be made quickly and without guarantees and will be largely habitual. This argument is based on the notion that we have deeply internalized outlooks, experiences and beliefs that we acquire from our social environment and from our experiences of school. (See, for example, Reay and Ball, 1997 for a more detailed discussion of this point.)

Personal agency to overcome the constraints of the structural conditions of our lives is frequently associated with Beck's concepts of reflexivity and 'choice biography'. This is evident in the general approach in the literature which tends to use Beck's concept 'choice biography' to emphasise the part played by personal agency in shaping a given individual's biography. Those who apply these concepts to their data tend also to play down structural constraints (e.g. Brannen and Nilsen, 2007). Woodland (2009) however has argued that it is misleading to link Beck's concept 'choice biography' to personal responsibility.

According to Beck, reflexivity changes what seems normative and possible, when following a traditional route is no longer guaranteed or a probability. At this point, Beck argues, constraints begin to break down and new opportunities potentially arise. However he also argues that it is only under secure and predictable conditions that these new options can begin to function as choices. And as he also argues that predictability and security have been weakened in the process of detraditionalisation, what is presented as an option may not function as a choice. Put differently, according to Beck the opening up of possibilities does not signify choice – on the one hand opportunities are opened up but are closed down on the other hand. An example of this was evidence in Section 1 whereby Luke, Zane and Ryan had the WP door opened to them via the intervention programme and closed at the same time because this was not a realistic option for them, given their track record within the education system. Hence research has invariably found that the majority of young people have fairly traditional hopes and expectations (e.g. Smallwood and Jefferies, 2003; Wyn et al., 2008). In this respect the findings of my analysis so far do not mark a break with this tradition.

Beck's interest was in writing about the detraditionalisation of society and the emergence of self. Yet Beck's use of the term was intended to distinguish between 'normal' and 'choice' biographies. A 'normal' biography was described by Beck as one in which a young person follows a path to the future that is in keeping with family and cultural tradition. A 'choice' biography, on the other hand, was the one taken by those who choose to veer from this pathway by carving out an unconventional route to the future. The emphasis in a 'normal' biography is on linearity and predictability whereas the emphasis in a 'choice' biography is on personal construction and individual agency.

The relevance to the present analysis is that individualism, as opposed to collectivism, and detraditionalism are issues at the very heart of widening participation in higher education legislation. Normal (traditional) and choice biographies are therefore important conceptual tools in my analysis.

Also of relevance to the present analysis are two related conceptual tools - structure and agency. These two concepts tend to surface when considering choice biographies. The general approach amongst youth researchers is to stress the middle ground between agency and structure in preference to moving to either end of an assumed continuum. In Chapter 2 I presented a critical review of Karen Evans's concept 'bounded agency' which I argued she used to fill a middle ground between the agency of Beck, and Giddens and the structural determinism of Bourdieu and others. Beck's interest however was not between agency on the one hand and structure on the other and the tensions between the two. Rather his interest is in how processes emerge and work at many levels including individual biographies, institutions, and structures of society. Specifically he is concerned in his empirical work with how opportunities are opened and closed by this process.

Various models have been used by other researchers to frame and inform their analysis of the choices and imagined futures of young people with the intention of identifying patterns and points of significance in the young people's narratives. Hodkinson et al (1996), for example, and later Ball et al (1998) used a model of career decision-making. This model had points of relevance to my analysis. First Hodkinson et al argued from their evidence base that, unlike the policy literature's expectations that people make technical rational choices, young people did not make rational choices when deciding on a pathway to the future. But nor did they make irrational choices. Second, they found that choices are situated and 'constrained and enabled by their horizons for action' (p3). But these 'horizons' are dictated by a number of externally set factors. Not least amongst these, according to the researchers, is the economic climate

locally, nationally and internationally that influences the availability of jobs in the locality, and the family history of the young person in question which impacts on subjective perceptions of what is possible and what is probable.

Much of the idea concerning the impact of family traditions on subjectivity is captured in Bourdieu's concept 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977, 1986). Others have used the term 'educational inheritance' to describe the impact the family of origin has on what one perceives as possible (Edwards et al, 1989). Bourdieu's notions of habitus and cultural capital have been used by many others (e.g. Raey, 1998) to analyse sociologically the complex social and psychological processes underpinning students' decision-making practices. Bourdieu's conceptual tools can be used to help understand the processes of career choice decision-making in this study too.

A third point of relevance to my study that I take from Hodkinson and his colleagues is the fragility, instability, unpredictability and transitory nature of career decision-making. A fourth point is that decision-making is often brought about by turning points. These turning points, according to the researchers, may be structural such as exam results or chance happenings such as a family crisis or meeting someone who forces a rethink. Finally a fifth point of relevance is that all this decision-making is taking place in a 'negotiation space' where from time to time other aspects of young people's lives take precedence over career decision-making and contemplating their path to the future, such as relationships or leisure activities.

### **Luke**

Luke aspires to become an HGV driver. He shows an awareness that he will be unable to enter this profession until he turns 21 as HGV licences are not issued to individuals under this age.

I'll do any work 'til I'm twenty-one, 'cause I'm hoping to get a HGV licence so I can drive lorries, which I wouldn't mind doing anyway. (June 2004)

Luke is therefore considering undertaking any type of work until he reaches this age in order to have money. The reason he gives for this choice of future career is that it is what other members of his family do. Both his uncle and granddad are lorry drivers and this has given him an insight into this kind of work so he considers it to be something he would enjoy doing:

It runs in my family – my uncle and both my granddads are lorry drivers and I always go with them to work – it looks quite fun and it's good money. It's not really a hard job, so I think that would suit me quite well. (June 2004)

The appeal seems to be about the type of lifestyle that this work will bring.

If it was like haulage business you have to go to a quarry and pick up, say, bricks, and you have a drop-off point you take it to, unload it – that's why it's easy. (June 2004)

Luke reiterates that this job would be 'easy' and this appears to be a key attraction. It is not clear exactly what he means by 'easy' but it might be that he saw this as a job that was within his capabilities. He does not see higher education as having any relevance in this plan.

It depends on how well I do in post-sixteen – if I've got a job offered after post-sixteen, like a steady job or something, then ... 'cause I'll be like eighteen when I leave school ... I'll be nearly nineteen ... so I think if I had just two years of working normally, if I didn't go to university, I could just start when I'm twenty-one getting my HGV licence and my Crane licence. (June 2004)

He is well informed about the potential that becoming an HGV driver has for earning extra money;

My uncle – he's a HGV driver – he's on £7.50 an hour now, and if you stay away at night as well you get an extra £50. (June 2004)

Luke is making an informed self-aware choice based on information he has acquired through his extended family. This is the obvious choice for him as it 'runs in the family'. In the absence of a father figure within his home, his uncle and grandfather are the role models for a family tradition.

### **Zane**

Zane is another individual who is keen to follow in the footsteps of a family member. Zane wanted to become a chef which was what his uncle did and he had done work experience at his uncle's restaurant:

Cause I've worked with my uncle and that's how it's led me on to it [becoming a chef]. (June 2004)



The insights and experience he had obtained from time spent at his uncle's restaurant has given Zane an informed view of what working within the profession will be like. Zane says he has considered other manual jobs such as working in the mechanics industry but would rather be a chef because he has had first-hand experience of this.

## **Ryan**

Ryan's choice of future career as a fireman is based largely on the kind of lifestyle he would like to have:

It is just, well, I don't know really, but I thought I don't want to sit in an office all day, but I want to go out and do something active, so I might as well help people whilst I am doing it. So I thought fireman would be something I would like to do. (December 2003)

He considers that an active outdoor environment is the one he would be most comfortable with. He says he developed an interest in the profession from an early age through watching a popular children's television programme:

Since I was like six or seven, watching *Fireman Sam!* I just started thinking about it, when people ask you what you want to be when you are older, and that is what I have always said. (December 2003)

He is aware that he cannot enter the fire service until he is eighteen so sees post-16 education as an interim possibility. Higher education is still a possibility but only if he does not get into the fire service:

I want to go to college, but I am still not sure about going to university. Because I want to be a fireman, but if for some reason I can't be a fireman I will go to university to study for things and like try and do something else. (December 2003)

## **Laura**

Laura wants to be a film director. Laura explains what has influenced her:

I've seen so many big films and that ... and at the end when someone's watching a film, and then it flashes up 'Director ...' and I think, 'Yeah, he managed to create that,' and that's like absolutely amazing, and if you can create something which loads of people are going to really enjoy, it's ... everyone says, 'Oh, making films – it's not something that people need,' but people do need to

relax and that, so if you're helping people to do that, and you're giving them something – even if it only makes them happy for an hour or so, that's got to be worth it still. (June 2004)

Watching films is a hobby and this is what has led her to this choice of career.

### **Jenny**

After dabbling with the idea of becoming an amateur wrestler (interview 1, December 2003), Jenny has changed her mind and now wants to enter the RAF and become a Physical Training Instructor. She has opted to study Psychology, Leisure & Recreation and Biology at A-Level as she feels these subjects will help her realise her career choice:

Go into the RAF and do PTI – like Physical Training Instructor. And I thought, well, PE, because of the physical side of it and because you have like a lot of the theory side so you know how the body works; and Psychology is like knowing how the brain works so you'll know how people think, and then Leisure & Recreation – that's like recreation and stuff – and then Biology because it will help with knowing how the body works and stuff. So I've kind of done it so they all link in. (June 2004)

Her choice of career has been influenced by her brother's choice of career. He has already joined the RAF and enjoys the lifestyle.

I wanted to do something maybe like a PE teacher, or working in a leisure centre – something with sports or in the leisure industry – and then I thought, 'Well, I don't really want to be a teacher, 'cause I don't want to go to university,' – and my brother's in the RAF and he says he really enjoys it, so I looked into the RAF, like all the different careers, and PTI just kind of jumped out at me – I thought it looked really good. (June 2004)

Jenny has ruled out higher education because of the financial costs involved:

I don't want to get into loads of debt and have loads of student loans and stuff. That's kind of scary, 'cause they [graduates] leave with like ten grand's worth of loans – well I think that's really scary, having to pay all that off. (June 2004)

She says she got this view of the costs of higher education from listening to her cousin's account of life as a higher education student and from the 'telly'.

She's [cousin] left [university], and her fiancé as well, and ... just like stuff you hear, as well, on the telly – things like that. It just really scares me, 'cause ... I

dunno ... my mum's really rubbed off on me, 'cause she's never been in debt, and because she's never had any problems, I think, 'Well, why should I have any problems if she's never had them?' (June 2004)

Would she consider higher education as an option if fees were abolished?

I'd probably go. Because I don't have to pay to do my A-levels, so that's why I'm doing them. I probably would do them anyway ... (June 2004)

#### 4.3.2 Conclusion

By drawing on the experiences of my participants I have demonstrated that: choices about one's future are based on life-time patterns; they are deep rooted in families, family histories and traditions; choices are based on the familiar, i.e. choices were made from within the habitus of the young people; real choices need to be separated from opportunities (in many respects the widening participation intervention in practice opened and closed an opportunity in one go - it was a wrongly timed strategy (and perhaps a wrong strategy) for its target group). I have elaborated on these points below.

It is evident from the above analysis that choices are made on trajectories. What I mean by this is that choices are dependent on lifetime patterns rather than a given individual simply weighing up the costs and benefits of the higher education option as though they were choosing to buy a breakfast cereal from a range available on a supermarket shelf. Thus is presented a more complex picture than belies the simplicity of the widening participation intervention programme that underpins this thesis and other similar interventions and outreach activities thought up by higher education establishments to demonstrate that they are allocating resources to the 'fair access' issue.

A second and related point I want to make from the evidence is that choice is about choosing a lifestyle that is in keeping with which one is already familiar. Being at home in one's social surroundings is an important part of choosing a lifestyle. In other words, people oscillate towards lifestyles with which they feel familiar and reject ones with which they are unfamiliar to avoid feeling socially out of place (cf Alheit, 1999). Alheit found that some of those who had climbed the ladder from disadvantaged beginnings felt socially out of place in their new surroundings. 'They had come to realise that distinction is something beyond mere titles. Acquiring the title has by no means provided an "entry ticket" to the "better society" - habitus - being at home (or not) in

your surroundings.’ (p 71).

In sum, the evidence presented in this section shows how the decisions taken by the young people in my study were not un-thought through or ill-informed but they were based on a lack of direction, guidance and knowledge. I have demonstrated through drawing on the experiences of my participants how choices are deeply rooted in families and family histories and traditions. Where families are strong they have the experience and can advise. But not all my participants were able to rely on their family members for advice and guidance.

Widening participation initiatives such as the one under consideration in this thesis are aimed at raising the desire to participate amongst targeted pupils beyond compulsory education and into higher education. The message is that higher education is desirable and attainable for all in a way that decontextualises and individualises the problem. Yet the data and its analysis presented in this section and previous sections has clearly demonstrated that the problem is neither a matter of choice for the individual nor is it devoid of a structural context and social milieu. The evidence presented above shows that whether or not a goal is achieved depends much less on the efforts of the individuals acting and much more on the conditions in which they act. The analysis of my data supports the view found by others that whilst there is a certain amount of fluidity in the pathways possible the influence of social class and locality remains strong as far as real choices (as opposed to opportunities) are concerned (Bates & Riseborough, 1993; Chisholm & Hurrelman, 1996; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

#### 4.4 Advice and guidance

Before turning to the final section of my analysis chapter I want to briefly consider whether the widening participation intervention programme helped overcome structural constraints. The careers guidance that was available via the school will be considered in the next section as participants reflect on the value of advice given for their future lives.

As Section 1 explained, the widening participation programme began in Year 9 and ran through to Year 11. The commencement of the programme in Year 9 was intended to catch the students at the juncture where they would be selecting their GCSE subject options. In reality, the programme commenced too late in the Year 9 academic year for it to have any impact on the participants’ lives as they had already made their option choices. The first series of sessions were aimed at getting to know the students, their

likes, dislikes, academic strengths and weaknesses, with a view to supporting them to make good decisions. But by the time this had occurred, students had already selected their options and were thus well on their way to dropping subjects which they did not wish to pursue post-Year 9. Regardless of how much their student mentor wished to influence these choices, it would be too late at this stage for the student to approach the school and get these altered.

Moreover, it is also questionable how much influence a student mentor would have had over the participants they had only recently met. The curriculum is designed so that students gear up towards their GCSE options throughout key stage 3 (Years 7-9). The students themselves tend to use a vast array of criteria whilst making their selection. These can range from personal preferences, i.e. selecting subjects they like doing, to decisions based on academic achievement. Understanding these complex decisions in the space of several visits and making sensible suggestions which participants would have valued would be a very ambitious aim.

By the time participants reached Year 11, they would have worked with their student mentor for approximately two years. It would be hoped that by this time the relationship between mentor and mentee would be meaningful to the extent that there would be some trust built up to talk about options post-16, reflecting on the mentor's own experiences. However, in the majority of cases, the mentor's experiences of progression from Year 11 to post-16 education and in particular, the social spaces in which option decisions were taken, were not comparable to the issues encountered by the mentees. Put another way, there was a mismatch between the thought process and decision-making environment that one part of this relationship had undergone with what the other was facing. Student mentors would be able to demonstrate empathy but it would be evident that their experiences differed from those that the participants were currently undergoing. So there was a lack of fit. Besides, as suggested above, decisions about mentee's futures in terms of post-16 subject choices and how these would impinge on career paths had already been taken in Year 9 so there would be little room for major changes at this stage.

#### 4.5 Section 5: Life after Year 11

In this final section I focus on what happened next in the lives of the young people I had interviewed when they were in Year 11 in 2003/4. My main interest in tracking my

participants longitudinally was to find out what had happened in their lives during the period from when they had left Year 11 until now.

Here I am particularly interested in using the narratives of their lives beyond Year 11 to reflect on the value of participation in higher education for those who participated and also the value of non-participation for those who did not choose this route to the future (Watts and Bridges, 2006). Before outlining what actually happened next to those I caught up with later on, I introduce the theoretical framework I shall be using to reflect on the longitudinal data I collected about their lives between ages 15 and 24.

#### 4.5.1 Youth transitions and emerging adulthood

Prior to the 1980s youth transitions typically referred to the linear move from school to work (Ashton & Field, 1976; Willis, 1977). After the collapse of the youth labour market during the 1980s this was no longer the norm. (See Section 4 for a more detailed discussion.) However, some researchers such as Stokes and Wyn (2007) feel that more complex contemporary transitions are unnecessarily compared to previous normative transitional patterns and that this leads to ‘mainly negative, assessments of contemporary youth transitions’ (p. 497). While the transition from education to work may be protracted nowadays in comparison to an earlier time (Coles, 1995), theory on post-16 transitions acknowledges their relational and multi-faceted nature. Yet this theorising is often seemingly contradictory with young people in transition seen as arrested (Coté, 2000), but also accelerated (Bynner, 2005).

How young people see themselves as they move through the period of their lives from being at school and dependent to being an independent adult is of relevance to the current discussion. Arnett (2000) proposed a new theory of development from late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25. He called this a period of ‘emerging adulthood’ and argued that it was neither adolescence nor young adulthood but was theoretically and empirically distinct from them both:

Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and world views. Emerging adulthood is a time of life when many directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any period of the life course. (p 469)

For Arnett this was a 'betwixt and between' stage in which young people saw themselves neither as adolescents nor entirely as adults. Although Arnett treated his theory of development as a stage theory, he conceded that this stage of exploration might under certain conditions be curtailed by structural and cultural influences. This was because, like all developmental periods, it was culturally constructed and as such was not necessarily universally applicable.

Bynner's (2005) critique of Arnett's work was based on his claim that this period was to be recognised as a distinct developmental period. Whilst Bynner accepted that in the developed societies education is ending significantly later for a larger proportion of young people and the age of marriage and parenthood is becoming later and later, he put this down to a period effect rather than a developmental issue. Bynner argued that there is no reason why things might be different in the future just as they had been different in the past. For example, whilst it was now the more educated and the more affluent middle and upper social groups that were delaying marriage and parenthood, in the past it was the other way around with the upper social classes moving into marriage and parenthood early and the lower (their servants) delaying marriage.

#### 4.5.2 Policy context

While the transition from school to work is becoming less and less likely at 16 (Roberts, 1993), young people may currently enter a range of post-16 destinations. But in 2015 young people will be expected to remain in education or training until they are 18 years of age. Nevertheless, Shildrick and MacDonald (2006) note that in times of high youth unemployment, as has been the case since 2008, young people are more likely to remain in education post-16. My participants however had made their post-16 transitions some years earlier in 2004. One policy change however that almost certainly had a bearing on their post-16 destinations was the introduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme in 2004.

The age group from which I drew my participants was the first cohort group of students to benefit from the introduction of EMAs. This was a financial scheme that was intended to act as an incentive to keep young people from low-earning backgrounds in education or training beyond their sixteenth birthday. It was aimed at students and those undertaking unpaid work-based learning throughout the UK aged between sixteen and nineteen whose parents had a certain level of taxable income. Those eligible had to be

doing at least 12 hours of guided learning on further education courses in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges or Further Education colleges. This included a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications. The scheme ran from 2004 but closed to new applicants on 1 January 2011.

#### 4.5.3 Tracking my participants beyond Year 11

When my participants were in Year 11 in 2003/4 they were aged 15/16. I was able to track some of them again in March 2008 when they were aged 21, and again in March 2010 when they were 23. I finally caught up with some of them in April this year (2011) when they were 24. I only carried out an in-depth interview with those I caught up with in March 2010. Even in these days of Facebook and Twitter, I was unable to find Matt at any of these three time points. Neither was any of my other participants able to shed light on where he was and what had happened to him.

#### Those participants the school had deemed eligible

##### **Zane**

##### *March 2008 – Age 21*

At 21 Zane was working for a roofing company and had been doing so for the previous three years. He told me how after he had left school at 16 he had joined an Entry to Employment course that was designed to facilitate his transition between school and the employment sector. He received an EMA and the course was centrally funded. Many of his Year 11 friends also attended.

After this he joined a landscape gardening company where he worked for four months. But he felt he was not earning enough money and so moved to the construction industry where he stayed for six months. He found this job after speaking to a neighbour who owned the company. He then joined the roofing company. This was the company for which he had been working for the past three years. At this time he was planning on working in this company long-term.

He was still living in the same house as he had been when he was in Year 11. However the make-up of the home had changed. His father has moved out and his mother has moved back in along with her new partner, to look after Zane's young brother. It also transpires that his mother's new partner is also the boss of the roofing



company where Zane is employed. So Zane is sharing a home with his boss. Zane would like to move out but cannot afford to. He would like to move in with his girlfriend whom he has been seeing for the past year. She is aged 35 and has two children from a previous relationship.

*March 2010 – Age 23*

At 23 Zane's life had undergone some major changes at work and at home since we had last spoken. He was now working for a company specializing in fitting cabinet door installations and loft conversions throughout the South West. His mother's relationship has broken down and his mother, his father and younger brother are now living together in Zane's original family home. But his father is unhappy and plans to move out and in with Zane's older brother.

His relationship the 35-year-old woman (who was now 37) had developed into a serious relationship and he had moved out of the family home to live with her a year prior to this interview. He was now living with her and her two children aged 12 and 16. He describes how his relationship with each of the children is different:

Obviously the older one he's a bit older and sees me a bit of a mate rather than his mum's boyfriend, the younger one looks up to me a bit more as a step dad if you know what I mean.

Zane also wants children of his own but is aware that this might be difficult with his current partner because of her age. On this point he says that they have come to a practical understanding:

She's told me if she couldn't [have children] and it wasn't down to me we would have to split up, that not in a, it would not be a horrible split up, we would still stay friends, get on, maybe I could have them with someone else then move back with her.

As regards his financial responsibilities to his new family, Zane says:

I do a bit with the bills, like the kids really, obviously they are not mine, it's like bits you can't really expect me to be contributing really, although I do give them money and that and buy them things.

Zane's Year 11 aspirations to become a chef had, it seems, been put aside. Reflecting on this at age 23, he says that he had considered the number of hours chefs had to put

into the job and thought that he would much prefer a 9-5 job. He also reflected on his life when he had been 17. At that point, Zane had just begun to work for the roofing company referred to above. He wanted to enrol on a roofing course at a local college in order to gain some further qualifications. Zane explains that the course had been cancelled and he therefore missed out on this training opportunity.

Yeah um, that was all signed up to go, went to where you have to sign up um er, and they said they'd um get me a date like when I had to start this, was going to be in Plompton the Blue Swish College site for it, because of the experience I had on roofing normally it's a two-year course they were putting me straight to one-year course and er, we rang up and said ah, when's the starting date and they said oh, we've cancelled it and 'cause after 16 you have to pay to go college then but at the time I had only just turned 17 they would backdate it a couple of weeks so I didn't have to pay then it all fell through so I didn't end up doing that...

Zane described how he felt annoyed by the let down:

Annoyed really because it would have been nice to have some papers so I could actually do some work for me got the certificates but couldn't do much about it really.

In terms of re-engaging with the education process, he states that he would have done so at an earlier age but instead now wishes to earn an income.

...yeah if I wanted to do anything [education courses] I would have done it when I was young over and done with but don't particularly want to do any of it now, want to work, earn some money, pay some bills, nothing else really.

With regards his future aspirations, at 23 Zane envisaged that at age 40 he would still be in his current relationship but would now have two children of his own with his partner in addition to the two within the current family set-up. His employment, although uncertain what this would be, would be paying him £30,000. This is the same as what he considered he would be earning at 40 during his Year 11 interviews.

#### *March 2011 – Age 24*

Zane is still working for a company specializing in fitting units and loft conversions in the South West. Zane has worked for this company for the last few years and is happy with his current career. He says he does not have any further ambitions to further his training or educational development. He is content at work.

He is still living with the same partner and her two children, but they also now have a baby of their own. Having just become a dad, he is really happy with the way his life is working out and is now focused on providing support towards his newly born child. There are currently no major plans for any changes in Zane's life.

Probably because he is now settled within a new family set-up he made no reference to the comings and goings in his family of origin.

## **Luke**

*March 2008 – Age 21*

I was unable to track Luke down at this point.

*March 2010 – Age 23*

At 23 Luke was still living at home and in the same town as he had been in Year 11. At this point he was working as an assistant groundsman at a school. He told me about what happened in the intermediate years between school and 2010.

He had opted to stay on post-16 and completed a year of AS levels in Media Studies, Leisure and Tourism, and Engineering. He had received an EMA. He chose these subjects as he wanted to continue studying practical (vocational) studies rather than following an academic pathway. Luke's decision to study these subjects was based predominantly on recommendations from his peers and he said that he decided to take Leisure and Tourism just for the 'sake' of taking another subject. He seemed to have difficulty recalling the precise details at this point. He thinks that he had completed the full year though was not totally certain of this and was unsure what type of qualifications he gained from this period of post-16 studies.

He then moved to Bicton College where he undertook a one-year course in Horticulture followed by a further half year of study in Arboriculture (tree surgery). His interests in horticulture emerged after a summer job at a local supermarket doing gardening shortly after completing his AS levels. He got this job, he said, via local connections and primarily through his uncle who was already working for the supermarket.

He does not have happy memories of his school days:

...I never really enjoyed school and the opportunity came up to do something hands-on. It was good to sort of get out and do practical work rather than being stuck in a classroom really...

And reflecting on the reasons why he had not proceeded on to higher education, he says:

...it's like when I left school, things slotted into place and it [University] kind of just got forgotten about. I'd say really it wasn't, I just didn't put any more thought to it, after school it's just kind of a case of you know, got my job, went from there and just kind of got, I don't know, I'm kind of glad I did in a way because I don't know, I quite like the uni lifestyle but the uni sort of work and stuff wouldn't appeal to me. I don't think [so,] listening to friends that have gone.

Whilst undertaking the course at Bicton he was involved in some relevant work experience at a local private school which happened to have a vacancy as an assistant groundsman. He submitted an application and was very happy to gain employment within this establishment. Luke has worked as an assistant groundsman since then and describes himself as very happy in his current employment. He views this as a 'job for life'. He is content to remain living in the same town and working in his current employment for the foreseeable future.

...yeah probably, to be honest with you I can see myself in the same job, I think I have a job for life where I am, um don't know, would like to have my own place in five or ten years' time, don't plan to be living at home then but I can't, I don't know, can't see my life changing that much as long as I'm happy, you know got my friends around me, family, its fine, I can't really see myself moving out of Sunnyside to be honest with you.

What about his HGV licence and the aspiration that he had in Year 11 to become a HGV driver? Luke still thinks of the possibility of entering the HGV sector. He said he had thought about it again recently, as a result of what he described as a 'predicament' that arose in his current employment. However, he is quick to close these doors again as he recognises that it would require a major financial investment which he appears not to want to do.

It has crossed my mind recently, actually I was sort of in a predicament in my job, I thought I might like a change and I did enquire about doing that... the only reason I haven't continued through to doing it is the money side of it, it's like expensive to get your licence, it's about £1000 to get your licence so it's quite a money-grabbing thing really, but yeah, quite interesting.

Financial issues kept resurfacing during our conversation. He has looked at gaining further vocational qualifications through his current employment but is aware that there may be financial constraints that will prevent him from pursuing this and his future career path may be directed in part by funding provision from his current employer.

I have actually been sent on to carry on to do some more of my chainsaw work, um, at the end of this year so they, so like they've said if we get any opportunities arise as long as it fits into any budgetary issues, is that I can go off and do my courses and stuff so they're quite good with that sort of thing.

*March 2011 – Age 24*

Despite having had initial contact via a social networking site in 2010, Luke has now removed himself from the site and was unreachable.

## **Ryan**

*March 2008 – Age 21*

At 21 Ryan was preparing to go travelling for a year. He had remained in education and attended his local sixth form. He studied Biology, Physical Education and Computing at AS level and continued through to the A-Level stage. He obtained two Ds and an E, and then decided to get a job at the local Tesco store for the time being. He was planning on leaving the UK and travelling for at least six months. He was unsure what he would do upon his return.

*March 2010 – Age 23*

I was unable to track Ryan down.

*March 2011 – Age 24*

Further attempts were made to contact Ryan at this point but these did not prove successful either.

## Non-traditional students

## **Jenny**

*March 2008 – Age 20*

Despite various attempts, I was unable to contact Jenny at this point.

*March 2010 – Age 22*

When I eventually caught up with Jenny she was studying Sports Rehabilitation at St. Mary's, Twickenham. Jenny explains how she had changed her path twice. Initially she had continued her education post-16 at her local community college.

Jenny told me that she had had to adapt her aspirations after having done her GCSEs. She took a decision at the time that she was not particularly suited to following the academic route and decided after her first year of post-16 education to drop out of her local community college. Jenny explains the reasoning behind this decision to drop out of education:

I had been told by my careers advisor at school, ummm, she said what do you want to do, I said I wanted to do physiotherapy, she said what are your predicted grades at AS level, I said oh, Cs and Bs, she said with those grades you are never going to be able to do therapy so you should rethink what you want to do.

So following her AS levels results which were as predicted, Jenny dropped out of college and got a job life-guarding at two local swimming centres. After eight months working as a lifeguard, she began to get bored and sought other options. She discovered that another college would take her in with the grades she had obtained:

...when I read up about the BTEC, I actually did [realise] as soon as I read up about what it was like, [this was] what I want to do because it covers so many different areas to the sporting industry and I was, like, thinking if I do that, it will give me an insight to what I actually want to do as a career because it will give me a very brief overview of a number of jobs that are available and I can sort of go from there, of what I enjoy and what I don't enjoy.

When she had completed this BTEC course, she began looking at courses post-18. Jenny describes how she came to the decision that she wanted to further her studies in Sports into higher education;

...because I knew the career that I wanted to do, I always thought about doing physiotherapy, umm, and I knew to get there you had to have A levels, you had to have a degree you can't do it any other way, you have to have a degree to do physio, um, but then I started to look into it a bit more and I didn't want to do physiotherapy, I wanted to do the sports physio degree hence I found Sports Rehabilitation, and I knew, and to be a sports rehabilitator I had to go to Uni, like I knew to get there I had to do the college thing first to then get on to the Uni... (January 2010)

Jenny sought information from websites, and with the help of staff within the college she investigated various courses at different higher education institutions. She succeeded in gaining a place at St Mary's.

*March 2011 – Age 23*

Jenny was coming up towards the completion of her degree course at St. Mary's. She was optimistic that her graduation was timely given the imminent arrival of the Olympic Games in London in 2012. She was hopeful that new opportunities would arise from this that might come her way. Her horizons had broadened since we last spoke two years ago and she was now looking at opportunities that may arise nationally and internationally. Attending higher education had provided her with a clearer understanding of the job market.

### **Chris**

*March 2008 – Age 21*

At 21 Chris was in his final year of a Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies course at Cardiff University. After Year 11 he had proceeded on to sixth-form college and obtained decent A-Level grades which had been enough to gain a place on a BA (Hons) at Cardiff. He was uncertain about his future and was unsure what career path he would be taking.

*March 2010 – Age 23*

I was unable to find Chris at this point.

*March 2011 – Age 24*

Further attempts were made to contact him but these proved fruitless.

### **Matt**

*March 2008 – Age 21*

Matt was unreachable post-16. None of the other participants remained in contact with Matt after Year 11 and his contact details appeared to have changed. Searches on social networking sites did not provide any information as to his whereabouts.

*March 2010 – Age 23*

No contact with Matt.

*March 2011 – Age 24*

No contact with Matt.

### Traditional students

#### **Laura**

*March 2008 – Age 21*

Despite numerous attempts to try to get in touch with Laura, I was unable to reach her at this point.

*March 2010 – Age 23*

Many attempts were made to find Laura via other participants but this proved futile. Eventually, following numerous searches, I was able to find Laura using a social networking site. Laura was now 23 and in her third year of studying Media Production at Lincoln University. She had become actively involved in student politics within her institution, initially taking up a volunteer position within her students' union. At the time of this interview, Laura was standing for election for a paid sabbatical position following her graduation the following June (2010). Although student politics was a recent interest, she has few reservations about her commitment.

It completely threw me, I absolutely adore politics, um, I didn't realise till I came to Uni that I love politics, I actually found out what I want to do for the rest of my life.

Laura described her life between when we last met and her entering university. She had left Sunnyside after taking her GCSEs and went to live with her mother and father at her new home approximately 100 miles away from Sunnyside. She enrolled at a college half way between both towns and began courses in AS Levels. However, shortly after beginning these courses, she explains how she decided to change the type of course she was undergoing and enrolled on a BTEC in Media:

Well um, um, I was doing AS Levels which were quite academic and then talking to quite a few people, um, and thinking about my interests, I thought I wanted to go into films, into film production, be a director or producer so, um,



obviously at AS Level they were actually a lot more academic than they are practical so I wanted to find a course that was more practical so I could have a hands-on skill as opposed to being able to write about making films, um, and that's why I chose Media Production because you actually get to produce the Media there in them as opposed to sort of, um, working out of books. I thought I would be better off, er, going into the Media Industry having practical experience of saying actually I have experience of using a camera, rather than actually I know the theory of how to use a camera.

Having completed her BTEC, Laura decided to apply to several higher education institutions and gained a place to further her ambitions to study Media Production. But before starting she decided to take a gap year and made a further decision to return to the college, and this time take some AS Levels. She did not need to take these courses as she had already gained a place at a higher education institution but she was interested in returning, primarily explaining that she missed her peers, though as a secondary issue she appears determined to gain AS Levels and gain As across the board in all her chosen subjects. She also describes how following this particular pathway would be something that her 'mother and father would approve of'.

Laura sees her move to higher education as a positive move:

I think that at some point you have to stop relying on mummy and daddy and I think, um, being able to put a physical distance between you is a good way to start, like almost an emotional distance between you because I know people that, they go far away but they still ring home every day, but I didn't want to be the person like that, in fairness it's quite important to me in being my own person and being able to be far away, so my parents can't come and visit me was a good way of doing that.

At the time of conducting this interview, Laura was looking ahead to her future options and contemplating a move into politics. Her life plans had now shifted from the film/movie industry into politics and this interest developed primarily whilst at university. As for her future, she now looked towards working with local members of parliament, remaining in her current location, and eventually fully engaging in the political arena by becoming an MP. The timing of the interview may have influenced this. The interview took place in the run up to the 2010 General Election and Laura talked about the election with considerable excitement.

*March 2011 – Age 24*

Laura had not been elected to the paid sabbatical position she talked about when I had interviewed her the year before. After graduating from Lincoln University she moved

back to Hampshire. (Hampshire had been her early childhood home.) She sought employment via an agency and got a job collecting royalties for music composers, writers and music publishers. This was as a (full time) job rather than a career move.

## **Clyde**

### *March 2008 – Age 20*

At age 20, Clyde was undertaking an undergraduate course in Property Development and Quantity Surveying at Portsmouth University. He explained how having left school at 16, he proceeded on to college where he took A-Levels in Business Studies, ICT, and Media, and achieved two Bs and a C. He said that he had been fed-up with education by this time and so decided to take a gap year as he did not want to go to university just yet. He went travelling to Australia and then spent some time skiing in France before returning to the UK. He got a job as a classroom assistant at his mother's school for the remainder of the academic year, filling the time before going to university and earning some income for around 4/5 months. He explains that he selected Portsmouth University as it was the only place that he could find this particular course. There is however another connection to Portsmouth – his parents had lived nearby in the past and he had some vague recollections of the area, providing some kind of association.

He was still looking forward to developing his own business and wished to return to Devon to further his career once he had completed his degree.

### *March 2010 – Age 22*

At age twenty-two, Clyde was in his final year of his course in Property Development and Quantity Surveying at Portsmouth University. In line with his Year 11 plans, Clyde's future plans at this point included working within a property surveying company based close to his home in Devon. He describes how after his first year of studies, he wrote letters to all the local property surveying companies around Sunnyside town requesting an opportunity to carry out some work experience or paid work over the summer holidays. This produced results and provided him with access to a local company with which he has maintained links over the course of his degree. He is currently discussing future employment with this company and is optimistic that a more long-term position will arise:

...hopefully they are going to employ me for a minimum of two years so I can fully qualify as a quantity surveyor, um, and then hopefully from then on maybe save some money and, um, start doing property development.

When asked about his fallback options should his current discussions with the company falter, Clyde appears slightly taken aback by this question and has not given much thought to a 'plan B'.

Oh plan B, er, I haven't got one really, I'm hoping I will get a job otherwise I will have to have a look around, there is not that many jobs out there at the moment, um, so I can officially say I haven't got a plan B. ... All I can say is look, er, I am one of these people that once they have their mind set on doing something then I am going to get there eventually.

#### *March 2011 – Age 23*

After having graduated from Portsmouth University, Clyde went travelling to Thailand for a month. By this time he already knew that he had secured employment with a large construction company in Devon (Rok). He worked at Rok for four months until the company went into administration in late 2010 and he became unemployed. He was successful in seeking employment with an alternative construction company based in Plymouth where he was based for a week before another construction company offered him a position as an assistant quantity survey based at an old project he had been working on whilst with Rok. He had worked for this new company since the end of February.

Since graduating in June 2010, Clyde states that he has been trying to settle down and get himself stuck in to his new career as a quantity surveyor. He is focused firmly on his career and is looking at establishing himself within the sector as a key figure. He is still living at home with his parents although he claims that he is 'hoping to jump onto the property ladder' in the next few months. Clyde states that he is trying to get a mortgage in order to enter the property market although getting a mortgage is proving difficult. He is hoping that he will be able to get one jointly with his girlfriend very soon. He has no immediate plans to further his education/training as he feels that he wishes to establish himself within the sector first.

#### **Tina**

#### *March 2008 – Age 20*

At 20 Tina was working for a bank in a branch based in a city approximately 15 miles away from her home town. She explained how she achieved two As, five Bs and two Cs at GCSE, and then took French, Psychology, Computer Science and Health & Social Care, where she got a C and two D's but failed computer science. She thought that this was as a result of spending too much time 'hanging out with her friends' instead of doing academic work. She had ruled out going on to university as it was too expensive. She started working for a different bank although her boss was not treating her very well. She then changed banks and is now happy in the new bank. She has left home and is living with her boyfriend.

*March 2010 – Age 22*

At 22 Tina is still working for the same bank but has gained promotion. She initially joined the bank as a cashier but more recently has been promoted to branch manager in her home town. She has broken up with her boyfriend of four years and moved back into the family home with her brother and parents. Her father has recently suffered serious illness and as a result has left his employment. This makes Tina the only person within the household earning an income. This income is, she says, providing for the mortgage repayments for the house and her family is relying on her to continue living at home. Tina is determined to make her banking career a success. Her determination appears to arise through her desire not to replicate the financial struggle that she is now witnessing at home and apparently has also witnessed in the past:

I have always been really focused, I have never really known what I wanted to do but I have always known that once I get my teeth into something, I work as damned hard as I can to get to where I want to be, and after seeing my mum and dad struggle pretty much my entire life with money just trying to bring us up in a safe and sound environment, I want to be able to do that later in life, I don't want to have to struggle like my parents did so I have always been very career-focused and very set on getting the very best out of me as possible, so I now have a career in mind and I'm working towards it. (January 2010)

Tina has sought to gain relevant qualifications whilst in her current employment which she believes will enable her to further pursue her career. These include enrolling on a junior auditor's course, and undertaking an Open University course in French which she believes will enable her to move abroad and further her progression within the bank. She still holds aspirations to move abroad and lead a life away from the UK although at present has remained local within her home environment which she attributes to life

events which have resulted in her family having to rely on her financial and emotional support.

Tina reflected on her life post-school. She described how she spent two years after her GCSE examinations at her sixth form college, firstly taking several AS Levels in Social Care, Computer Science, Psychology and French. Having achieved her AS Levels, she then moved on and did an A-Level in Psychology during her last year at the college. She explained that she thinks she 'slacked off' a little during her sixth form and underperformed which led her to obtain C and D grades, and she attributes this to not having any aspirations to continue her education post A-Levels and instead wanted to go straight into employment.

Well my grades weren't that great because when I was at college I kind of slacked off work a bit, I averaged C and D grades whereas before I was getting straight As. My time at college was not great but I never wanted to go to university, it never appealed to me at all, I was going to go straight into work.

Tina indicates that she was never really thinking about higher education as an option and instead was going straight into employment. She provides an insight into the reasons for this:

It's [university] something that never really appealed to me, no-one from my family ever went to university, and watching friends go through the whole process, having to apply, do personal statements and then see other friends who got left behind, and because of going to university I didn't want to spend the rest of my life paying off three years and probably getting a degree I will never actually use.

Whilst reflecting on the higher education option, Tina describes how she felt pressured into following that particular path as it was presented at school as the only pathway which would result in success:

I do remember wanting to go to university for a very short time but it was mainly for that was the done thing, at the time everyone was going to university and if you wasn't going to university it was frowned upon and all sorts, and I remember having a lot of pressure from my teachers at the time as some of them were quite nasty about it as well, and I thought it was the done thing and that I had to go to uni.

Tina describes a period during school when those who did not want to proceed on to higher education were considered 'stupid' and thus felt bullied by staff members to have to think about studying for a degree.

#### *March 2011 – Age 23*

When I last caught up with Tina earlier this year, she was still employed by the bank but had just taken six months' leave of absence to look after her mother who had been diagnosed with Metastatic Breast Cancer. Tina explains that her mother's treatment was so aggressive that she had to stop working for six months in order to be able to support her mother during this period. Despite still officially employed by Santander, she says that she is now not enjoying her work at all and is actively seeking another job so as not to return to Santander once her mother completes her treatment and is well enough for Tina to resume full-time work.

Tina talks about moving out of the family home by the end of the year (or as soon as possible thereafter once her mother is in remission). She wants to move in with her boyfriend whom she has been seeing for over a year.

Aside from her work and family, Tina has recently received a kickboxing instructor's licence and is now taking her own kickboxing classes. She is regularly competing in competitions and was wishing to take her 1<sup>st</sup> Dan grading in kickboxing later that month. In addition, she is in training to take part in the Race for Life in July 2011 for Cancer Research UK.

#### 4.5.4 Conclusion

Jenny's story in particular highlighted the weaknesses in the widening participation strategy and the need to improve the information, advice and guidance that is available to young people at crucial points in their education lives. This is especially the case with respect to opportunities that higher education can provide and the different routes available leading to the same or similar outcomes. Jenny got to higher education despite being counselled otherwise by her teachers, and not being informed about other possible routes, providers and courses by those charged with the responsibility of advising and guiding her.

Tina, Zane, Luke and Ryan simply did not want to enter higher education. Whilst the three males were not on a trajectory that would lead to higher education, Tina, even

when she was under pressure from her teachers, sought to reject it. Although it is not clear if she would have thought otherwise had she got better exam grades, the important point to take from this is that what successive governments think people want is not necessarily what they do want. For these young people neither the intrinsic nor the instrumental benefits of higher education had much value for them.

However, it is possible that their understandings of the potential benefits of higher education were grounded in the social milieu of their everyday lives and this tended to steer them in another direction. Whatever their social conditionings, their stories show that they were using their individual freedom to pursue the lifestyles that they valued (Sen, 1992).

Yet their stories evidenced that there were considerable variations in the extent to which they were free as emerging adults to explore a variety of life directions in love, work and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Zane moved into a serious relationship with a woman almost double his age and took what would normally be regarded as the responsibilities of adulthood at a very young age. Happenstance had resulted in Tina taking on the responsibilities of an adult in her family of origin at a very young age. On the other hand, Laura of all my participants appeared to fit Arnett's theory of emergent adulthood. She took time to explore different courses and options. And now after completing her degree she is happy to spend some more time exploring a variety of life directions. But it should be noted that Laura was the participant with the most resources available to her – she expected her immediate and her extended family (her grandmother) to support her as they were financially well-off enough to do so.

There was also evidence of how the recession was impinging on their lives. Clyde had the most linear trajectory of all my participants yet after completing his degree he entered employment at a time when the construction industry had all but collapsed. Thus, although he had left university less than a year ago at the time of writing, he had already experienced three different jobs and one period of unemployment. Zane, unlike Clyde, had not gone to university but he too, as a fellow member of the construction industry, had experienced unemployment and had had job changes imposed upon him. Both were making way using the social networks they had built up to successfully gain employment. At a time when jobs in their chosen industry were scarce, both were able distinguish between 'cold' knowledge and 'hot' knowledge and were not relying on the former (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

Taken together, their stories represent diverse narratives that characterise the unpredictability and complexity of the life course post-Year 11. None lacked 'the

position, capability or inclination to become agents on their own behalf' (Matza, 1964, p 29). In this sense they were not drifting but focused on their chosen path to the future. The assumption that young people choose not to enter higher education because they have low aspirations has been challenged by a number of their accounts. Some may be uncertain about their longer-term lives but they all articulated their own personal aspirations. This accords with work done by others (Watts and Bridges, 2006; CWPP, 2004). The life stories of the eight young people I was able to track beyond 16 show that there is an alternative, reading low aspirations as different aspirations that lead some people towards higher education and others away from it toward other valued lives and lifestyles.



## CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 5.0 Introduction

My primary aim in this research was to provide a framework for understanding the attributed meanings of young people as they moved through their final year of compulsory schooling and to use this framework to reflect on the usefulness of Widening Participation initiatives. The task of this chapter is to draw together the diverse strands of the research into a coherent whole. I do this by building a narrative that is grounded in the experiences of the nine young people I interviewed.

As was apparent from the final section of the last chapter, the task of writing this thesis has unfolded with the lives of the young people at its centre. I have attempted at every point to give a true account of their individual stories and to remain true to their meanings and their intentions. These young people, whose meanings and intentions were grounded in the reality of their lived worlds, gave me an account of their lives that I have subjected to analysis and discussion. The thesis has primarily focused on the stories of these nine young people. The intention was to capture far more than their educational journeys. Their stories emphasise difference in meaning and understanding.

In Year 11, all nine young people displayed agency in the sense of seeing what was possible for them to achieve and perceiving that it was possible for them to achieve their potential by effective management of the resources they had at their disposal, including their capabilities. They all felt they could influence and control what would happen in their future lives. In this way, in Year 11 all nine in their different ways demonstrated a tendency to take control of their futures.

For coherence of presentation, this final chapter has been organized into five sections as follows: a summary of the key findings that emerged from the analysis, my interpretation of these findings and their significance in the light of successive governments' widening participation agendas and policies, the strengths of the research, and a concluding section which reflects on its significance and contribution.

## 5.1 Key findings

The key finding from Section 1 was the need for great care and caution when identifying not only who is eligible for widening participation intervention but also who is likely to benefit most from it and the need for greater clarity about the optimum point to intervene so as to achieve maximum benefit.

The key finding from Section 2 was to draw attention to the danger of problematising under-representation as a problem that lay within the individual learner rather than turning the spotlight on to deep-rooted issues within the education system that result in turning young people off formal education often for life.

The key finding from Sections 3 and 4 was to highlight the issue of social conditioning and the structural nature of the under-representation, further illustrating the need to move away from individualizing the problem.

The key finding from Section 5 was for the need to value diversity and non-participation at the same time as ensuring that young people, and especially those from under-representative groups, receive timely high-quality information, advice and guidance.

## 5.2 Interpretation

In this section I return to the policy issues of widening participation and reflect on the implications of these findings in a changing policy context. Earlier in the thesis I made reference to the then government's 2001 target for 50% of young people in the countries that make up to UK to be participating in some form of higher education by 2010. I also indicated that this target rested on the assumption that a larger proportion of young people from under-representative groups would both aspire to proceed to higher education and achieve a sufficient level of educational attainment to be able to enter higher education. At the time of writing (early 2011) 2010 has come and gone and neither the target nor the condition on which it rests is yet in place.

Four major flaws in the widening participation policy that was in place at the time of the Year 11 data collection period (2003-4) can be identified from the analysis in the previous chapter. All these flaws stemmed to some degree from the assumption that higher education was a desirable option that would benefit both the individual and society. They also stemmed from the assumption that low aspirations and low

educational achievements present a barrier to increasing participation rates. Each of these flaws has been elaborated upon in the following subsections.

### 5.3 Individualising the problem of under-representation

The individualisation of the problem of under-representation amongst certain groups had two undesirable effects, both of which must be addressed if change is going to happen. On the one hand it drew attention away from the structural nature of the problem and on the other it drew attention away from problems within the educational system that often resulted in perpetuating rather than alleviating the issue of under-representation.

### 5.4 Ignoring the structural nature of the problem

Manifestations of the structural nature of the problem were particularly apparent in the Section 4 analysis. The analysis in this section showed how no choices are completely individualized and that they are always negotiated in a context. Familiar and social influences impact on these contexts as do past actions and earlier decisions.

### 5.5 Ignoring the deep-rooted and long-standing problems in the system

Manifestations of problems with the system were apparent in all five sections but in Sections 1 and 2 in particular. Moreover, there was some evidence to suggest that treating the problem of under-representation as one of low aspirations and low achievements lying within the individual student may actually be perpetuating the problem it was designed to alleviate through the process of stigmatizing under-representative students as 'other'. In sum, individualizing the problem was found not only to be illusional but also counter-productive and dangerous.

### 5.6 Ignoring that learning takes place on a trajectory

Insofar as the problem lies within the remit of the individual student's responsibility, there seems to be a lack of appreciation of the longitudinal reasons why some young people do not enter university. The consequences of choices taken at key points in young people's lives are considerable as life chances are rooted in educational

trajectories. Yet this simple and rather obvious point did not seem to feature at any point in the implementation of the widening participation programme. Those responsible for implementing widening participation outreach need greater guidance on how and when to intervene in order to make a difference. This leads to a considerable number of avoidable practical problems in the implementation of the widening participation programme that underpinned this study.

By the time they were in Year 9, when they were selected for and either entered or did not enter the widening participation initiative, these young people were already positioned or had positioned themselves on a trajectory that would either lead to higher education or not. In other words, they were already on course for one or other of the major post-compulsory routes or were outside these routes entirely. It may seem like an obvious point to make but worth making anyway, that the possibilities of ‘choice’ during Year 11 are in this sense as much constructed and constrained by young people’s education track records as they are by anticipations of the future. Put differently, being a widening participation student had little consequences if their education pasts made higher education a highly unlikely prospect as was the case in this study.

#### 5.7 Not valuing non-participation

These findings shed doubt on the dominant discourse that higher education should be marketed as an essential option in order to achieve a better future. Behind this notion, it was argued, is a lack of vision amongst proponents of widening participation initiatives regarding the plurality of human values and the social contributions made by members of society who hold a different worldview.

#### 5.8 Strength of the research

The longitudinal element is rare in research and therefore gives a different picture to previous studies. This study looked at the lives of nine young people broadly and longitudinally capturing the pre- and post-compulsory period.

The stories of such a range of young people over almost a nine-year period (2003-2011) are not typically heard (see Evangelou & Boag-Munroe, 2009 who have called for this kind of research). This was a period not just of immense change in their lives, but also a period that saw huge policy shifts within the higher education sector.

## 5.9 Significance and contribution

By taking a wide and long view of the lives of young people who were or were not designated as in need of a widening access outreach programme, this study gave insights into the lives and lifestyles of young people, some of whom did not aspire to enter HE and others who did but have so far failed to do so. By listening to what they had to say we learned to place greater value on diversity and non-participation; to appreciate the complexity of the widening participation issue which cannot be resolved by successive governments' simplistic add-ons to a system that is rife with difficulties; and to focus our attention more on the context in which individuals learn and make choices, which includes their past lives and earlier decisions.

Fundamentally the research has enabled an exploration of why some young people continue to participate in education and others become non-participants at the point it becomes non-compulsory or very soon afterwards and their experiences of this. The findings therefore raise implications around the reasons for and against participation.

This research is highly topical and holds practical value at a time when fair access for all has, once again, become a major political issue. When the Browne Report (Browne 2010) was published in late 2010 the Coalition Government responded by instructing the Director for Fair Access to follow a new set of guidelines that would place additional expectations on higher education providers. These additional expectations were published in a document entitled 'Guidance to the Director of Fair Access' which was published in February 2011. In this document higher education institutions were being asked to submit 'access agreements' every year as opposed to every five years. 'Access agreements' require providers of higher education to submit detailed plans for how they intend increasing social mobility by extending fair access to higher education and the professions. In sum, higher education providers are now being instructed by the Coalition Government as a matter of priority to make greater efforts in their endeavours to attract a higher proportion of students from under-represented groups. In particular they are required to show how they are reaching out to those young people deemed to be the most able but least likely to apply.

In terms of monitoring the implementation of this policy the document revealed that the emphasis had shifted from tracking inputs to tracking outputs (see Section 1, Chapter 4 for an elaboration of this point). The new fair access guidance requires that all providers review their admissions process to ensure that they collect and monitor data from both applications and admissions to their institution broken down by courses,

offers made (and in the case of conditional offers to disclose information on the grades and subjects required), and ultimately the number of acceptances. This will include provided data on is the number of students from under-represented groups they attract to their more selective courses, and their retention of these students throughout the degree programme. All the information gathered, it is recommended, should be used to inform and focus outreach activities to support both widening participation and widening admissions.

Recent national news headlines (late 2010 and early 2011) have highlighted the apparent conflict between students, higher education institutions and politicians on the proposed and now agreed new tuition fee structure following Lord Browne's review recommendations. Running parallel to Lord Browne's review and as part of the UK government's austerity measures, the education maintenance allowance provided to eligible sixth form students across the country was abolished. Late 2010 saw numerous national protests organised by both the National Union of Students and student groups across the country whilst many higher education institutions also experienced student occupations protesting at the way their institutions were responding to the tuition fee proposals. The year 2011 commenced with major uncertainty; uncertainty for higher education institutions as it is still unclear what level of fees they will be permitted to charge students entering in September 2012; and uncertainty for prospective students who do not know how much they will be paying as from next year. The only certainty is that by 2012, fees will be raised from their current £3290 level.

What the effect of these changes will be for widening participation remains to be seen. But already evidence is emerging to suggest that increasingly, young people with good academic credentials and capabilities, including those from privileged and less privileged backgrounds, are weighing up the costs and benefits of higher education and deciding to disengage from school, and not be motivated to pursue an academic pathway (Schoon, 2008; Steedman and Stoney, 2004).

#### 5.10 Reflections

In this section I reflect critically on the weaknesses of the research and consider how these might have been overcome. Whilst this primarily involves highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the research process these are inseparable from my reflections on the personal journey I undertook during the conduct of the research. Whilst I was researching a major transition period in my young participants' lives there

was no doubt that a major transition was also taking place in my own life. As I have indicate in the first chapter, I was appointed to coordinate a mentoring scheme as part of a higher education institution's widening participation activities. During the latter part of the study, this role became part of a full time job. I was not only involved with the provision of mentoring directly to several participants, but in addition, I was also leading on the delivery of these activities across other schools. This inevitably shaped my perceptions of the young people I was researching. It also influenced the value I attributed to these programmes given that on the one hand I had an interest in ensuring that the programmes succeeded and on the other wished to remain objective in my role as a researcher.

The strength of the research was that it focused on a range of young people at a key transition in their lives and was able to monitor their life journeys over a considerable period of time. This was deliberately a small-scale study involving nine young people representing, widening participation and non-intervention students, widening participation and intervention students, and non-widening participation students recruited from one year group and one school in the Southern England. It was also an ethnically homogenous group of participants. Participants were recruited with the assistance of a school teacher who was asked to identify students who would fit the groups listed above. The schoolteacher's definition and perceptions of who should fit each group was key to the selection of my participants. As the study has shown, there were questions over the appropriateness of several participants within the groupings that made up my sample. But this became a finding of the study in its own right rather than just a sampling issue. It also highlights how the selection process can be fraught with difficulties especially in a situation where there is reliance on others to make good decisions on who participates in a study.

Issues concerning reliability and validity in the scientific sense were never part of the study, given its interpretive methodology. With a small sample and particular context, generalisation was never the goal; rather authenticity and credibility as measures of the quality of this type of research were important (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It must be conceded though that the sample was limited by its size and this was made worse by sample attrition over time. If time and other resources had not been constrained a larger sample would have been appropriate. Also the study was limited to one cohort group. This might have resulted in keeping period effects hidden.

A central feature of this study was its longitudinal design, described in detail in chapter 3. Yet potentially the hardest issue in the conduct of longitudinal research is

keeping track of one's sample over an extended period of time. In this study, the initial group of 15 students became 14 after the first set of interviews when the participant failed to turn up to their allocated interview. At the second stage, whilst participants were still at school, a further participant failed to undertake the activity and was deemed as not wishing to continue. The biggest drop in the number of participants was at the third stage when my participants had already left school to study for their GCSE examinations and therefore had to return to school for the interview. Four participants failed to turn up to their interviews and although understandable, this was disappointing. In hindsight I might have commenced with a larger number of participants in anticipation of attrition. Also to minimise attrition I might have collected data over a shorter time period, but I wanted to maximise the length of transitions that the study captured, even though this meant extending the period of data analysis. Instead I took many contact details including the phone number of a friend or relative who lived elsewhere so that I could keep track of each one as they left the compulsory stage of their education into many destinations. In addition, I took advantage of the emerging popularity of social network sites and created a study "group" on facebook with the sole aim of keeping track of the participants of this study. This involved setting up a page providing a short descriptive of the research. Participants were invited to join the group and their profiles would therefore be accessible from this page. This made it easier for me to get in contact with them once they had left school and proved extremely valuable when trying to get hold of participants especially towards the end of the study. Although my participants had changed addresses, mobile numbers, etc, their facebook profile was regularly updated by them and this meant that I was able to maintain contact with those who used this facility without undue difficulty. However, in keeping with ethical guidelines, it was always going to be the decision of individual participants whether or not they wished to continue. Thus, within the constraints of a PhD study and the need for ethical sampling I could have changed little in terms of keeping track of my sample over time.

Whilst participants may drop out of longitudinal study over time, this problem may become more critical depending on who drops out (Lynn, 2009). In my case I had three sampling groups and fortunately the groups remained intact with equal numbers dropping out of each category. Collecting data from the same individuals at several time points mean that on occasions participants may drop out and drop back in a again without having an adverse effect on the overall quality and richness of the dataset as a



whole. This happened in this study in the case of Laura and Clyde and facebook played a key role in relocating them some time after they had left school.

As I wanted to capture the voice of my participant, analysis was grounded in the data. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to give the young people the opportunity to express their experiences and understandings. During the earlier part of the study, three interview phases were incorporated whilst participants were still at school. Interview schedules were structured and questions developed around themes (as indicated in chapter 3). Undoubtedly, the first set of interviews although semi-structured in nature, was conducted in a slightly more rigid structure. What I mean by this is that given that this was the first time that I had met these participants in an interview environment, there was a tendency to stay to the script and follow the themes predetermined prior to the interviews. Participants were also understandably wary about what they were saying. As the interviews moved along in the cycle, both the participants and I became more comfortable with each other, I gained more experience and so the interviews felt more relaxed. Having conducted previous interviews meant that I was able to determine what type of questions would elicit meaningful responses and which ones would take me to a dead end. Getting to know the participants meant that I was able to build an interview profile of each individual and the types of issues that they were happy to discuss.

A large part of the improvement to the types of questions I was posing came from my reflections as a researcher. Following each interview cycle, I would review the transcripts and consider how I may have adapted the style and type of questions to elicit further information. I also developed an understanding of each participant and considered areas that required further probing at future interviews.

Given that the interviews were structured around the focus of my enquiry, my approach was to an extent informal and conversational. However, as the interviewer it has to be conceded that I held the agenda and therefore the power to move the conversation in its intended direction (Kvale, 1996). A more loosely structured approach to interviewing might be said to lack credibility, validity, authenticity and trustworthiness (Cohen et al., 2000). I attempted to minimize any personal bias that might have affected the interviews such as expectations, experience, and misunderstandings, through aiming for neutrality, as far as was possible, in terms of my reactions during the interviews (Denscombe, 1995). In doing so I made sure I did not respond, for example, with surprise to anything participants revealed. It was intended that this non-judgmental approach would put my participants at ease (Charmaz, 2005).

Throughout I remained sensitive to when responses were unexpected, surprising or when a particular conflicted with that of other respondents. I also probed further in such instances to elicit data that might challenge the ongoing analysis.

In the year 11 interviews I took an empathetic approach to interviewing. This involved making it clear that I was not judging them about their schoolwork or that I was in any way affiliated to their school. I think this technique and my ability to react with a lack of surprise to some of their revelations during interviews helped to build rapport and led to richer interview data. In maintaining this approach I had to try and retain a level of neutrality; by this I do not mean to imply that I was objective, after all I was deliberately dissociating myself from their teachers and other school personnel. However I was also not there to befriend them or judge their behaviour, I built rapport in order to find out as much as possible about their experiences and understandings. This can be considered unethical; however, I ensured that young people were clear on the purposes of the research and were given ample opportunity to withdraw throughout this longitudinal study.

#### 5.11 Implications

My first research question required that I consider (i) who is deemed eligible for widening participation intervention (ii) who is likely to benefit most from this form of intervention. In considering these issues, it should be noted in the first place that none of the three participants in this study selected for widening participation intervention had any hope of entering higher education, at least in the short term. This deduction is based on the fact that none of the three was on an academic trajectory that would allow them to progress to higher education. This is because entry into higher education is dependent on prior qualifications. One could, of course, speculate that the extensive input these three young people received will encourage them to gain qualifications later on and enter higher education as mature students. However this evidence is particularly worrying given that there was also evidence in this study that some of those deemed ineligible showed the potential to benefit from widening participation intervention. In other words, some of those who appeared from the evidence to be the intended beneficiaries of widening participation intervention and who might have benefited were excluded, and their places given to others who probably would not.

The reason why this happened, as the evidence in this study revealed, was due to the selection criteria being used by the school to identify eligibility. However, it may be

that distinguishing between those who are able but are not aspiring from those who do not aspire because they are not able is far from easy. The widening participation agenda assumes that this is a relatively straightforward and politically uncomplicated issue. The evidence presented in this study suggests otherwise.

A second and related problem that this study highlighted was the lack of accountability that was required at both the school and university levels for all widening participation outreach activities including the one that formed the basis of this study. All that the higher education institutions were required to do by central government policies was to appear to be doing something to make their intake more representatives of the wider UK population. This 'appearance' was measured by the amount of resources they threw at the problem, i.e. inputs rather than outputs. This may go some way to explaining why the university cynically collected evaluation data and simply filed it. More recent legislation, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, intends to take a more rigorous approach to institutional accountability when it comes to issues concerning 'fair access for all'. The issue of competing agendas between institutions, which emerged as an issue in the selection processes in the course of this analysis, is unlikely to be resolved by the new legislative framework.

The analysis highlighted the ways in which the widening participation target group was 'othered' and excluded by the very policies that were intent on helping them. An obvious example of this is the way in which they were withdrawn from their normal lesson routines and by so doing were separated (marginalized) from their peers. Concerns were raised regarding the knock-on effect this may have had on their education. Whilst the analysis focused on the process of othering that took place at the individual student level, implications need to be drawn at the collective level and how individual and collective level othering may interact.

This study showed how the very process of identifying the widening participation target audience using individualized selection criteria is in danger of perpetuating the problem it was intended to alleviate. It may therefore be that the dominant discourse that sees the problem of under-representation as being the responsibility of the individual student rather than the system may be counter-productive. Identifying those who are under-represented but who would be 'susceptible to becoming learners' (Maguire et al, 1996, p1) is individualizing what is essentially a structural issue. By focusing on this, attention is taken away from the structural barriers that are inhibiting the groups to which individuals belong from participating.

My second research question required me to consider the extent of the impact of problematising under-representation as a problem that lies within the individual. In particular I set out to consider the impact of this on the young people I interviewed, their life chances and life choice. In considering this I also set out to address the extent to which underrepresentation in higher education is a structural and social conditioning problem. And finally to consider the impact on young people of the value society puts on their post sixteen designations and ultimately their career choices.

I approached the analysis to this question in the first instance by considering the learning identities held by the young people in my study and the origins of these identities. I showed that the experience of compulsory schooling is often more complex than a simple lack of fit between young people's learning identities and the school identities engendered by the institutions. With Wald & Castleberry (2000) I evidenced how schools were failing to promote an ethos that values lifelong learning and how some of my participants were learners who had strong learner identities but the way they were being taught at school damaged their school learning identities.

I demonstrated, using the evidence I collected from my participants, how the school had little regard for the continuity of Luke, Ryan and Zane's education by allowing them to withdraw from classes to attend an intervention that had little meaning or consequences for them. I also showed how Luke's experience of learning in the informal arena contrasted with his experience of learning at school. Learning outside school for some of the young people in my study was a social collaborative event where they learnt alongside significant adults in their lives – growth and change was encouraged through pursuing shared dreams, a shared focus and a shared responsibility to learn to do things better, to be a good team player.

It seems then that there is a problem inherent in focusing on the link between learner identity and the habitus of individual learner when what is being offered as learning in the formal arena is often inadequate. It seems that the same old assumption that schooling is good but some learners are inadequate does not hold water when it may well be that school is inadequate for potentially good learners. My analysis has demonstrated yet again how the education and school system need to change to accommodate the different experiences/identities young people hold.

This draws attention to a major flaw in the widening participation agenda, since these targeted young people's damaged learner identities stemmed largely from their experiences of the system. Problems that are deeply embedded in the system that have the effect of turning young people off learning need to be addressed. It is therefore not

enough just to focus on young people's problems with school learning as though the problem resides within them rather than within the system.

The futures imagined by my participants revealed how their hopes and plans for the future are by and large a matter of choosing a kind of life and lifestyle with which they felt comfortable. This in most cases meant staying within the bounds of familiarity by mirroring what they already knew. This enabled me to consider the link between aspiration and lifestyle and, in particular, the role of higher education in achieving the sort of future life one envisages for oneself. Some of the lifestyles that the young people wanted for themselves did not recognise any benefit afforded to higher education whilst others did. Put another way, some of the young people in my study had different (rather than low) aspirations that did not involve doing a degree to get there. And if the lifestyle they wanted for themselves in the future did not require a degree then going to university did not figure in their plans. For Tina this changed because her lifestyle plans changed.

Sen (1992, 1999) argues that resources, including educational resources, are only valuable to the extent that they enhance individual wellbeing. Wellbeing, in turn, he argues, stems from being free to choose and lead the life one values and has good reason to value. Considered from this perspective, the evidence presented in this study suggests that participating in higher education is not seen as necessary by some young people to achieve those things they value and in which they find meaning. (See Watts and Bridges, 2006 for an elaboration of this argument).

From Laura's and Clyde's perspective university education was both to be valued intrinsically for the broader experiences it presented whilst one was there and an instrumental value for what one could do with a degree once it had been obtained. But for Zane, Ryan and Luke the intrinsic and instrumental value of higher education remained unrecognised for either its academic or social manifestations as their chosen careers did not require them to have a degree. A degree would not give them more freedom to pursue the career they aspired to follow. But were they free to choose in a more informed way?

In considering this question it is important to listen hard to what young people have to say and to take account of the diversity of lived lives and subjectivities. This diversity, the evidence suggests, is to a large extent the result of the social inequalities that impact upon experiences. It does not necessarily follow that some young people would choose higher education even if they could see beyond the constraints and barriers and be given a clearer understanding of its benefits. What if, after all possible steps have been taken,

there remains a sector of the population that do not value (or see value in) what the educated (the more powerful who are responsible for the widening participation discourse) think they ought to value. This issue will be returned to later in the thesis.

By drawing on the experiences of my participants I have demonstrated using my data that: choices about one's future are based on life-time patterns; they are deep rooted in families, family histories and traditions; choices are based on the familiar, i.e. choices were made from within the habitus of young people. I have also demonstrated that real choices need to be separated from opportunities (in many respects the widening participation intervention in practice opened and closed an opportunity in one go - it was a wrongly timed strategy (and perhaps a wrong strategy) for its target group.

It is evident from the analysis in the previous chapter that choices are made on trajectories. What I mean by this is that choices are dependent on lifetime patterns rather than a given individual simply weighing up the costs and benefits of the higher education option as though they were choosing to buy a breakfast cereal from a range available on a supermarket shelf. Thus is presented a more complex picture than belies the simplicity of the widening participation intervention programme that underpins this thesis and other similar interventions and outreach activities thought up by higher education establishments to demonstrate that they are allocating resources to the 'fair access' issue.

A second and related point I want to make from the evidence I presented is that choice is about choosing a lifestyle that is in keeping with which one is already familiar. Being at home in one's social surroundings is an important part of choosing a lifestyle. In other words, people oscillate towards lifestyles with which they feel familiar and reject ones with which they are unfamiliar to avoid feeling socially out of place (cf Alheit, 1999). Alheit found that some of those who had climbed the ladder from disadvantaged beginnings felt socially out of place in their new surroundings. 'They had come to realise that distinction is something beyond mere titles. Acquiring the title has by no means provided an "entry ticket" to the "better society" – habitus – being at home (or not) in your surroundings.' (p 71).

In sum, the evidence presented concerning choices and constraints on choices in the previous chapter shows how the decisions taken by the young people in my study were not un-thought through or ill-informed but they were based on a lack of direction, guidance and knowledge. I have demonstrated through drawing on the experiences of my participants how choices are deeply rooted in families and family histories and traditions. Where families are strong they have the experience and can advise. But not

all my participants were able to rely on their family members for advice and guidance.

Widening participation initiatives such as the one under consideration in this thesis are aimed at raising the desire to participate amongst targeted pupils beyond compulsory education and into higher education. The message is that higher education is desirable and attainable for all in a way that decontextualises and individualises the problem. Yet the data and its analysis presented in this section and previous sections has clearly demonstrated that the problem is neither a matter of choice for the individual nor is it devoid of a structural context and social milieu. The evidence presented above shows that whether or not a goal is achieved depends much less on the efforts of the individuals acting and much more on the conditions in which they act. The analysis of my data supports the view found by others that whilst there is a certain amount of fluidity in the pathways possible the influence of social class and locality remains strong as far as real choices (as opposed to opportunities) are concerned (Bates & Riseborough, 1993; Chisholm & Hurrelman, 1996; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

At this point it is relevant to briefly consider whether the widening participation intervention programme helped overcome structural constraints. The careers guidance that was available via the school will be considered in the next section as participants reflect on the value of advice given for their future lives.

As Section 1 in chapter 4 explained, the widening participation programme began in Year 9 and ran through to Year 11. The commencement of the programme in Year 9 was intended to catch the students at the juncture where they would be selecting their GCSE subject options. In reality, the programme commenced too late in the Year 9 academic year for it to have any impact on the participants' lives as they had already made their option choices. The first series of sessions were aimed at getting to know the students, their likes, dislikes, academic strengths and weaknesses, with a view to supporting them to make good decisions. But by the time this had occurred, students had already selected their options and were thus well on their way to dropping subjects which they did not wish to pursue post-Year 9. Regardless of how much their student mentor wished to influence these choices, it would be too late at this stage for the student to approach the school and get these altered.

Moreover, it is also questionable how much influence a student mentor would have had over the participants they had only recently met. The curriculum is designed so that students gear up towards their GCSE options throughout key stage 3 (Years 7-9). The students themselves tend to use a vast array of criteria whilst making their selection. These can range from personal preferences, i.e. selecting subjects they like doing, to

decisions based on academic achievement. Understanding these complex decisions in the space of several visits and making sensible suggestions which participants would have valued would be a very ambitious aim.

By the time participants reached Year 11, they would have worked with their student mentor for approximately two years. It would be hoped that by this time the relationship between mentor and mentee would be meaningful to the extent that there would be some trust built up to talk about options post-16, reflecting on the mentor's own experiences. However, in the majority of cases, the mentor's experiences of progression from Year 11 to post-16 education and in particular, the social spaces in which option decisions were taken, were not comparable to the issues encountered by the mentees. Put another way, there was a mismatch between the thought process and decision-making environment that one part of this relationship had undergone with what the other was facing. Student mentors would be able to demonstrate empathy but it would be evident that their experiences differed from those that the participants were currently undergoing. So there was a lack of fit. Besides, as suggested above, decisions about mentee's futures in terms of post-16 subject choices and how these would impinge on career paths had already been taken in Year 9 so there would be little room for major changes at this stage.

Jenny's story in particular highlighted the weaknesses in the widening participation strategy and the need to improve the information, advice and guidance that is available to young people at crucial points in their education lives. This is especially the case with respect to opportunities that higher education can provide and the different routes available leading to the same or similar outcomes. Jenny got to higher education despite being counselled otherwise by her teachers, and not being informed about other possible routes, providers and courses by those charged with the responsibility of advising and guiding her.

Tina, Zane, Luke and Ryan simply did not want to enter higher education. Whilst the three males were not on a trajectory that would lead to higher education, Tina, even when she was under pressure from her teachers, sought to reject it. Although it is not clear if she would have thought otherwise had she got better exam grades, the important point to take from this is that what successive governments think people want is not necessarily what they do want. For these young people neither the intrinsic nor the instrumental benefits of higher education had much value for them.

However, it is possible that their understandings of the potential benefits of higher education were grounded in the social milieu of their everyday lives and this tended to



steer them in another direction. Whatever their social conditionings, their stories show that they were using their individual freedom to pursue the lifestyles that they valued (Sen, 1992).

Yet their stories evidenced that there were considerable variations in the extent to which they were free as emerging adults to explore a variety of life directions in love, work and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Zane moved into a serious relationship with a woman almost double his age and took what would normally be regarded as the responsibilities of adulthood at a very young age. Happenstance had resulted in Tina taking on the responsibilities of an adult in her family of origin at a very young age. On the other hand, Laura of all my participants appeared to fit Arnett's theory of emergent adulthood. She took time to explore different courses and options. And now after completing her degree she is happy to spend some more time exploring a variety of life directions. But it should be noted that Laura was the participant with the most resources available to her – she expected her immediate and her extended family (her grandmother) to support her as they were financially well-off enough to do so.

There was also evidence of how the recession was impinging on their lives. Clyde had the most linear trajectory of all my participants yet after completing his degree he entered employment at a time when the construction industry had all but collapsed. Thus, although he had left university less than a year ago at the time of writing, he had already experienced three different jobs and one period of unemployment. Zane, unlike Clyde, had not gone to university but he too, as a fellow member of the construction industry, had experienced unemployment and had had job changes imposed upon him. Both were making way using the social networks they had built up to successfully gain employment. At a time when jobs in their chosen industry were scarce, both were able to distinguish between 'cold' knowledge and 'hot' knowledge and were not relying on the former (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

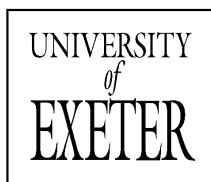
Taken together, their stories represent diverse narratives that characterise the unpredictability and complexity of the life course post-Year 11. None lacked 'the position, capability or inclination to become agents on their own behalf' (Matza, 1964, p 29). In this sense they were not drifting but focused on their chosen path to the future. The assumption that young people choose not to enter higher education because they have low aspirations has been challenged by a number of their accounts. Some may be uncertain about their longer-term lives but they all articulated their own personal aspirations. This accords with work done by others (Watts and Bridges, 2006; CWPP, 2004). The life stories of the eight young people I was able to track beyond 16 shows

that there is an alternative, reading low aspirations as different aspirations that lead some people towards higher education and others away from it toward other valued lives and lifestyles.

## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A**

Sample of letter sent to parents of participants.



School of Education and Lifelong Learning

Re: "Young People's lives" study

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am conducting a research project at the University investigating students' thoughts and aspirations when considering their future educational paths, career choices and life opportunities. In particular, I am looking at how students formulate different ideas and what influences such views. The project has received the approval of both the University of Exeter and Exmouth Community College.

Your son/daughter is amongst a group of students who have been invited to take part in this project. It is anticipated that their input will be through informal interviews held at the school. I fully understand that your son/daughter will be working towards taking his/her GCSE exams in July and so have ensured that the programme will make as little disruption to this as possible. The maximum time any individual student will normally be expected to contribute towards this project is five hours throughout the entire academic year.

I hope that this has provided you with sufficient information about the projects aims and purpose to enable you to provide consent for your son/daughter to participate. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in contact with me. ([T]: \*\*\*\*\*\*, [E] k.devincenzi@exeter.ac.uk, [W] http://www.ex.ac.uk/yr11voices)

Thanking you for your cooperation.

Yours truly,

Karl Devincenzi

Karl Devincenzi

✂ \_\_\_\_\_

I (Student name) ..... agree to fully participate in the "Young People's lives" study.

I/We (Parent/Guardian)..... have read the information above and

provide consent for (Student Name) ..... to take part.

Date:.....

Signature (Parent/Guardian).....



Signature (Student).....

Please return to Mrs. Anne \*\*\*\*\* at \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*.

## APPENDIX B

Sample of interview transcript with participant.

## Interview with Clyde – December

I I guess the best way to start is to ask you to tell me a bit about yourself.

M1 I am Clyde, I am fifteen, I lived in Swindon since, well I came here in year 7, and didn't know anyone, and just came into the school, got quite a big house, my dad works in computers, and my mum is a teacher in the school, which is quite good, cause she helps me out quite a bit, I enjoy swimming, football, all sports really, I like the internet and stuff, so, it's quite good.

I You mentioned that you lived in Swindon,

M1 Yeah

I Until year 7, tell me a bit more about that.

M1 Well, I was born in Swindon, and so I lived out there, but my dad worked, travelled from Exeter, and he used to stay, used to leave Sunday night, come back on Wednesday and then go again Thursday morning and then come back Friday, and this happened for like three years, cause there wasn't any work in our area, my mum just sort of got fed up and said right we are moving now, which was quite good for me as I had just finished primary school and just about to start secondary school, but for my sister she came here in year 9, so making friends was quite hard, and then my brother went off to a University, so, it was alright for me and my brother, but I think that my sister struggled quite a bit.

I What would you say are the differences between living in Swindon and Exmouth?

M1 Emm, Exmouth is really slow, whereas Swindon is really quick, what I enjoy, cause like if I want to go into town or something in Exmouth it is sort of like half a day, whereas, or Exeter, if I want to go into Exeter, whereas in Swindon you can pop in and pop out and do loads more stuff, and emm.

I What do you mean by Exmouth is very slow, what do you mean by that?

M1 It's like the people they are not very bothered, the workers and that, when our house was been built, they sort of, one worked and two sat down and watched and that sort of thing, whereas Swindon it would be like, we want this work done in six weeks not six months, which is good but it can also tire you out as well.

I And why do you think that is?

M1 Emm, much more laid back maybe, just older people and more calm, there is not a lot to do so that's maybe the reason.

I You have spoken about the move and what it is like down here, did you like moving?

M1 Emm, well not at first, don't know, but, it sort of like I said I did not mind because I was coming into a secondary school, but leaving your friends and all that is quite hard, so...

I You've mentioned your interest in sports, you do swimming, etc, tell me a bit more about that.

M1 Well, sort of my brother has done swimming and he was really good, and so does my sister, and emm, I picked it up when I was quite a kid, like quite young, about seven I think it was, and I kept doing it since now, but I have cut down on the hours now and stuff, it just keeps me fit and I enjoy it, especially the races, it gives you something to look forward to and aim for.

I And what would you say got you interested?

M1 Probably my brother doing so well, if he did not do so well then I wouldn't have gone in.

I When you say your brother doing so well,

- M1 How well, well, he got in to the like the England, well, the under sixteen England squad until he broke his arm on a training thing in France, and then it just went downhill, he could not swim as good cause the arm had affected his swimming and stuff so he had to quit and I sort of got into it then thought I'd take it up.
- I And how did it make you feel having a brother been good at something?
- M1 Well, quite privileged, I thought it was quite good of him, cause he is not like very intelligent, but emm, he past some of his GCSE's and went to college and then went to Uni, which is quite good as he did not get like 5 C's and stuff, so, I am proud.
- I Is he still at University now?
- M1 No, he has left, he is running a posh bar in Bournemouth, but he used to run like nightclubs and stuff and used to do festivals and stuff which is good. He enjoys it.
- I You mentioned your mum, dad, brother and sister, how would you describe your relationship with them?
- M1 Emm, quite strong, not so much with my sister now as she is older, she still lives at home but she has like a boyfriend so I never really see her, my dad is home quite a bit and that is quite good, whereas when I was in Swindon he, obviously I did not see him much so I had to rely on my mum quite a lot, which is alright cause it is shared out now, we are quite a family, like a family family, so in Christmas and that we will have the whole family and it is quite good.
- I So how does it feel now having your dad with you whereas before you didn't?
- M1 Well, he is not stressed as he was, whereas like when he came back there was jobs that needed doing, and obviously I was a kid and I needed telling off when I did naughty things and stuff, so it is not that much now, and it is ok him been there.



I And how would you describe your relationship with your brothers and sisters?

M1 Emm, very strong I think, my sister has learnt a lot because there is two brother's whereas if it was me and two sisters then I would probably be the odd one out which she is, I probably look up to my brother mainly, my sister is older than me but not just we have our good times and bad.

I How important is this relationship to you?

M1 Emm, very, like I can ask my sister stuff and look back and stuff, which it is quite strong, and even though I don't see my brother as much as I would like to he is still sort of there and he can actually help me out at times and give me advice and stuff.

I Would you say you like the type of relationship you have with them?

M1 Emm, yes, yes I would.

I In terms of your parents, how important would you say is your relationship with your parents?

M1 Emm, quite strong, I tell them everything, there is like no secrets or anything, yeah, they are not that bad, they let me do stuff, they are not that strict.

I Would you say that you like the relationship you have them?

M1 Would you say I like it, yeah, I would, they are pretty laid back, they would only say something like homework and stuff, they only say, have you done it, and if I say yeah they believe me and will trust me, which is good.

I How important it is to you to have that trust that you have just mentioned?

M1 Very, cause if they did not trust me I would always have to like prove myself, by doing that that would probably put more strain on me rather than them, cause

they can easily turn round and say where is the homework and that would mean me going out and finding it and proving that I have written it down and the teachers have actually told me to do it, which they believe me which is really good, we have obviously built up over the years.

I Ok, you have mentioned your family, you obviously live in Exmouth, tell me what it is like to live down here.

M1 Emm, boring, slow, emm, the only good thing is that my grandma moved down here, even if it is small we can easily get around and stuff, there is like the beach which we can do body boarding and stuff which i do, it is different really different.

I Different from?

I From like Swindon, and other upbeat places. Like if you are going to Exeter it is sort of like a day trip, sort of quite a strain now, whereas at the start when I moved it was sort of oh I am going to Exeter and pop in, but now I have to set like a day, like Sunday I am going next time, instead of just popping in, which can be good as you can get away from the countryside.

I Would you say that you like living in Exmouth?

M1 Yeah but I could not live here all my life, I would have to move on at some point to a livelier place.

I What makes you say that?

M1 Cause it just bores me, I think that I will get really really bored if I stay here, it is probably mostly young people but the average age is like 70 odd, so.

I How important would you say at the moment it is for you to live in Exmouth?

M1 Emm, how important, [pause], very at the moment, cause I am with my family, you see if my dad was working down here and we were in Swindon, then the

relationship between my mum and dad may not have stuck, as long and that, and Exmouth is quite nice, even though my dad worked in Exeter we choose Exmouth because of the school and stuff cause it was all there, whereas Exeter is quite big and you have to travel and stuff.

I You have mentioned you family, and described living in Exmouth, if I have to imagine your house what would I be picturing in my mind?

M1 Emm, well, when I first saw it it's like a church [laughs] well, I always thought, but I was quite young then, it is quite nice, it's in a cul-de-sac of eleven houses similar, there is three types of houses, there is a four bedroom, a five bedroom, which is ours and then a bigger five with a separate garage, and emm, basically it is near the beach, but we only bought it for investment and stuff, but it is a really nice house and we have just recently sold it, well sale agreed.

I You say you have just sold it, are you moving somewhere else?

M1 No, we are moving so that my dad can do up a house, just down Deanham way, which is like quite a, it is getting to be quite a big area, where builders are building quite a lot of houses, and we are going to try to do it up and make some money out of it.

I Ok, I guess we are going to stick to the one you are living in at the moment, how would you describe the house?

M1 Emm, very nice and modern, it is like all the carpets the same and all the colour walls are the same, it is really nice, when we first moved in the garden was like a hill, it was quite steep, and so me and my dad and that worked quite hard to get it flattened out and level and stuff, which I really nice, and the house now is looking really good.

I Would you say you like the house?

M1 Yeah, yeah I would, it is really nice.

- I Ok, we are now inside your house, and I am trying to picture what your bedroom looks like, what is that like?
- M1 It has got a big bed, a kingsize bed, emm, it has got like an England flag at the top, my desk has the stereo on it as it is very big [laughs], which you know, I have got a tv, a quite big tv in front of my bed, with my X box and DVD and that, and a built in wardrobe on the left, and that I basically it and a big window on the side.
- I Are the walls plain, do you have stuff on them?
- M1 Yeah, I have got, I support Tottenham so I have quite a few Tottenham things, and body boarding pictures and stuff.
- I Who decides what happens in that room?
- M1 Me, sort of, but I can't paint it, because emm, well, I could not wall paper it or anything, could not paint it because of the plaster, when that dried my mum and dad decided to keep it all the same colour cause it looks spacious, and the whole reason was because basically we were going to sell it for investment when the market boomed up, so keeping it all the same colour was sort of, they didn't say don't put up any posters or anything, but they just said just don't paint it just keep it the same colour which is fair enough.
- I How important is it to you to be able to decide what happens in your room?
- M1 Emm, not very, I am not that much in there, I am normally in other places, but, I like to pick my own furniture and quilts and stuff, so it is not really.
- I Ok, we are now looking at your everyday life, what do you get up to on a normal weekend?
- M1 Ok, emm, maybe do some sort of sport on the Saturday or Sunday, cause she does not, well she gets out quite a bit, but, to see her, well part of the family which is quite good, normally go to a bank or something cause I can't obviously

get to a bank during whenever, I sometimes work, which is alright but I don't like to do all the time.

I You say work, is that paid work, homework?

M1 Emm, no, it is paid work, I work for my next door neighbour, they sort of deliver, they have got a delivery company and deliver flyers and stuff and we go around the UK, London and place and deliver which is really good and it pays quite well, and her son is a good friend of mine, so we mess around after school and stuff.

I Do you like working for that company?

M1 Yeah, it is really good, it is like emm, it is only a few people but it is quite big in itself.

I And why would you say you worked?

M1 To earn my own money, to have, to get what I want, maybe I have saved up for a skiing trip with my school, which is quite good as I saved it up myself and did not have to rely on my mum and dad.

I How important is it to you to have your own money?

M1 Emm, very, cause if I did not have it I would sort of always be asking my mum and feeling guilty with my mum and dad, and I like to invest it and stuff which is quite good.

I You mentioned your grandma, how would you describe your relationship?

M1 Very strong, originally my grandma and granddad came down from Portsmouth where my mum and dad used to live and met, but unfortunately my granddad past away for a few months so it is quite hard for my grandma, and we all had to be there to get her out of the situation, but now she has met a lot of friends and she is happy and it is really good.

- I How important is it to you to have that relationship with your grandma?
- M1 Very, it is like, me and my granddad had a strong relationship, so having a strong relationship with my grandma makes it sort of even, sort of, cause we do stuff, and I help her out painting, and do little jobs that my granddad done I do.
- I You mentioned your friends earlier, tell me a bit more about your friends.
- M1 Well, his family and the person who I work for, they sort of go out quite a bit, to body boarding and to like quite fun places, and that, so I normally go out with them, like paintballing and stuff and we go body boarding and with our bikes and whatever, and well, I really do like most things with them.
- I How would you describe your relationship with them?
- M1 Quite strong, I met him when I first moved in to my house which is like four years ago, and gone all the way through, and he is like quite a laugh and we have never really had an argument, so that is quite good.
- I Would you say that you like the relationship that you have with him?
- M1 Yeah, yeah, quite strong and we are both good mates with each other, and wouldn't do anything.
- I You talk about one friends, are there any others around?
- M1 Yeah, yeah, there are a few mates just mess around, mainly at school, but I don't sort of like to see them all the time, cause I see then at school quite a bit so there is no need to see them outside.
- I How would you describe the difference between your close friend and these mates you are talking about now?

M1 Emm, a close friend is sort of like me and him, we just mess around and do anything, really, whereas the other friends you have got to do it in a group, and like emm, cause I work with my close friend as well, so sort of all the summer I am with him and just messing around and doing the job and having a laugh, whereas with close friends I would have to ring like most of them up and do something as a group, which is quite hard in Exmouth as there is not a lot to do.

I Would you say you like having this type of different relationship with your friends?

M1 Emm, it's not that I like it, it is just something that I have always done and got used to it really.

I These friends, are the similar ages, different ages?

M1 No, similar age, I know like quite a lot of people in the year above, but I don't normally go out, I think that when I go out to sort of the pubs and play pool and stuff then I meet older people, cause I get along with most people, but my friends at the moment, I don't know, it is hard to explain, they don't sort of go out and do normal stuff, like not normal stuff, but the stuff that I enjoy, some people do, and where I am moving to there is going to be more people who do the stuff which interest me more, if that makes sense.

I And you moved when you were in year seven, so I guess you had lots of friends in Swindon, what happened there?

M1 Well, the school is very big, so I thought that everyone would be in the same sort of situation, I just basically got dropped off and then just lined up in our tutor, and then met some people and that was really it, it just started from there.

I Do you stay in contact with friends you had from Swindon?

M1 Yeah, I try to, but it obviously fades away, but we still keep in contact with our like, old next door neighbours, cause are like good friends to my mum and dad, so they come down and like my mum and dad are going up this weekend, and

stuff. It is good for them, and even though I was a kid and my friends then really wouldn't understand, it is still quite good to know.

I How important would you say it is to keep in contact with your friends back there?

M1 Not very, because you are not really involved with them any more, you can only see them once in a while and play football with them, but you are not really that involved.

I If I were to ask you to devise a list of things that are currently important to you, what would be on that list?

M1 Family probably main ones, obviously brother and sister and that, making sure that everyone is like happy,

I What do you mean everyone been happy?

M1 Sort of that there is no problems and sort of, emm, it's quite hard, like if, if my brother needs help with something, or, like family will help and are willing to help, it is quite hard to explain, that's really it.

I One of things you also mentioned was your mum been a teacher at this school. Tell me a bit more about that.

M1 Ah well she was a teacher in my brother's school in Swindon, and my sister's, when she started, she used to teach business, but now she moved here and she teaches maths, and she is quite high up, and tries her hardest and is probably one of the best teachers, even though she is my mum, but she actually helps out the students whereas other teachers might not care whereas my mum does, which is probably why she has got a little bit higher than other maths teachers, or ICT teachers which is good for her and she enjoys it, that's what she likes doing.

I How does it make you feel having your mum as a teacher?



M1 Sometimes it can be quite hard, some people take the mickey, and that, but you just got to stick with it, normally it is ok, cause she helps you out and tells you what to do, someone there if you fall back, or whatever.

I Would you be able to tell me if there has been any major influence in your life, something that may have changed the way you see things?

M1 Emm, quite hard, yeah, probably something, yeah maybe something has changed my life, just maybe moving, like moving at an early stage made me look at how I would move again, gives me experience, so that when I go to uni or whatever, if I go to University, emm, I can easily move again because I will make new friends and stuff, whereas if I stay in one place like a home sort of person, then it will be quite hard to move away which I want to do eventually.

I Ok, let's look now at major events in your life, would you be able to identify significant events?

M1 Yeah, probably funerals, I always remember them, it is quite hard, emm,

I Can you tell me more about that?

M1 Yeah, emm, well obviously, you know that my granddad came down with my grandma and got a flat, but emm, he was not very well, he had a heart problem and stuff, and me and my grandma where there when he actually like died, we were actually there, which was quite hard to get through, but I think that if I wasn't there and my grandma was on her own, she would actually struggle to get an ambulance and stuff, which in a way it helped that I was there, but in a way unfortunate.

I Any other sort of events that may have been significant?

M1 Emm, obviously moving that was quite big, nothing really no.

I You've mentioned, you've said it twice about moving out and going to college then university, tell me a bit more about that.

M1 Well, my brother went to college and then Uni and my sister is planning to do it, but she wants to take a gap year, emm, even though, even though I do not think that it is necessary, I think that showing someone that you have actually been to university and got a degree, even in anything, they will understand that you've tried and got something, what you've wanted, even though I might not want to work for someone, it is still a backup, if anything else happens.

I You have just said you "don't think that it is necessary", what do you mean by that?

M1 Well, they don't look at the degree what you've actually got, I don't think, they look at how you got it and if you got it.

I Who is they?

M1 Sort of like employers, or anyone, if they, if they want to employ you, and they look at if you achieved your target, and I don't think that they look at if you've got the right subject and stuff, I think that they can see what you've got, but that is only a backup though, I think that it is alright.

I There are lots of other different options that can be done, why would you say that you are looking at following this path?

M1 Emm, I don't know actually, probably because I think that my mum deep down wants all of us to go to university as a backup, and I think having that, saying that you have been to university, sort of lets out your life really, cause if you go straight into work then you are going to be a bit miserable I think, rather than having a good time.

I How important is it to you what your mum feels and wants for you?

M1 Emm, it is quite important cause I would like to feel that she is happy as well, obviously, if I don't want to go to university which I have not made up my mind

yet, then I won't go, but I know that my mum would want me to go, but it's, she says that it is up to me and that is fine.

I Do you like knowing that for example your mum wants you to go, and do you feel that you have some pressure in going?

M1 Emm, no, I don't think that I have got, I know that I'm not pressured or anything, but I feel that if I do go to University, if I do say right I am doing this and university, my mum would try and make me keep up for me to follow it through, if you see my point, whereas, emm, for example, my sister said that she is going uni and then studying speech and therapy at Cardiff, and because she said that my mum like is trying to like make the steps easier, and get her all the way through it, and now my sister has changed her mind and wants to go travelling for a year, whereas if she'd said that she wasn't going uni and went travelling and then said, oh I want to go uni, then it would be completely different, whereas, say I want to just keep my options open.

I Something that we have not discussed is your present school life, can you tell me a bit more about that?

M1 Emm, yeah, it is fine, I just get day to day really, just go through it, I know, I have always felt that I am not going to stay here for long, so I don't really see any point of making good mates, even though I have, but, I don't see any point of really trying and getting into big groups and stuff, I don't see any point in doing that cause I know that I am going to move.

I Would you say that you like coming to school?

M1 Emm, yes, it is ok, you have to do it really, you've got no choice, some subjects are better than others, some subjects I wish I didn't pick, but it is all learning really.

I Can you give me some examples of subjects you'd wished you'd not picked?

M1 Emm, I wish I had not picked PE really, I think that it is a dead end, because I picked business, and I want to own my own business, cause I think that that is the only way you are going to make money. So really, picking PE and Business were sort of two negatives really, shouldn't, if you are going to pick, if you want to be something to do with PE pick PE, but you can't really have a business and PE, or something, so it is quite, I should have thought about me and not what my friends were doing.

I Would you say that played a big part what your friends were doing?

M1 What picking PE? Yeah, well, I decided to pick Business anyway, cause I know that is what I wanted to do, and the other subject was a struggle, cause I had already done ICT, cause I took it a year early, so, picking PE as like a group of mates was a group of mates idea, not your own, which was maybe the wrong idea.

I You have said maybe?

M1 It could come out ok, I don't know what I want to do yet, maybe I want to actually be some sort of PE teacher, or physio or something, but I am not too sure.

I How important would you say schooling is to you?

M1 Emm, these last well six months or whatever, very, because it is just starting to end now isn't it, with your GCSE's and stuff, even though I know if I do rubbish in my GCSE's I can still re-do them and go to college and stuff, but making sure that I do get C's and B's and stuff would really give me a boost, whereas if I didn't and just didn't want to learn, then I would have wasted ten or twelve years of whatever, just in school, which I don't see any point.

I Ok, in terms of what I wanted to discuss today, I think that we have covered everything, is there anything that you want to add?

M1 No, not really.

\*\*\* ends \*\*\*

*Interview with Clyde – March*

I How easy was it to do this?

M1 Quite hard. 'cause I didn't really know what to take pictures of. So it was quite hard, but I just managed to do it.

I You've taken 26 photos. How did you decide what to take?

M1 Well, I thought my family and house and stuff – what means most to me – and what I daily do and stuff – take pictures of that.

I OK. If we go through each of them now, individually – can you talk me through what's going on in the photograph.

M1 Well number 1's just me, 'cause you asked just for a picture of myself at the beginning, Number 2's my old house – the house what I sold. It was nice house and it was my first house in Exmouth. Been living here five years.

I So why's that in there?

M1 Well I was moving and so I thought I haven't really got one. Didn't come out very well, but, just meant quite a bit.

I What does that house mean to you?

M1 Just means that it was my first house in Exmouth, really. I haven't been like moved around much, 'cause I moved from Swindon to Exmouth, it just means that that's the one place I've stayed quite a bit, which is good.

I Have you actually moved out of it?

M1 Yeah, I moved out 30th of January. It was a nice house, but just a bit big for what we wanted.

- I OK.
- M1 Number 3 is my dog. I've had her six years. Our next-door neighbour in Swindon was pregnant, so we got a puppy off her.
- I Your next-door neighbour's dog?
- M1 Yeah, it was pregnant, so we got one of the puppies. And number 4's my dog again. She likes to play with my ball – it's not in the picture but it's just down below and I was just about to throw it, and she's just mad about it. I take her down the beach sometimes and just play ball with her and stuff.
- I So why has your dog made it to this photo shoot?
- M1 I don't know – she's always about; she always plays and stuff, which sort of I enjoy. When I was a child a few years ago I used to play with Millie rather than play football or play on the computer or something. Number 5's just my friend. I like her hat – I think it's different, so I just took a picture of that, really.
- I Why have you chosen to take a picture of this friend?
- M1 Just – when anyone like tries to take a picture of her, she goes away – so I thought I'd surprise her, and get the hat as well, 'cause I like the hat. But she's a really good friend and that. She's just up for a laugh.
- I And this picture's inside school, is it?
- M1 Yeah. In the computer room.
- I Do you see this friend outside school?
- M1 No, not a lot. But sometimes I do – just say 'Hi' and that – just like a normal friend. Number 6 is 'Blondie' I call him, but it's not really his name, but he's a good laugh. He's in business and Spanish and that. He's a really good laugh. Makes me laugh when I'm in town and stuff.

- I So what's he doing in the photograph?
- M1 Just posing! Just normal him. Something off the office or something. He just has a good laugh.
- I Would you describe him as a good friend, close friend?
- M1 I don't know. Good friend, really. I only see him at school and just sometimes down the beach in the summer and that, but he just tries and does anything that's good [?]  
Number 7 ... don't really know what that was. Don't know what happened there! Something happened. Number 8's my grandma ... and she was quite good to me. She moved down to Exmouth a year after us, so she's been here a good four years, and my granddad came with her, but he passed away a few months after they moved, so me and my grandma have been quite close.
- I And where's this?
- M1 Just in her flat. She's got a warden flat – it's quite secure and that. You've got to press the button and speak to her and then she lets you up and that.
- I You said she means a lot to you – tell me a bit more about that.
- M1 She's like a mum, really – just someone to go and talk to – give advice. I help her out sometimes, like paint the flat and that, and any little jobs that she can't do, which is quite good. I think everyone should do that for their grandmas or granddads, if they're, like, not that well or whatever. But she's a good laugh. Go on holiday and that sometimes with her, go out as a family – she comes along with us.  
Number 9's Courtney and Hannah – they're just good friends, really. They just have a laugh and that.
- I Is this in school?

- M1 Yeah. Breaktime. They're just mates, really.
- I Are they close friends? Distant friends? Friends you see outside school?
- M1 Yeah. Sometimes I see them outside school – parties and stuff – but they're just literally a a good laugh. Nothing really come much of it. Number 10 – there's Martin! He's quite cool – he's got this Afro thing going on. Everyone calls him Justin Timberlake. But, yeah, he's really cool – just another friend. 'cause I moved into my new house – he lives near me – so I just walk to school and that sometimes with him. I knew him since year 7 but not as good friends, but now I've moved closer to him I just hang around, go and knock on his door and stuff. Go swimming and down the gym and stuff.
- I And do you do this regularly with him?
- M1 Just once a week or whatever. Its' quite good.  
Number 11's Pete and Steve. They're just good fun as well – Pete lives near me and so does Steve. We go just gym and play badminton and stuff, and just do loads of sports and that really. Pete's a good laugh 'cause he's quite tall, so ... it just helps, 'cause we play basketball and stuff! Number 12 – that's my new house. It's not very nice, but the plan is we do it up and then sell it on. We've got loads of trees in the front garden, but we've hacked down a few of them, so it makes the house quite dark ... and loads of stuff's happening, really. The windows are coming soon, and carpets, and stuff, so that should be done soon.
- I Do you like this house you live in now?
- M1 No, not really, 'cause nothing really works, like showers and stuff and the cooker, but ... there's loads of stuff we need to do to it, so hopefully when it's done it should be all right.
- I When you say 'we', do you take an active part in that?



M1 Yeah, me and my dad, really, as much as he tries to let me. He's a bit stubborn, but, yeah, it's me and my dad, and my mum helps out quite a bit, so it's quite good.

I Give me examples of things you're doing ...

M1 Well, painting and decorating at the moment, but we're planning to knock down a wall to have this breakfast-kitchen room, 'cause they've got what they call a family room, but we have nothing to use it for, so, to knock down that wall will mean a bigger kitchen, and make the house sell well when we eventually sell it in a few months' time, when it's finished. But, yeah, I help my dad out, which is quite good.

Picture 13 is Birdie and Mark – I'm in most of their lessons, so these are the people I hang around with most, and go lunch and that with.

I How would you describe your relationship with them?

M1 Quite strong. Just good mates, really. Mark lives where my old house was; Matt lives down the road from my new house now, so they're just good mates, really ... have a laugh, play golf sometimes ... do sport with them.

I How often would you say you see them?

M1 Well, apart from every day at school, out of school ... twice a week? Three times? Do stuff at the weekends, so ... but they're good mates.

Picture 14 – I think that was meant to be my sister, but it didn't come out right. Maybe the flash wasn't on. So ... can't really explain on that one.

Picture 15 is my goldfish. I've had him – well, I think it's a 'him' – for about seven, eight years. So that means quite a bit. He's huge – I don't actually think he's a goldfish! But he's quite happy, and his scales started dropping off about two years ago and he was golden but now he's white, and my mum goes, 'Yeah, he's going to die soon but never mind,' but he hasn't died since. My mum hates him, so ... but he's real cool.

I Why do you think your mum hates your goldfish, or whitefish?

M1 I don't know, actually, 'cause ... just in the way, maybe! Or maybe she doesn't want a goldfish in her kitchen, I don't know. It just seems quite funny.

I Who looks after this fish?

M1 Well my dad cleans out the tank and that, but I normally like play with it. If you shake its food tub it moves quickly and that if it's hungry. But, yeah, my dad normally cleans it out, but I normally play with it – put gloves on.

I Whose idea was it to get this fish?

M1 My dad's – when I was about seven. It was only a little thing. I had two and my sister had two. One died – they were in separate tanks – I had two in one tank and my sister had two in the other. I've always said it was my fish that lasted but my sister thinks it's hers, for some reason, but I'm sure it's mine. And it's just kept growing and feeding and that ...

I So this debate about whose fish it is – does it matter who it belongs to?

M1 No ... well, it doesn't matter to me, but my sister seems to think it's hers, but her fish kept eating each other and tried to eat other, so they just died, and that one's just carried on through the years. Had to get a bigger tank and stuff, 'cause it's just too big. It's like that big – quite long – it's huge, and when we take it out and that, it's just massive, so it's quite hard to clean, but ... its' a good fish. I don't know how long it'll last.

Picture 16 is my mum and dad, with the curtains up in their lovely bedroom ... it's not very nice. The wallpaper needs taking off, but, yeah, they seem quite stressed 'cause they'd just moved, but they're all right. They're good. Good parents.

I Why are they in this photo shoot? Why have you taken pictures of them?

M1 Well, just 'cause they mean quite a lot to me – they're my mum and dad – and I thought, 'I see them every day' and that, and they stand by me and that, so I

thought, 'Well, I'll take a picture of them together, and it means that they are never going to split up and whatever.

Picture 17 is my tutor, Mr Dawkins. He's a good laugh. I went skiing with him this year, with the school, and he came along. But he just helps me out and organises stuff – tells me what I need to do and go and all the places, and I help him out sometimes, you know, if he's forgotten stuff and that.

I So – would you say he means something to you in your life? What kind of relationship do you have with him?

M1 Well, it's more of a mate than a Bossy Person. But he just helps you with the day and whatever, and I help him with his day – if anything needs doing – any problems, he'll sort it out. If there are no problems, no questions asked or whatever.

I Can you give me some examples of how that works?

M1 Sort of, say, I need something, or I need a note or something 'cause I'm going or whatever, he'll be cool and he'll just say, 'There's a note: you can only use it for so long, or whatever,' and coursework – you just speak to the teacher to just help me out a bit, which is quite good, and understand all the teachers, 'cause he's always there ...

Picture 18 is Pete again. I don't know how I took that one – I think someone might have taken my camera just for a laugh!

Picture 19's Paul. He's cool. He lives near me as well, in my new house, and just the same as everyone else – just go out and have a good laugh. And he's a good laugh as well – he doesn't really, sort of, upset you or whatever – just a good mate.

Picture 20's Jo. She's in my tutor – I see her every morning, and she's cool as well – just Jo, really.

I These people – are they close friends? Distant friends? Are they people you just see in school and that's it?

M1 Well, they're quite close. Sometimes I meet up with them, but like Jo I went on holiday with, through skiing and that, and most people in the pictures I went on holiday with. It was just a good time, really, and I just enjoy her company. Like number 21 is Dee and she's really cool – just a good laugh, really. Makes everyone laugh.

22's Courtney, Caley and Becky. They're just good mates as well. Courtney had a camera, so she's got one of me, I think, and I tried to get one of her. It was quite good. She's a good laugh, as well.

Number 23, which is Ben – he's got a hockey stick in his hand – I play hockey with him sometimes, in PE and that. And we just mess around, really. Just a good laugh ... relax, really, which is quite good.

24 is Charlotte, and she's a good laugh as well – they all are, really. Good mate, as well. She's just happy and that all the time.

25 is Charlotte again, and there's Susan there, but she's turned her face.

I Did you want to get both of them in the photograph, or just one?

M1 Well, I got Charlotte really. I don't know Susan that well. I did when I was in year 7, but not now.

I Why has there been that change?

M1 I don't know. She sort of went off with other people and that, and she's just ... I don't even speak to her any more – she's not in my classes or whatever, so there's really no need to speak.

26 – I don't know what happened there again! Sort of, a ... picture.

I OK. That's good. You've got 26 photos there. Have you left anything out? If I was to ask you to do this all over again, would you get similar photos, or ... would other things appear in there?

M1 I'd probably get my brother if he came down, but I couldn't get my brother. I'd probably try and get my sister again – I think I forgot the flash! I'd probably try and get one of groups of mates – it's quite hard to get a group of mates together at the same time, so rather than do individual pictures or whatever ...

I A lot of the photos appear to be from inside school – how come there’s not that many from outside school?

M1 I don’t know, really. By the time I get home and that ... I don’t really ... I go out but I don’t really take the camera with me. Whereas the camera was in my bag – and other people using a camera made me think, otherwise I would have forgot. That’s probably the main reason.

I Fair enough.  
I’m going to give you a task now. You’ve got your twenty-six photos there. Can you put them into different themes and areas of your life?

[C sorts photos]

M1 There’s a group of me and my family – just – and like animals and stuff: the goldfish and the dog; there’s a group of my change – sort of like from one class to the other, which kind of means a bit; and there’s a big pile of my friends and people who are involved in my daily live.

I Your ‘friends’ pile has loads of photographs. Would you be able to break that down further, or ...

M1 Yeah, maybe ... [sorts photos]  
People I see the most, in one group – mainly people from school; and the other pile is just people I only see in school, not outside. Sometimes see them, but not always.

I In terms of your relationship with those two different piles, how does it differ?

M1 I’m more close with one pile with one pile than the other, but sometimes, like on the internet [?] I speak and that – I don’t really speak to some, but some people I really see only during school in one pile, and the other pile I see mainly outside, but in school as well, so I go out with the group of friends in one pile but don’t

really go out with the other, but still speak to them, if you see the point. So I do stuff with one pile and just leave it with the other pile.

I OK. Another task now. Let's say you can only keep ten of these photos, and these are the ten you're going to keep for the rest of your life, and I'm going to shred the rest of them. What are you going to keep? I'll give you a couple of minutes just to go through them.

[C sorts photos] I don't think your goldfish is going to be too happy!

What have we got, then?

M1 Number 16 – the one of my mum and dad. Number 8 – the one of my grandma; number 4 – the one of my dog; number 2 – the one of my old house; number 12 – the one of my new house; number 25 – the one of Charlotte; number 9 – the one of Courtney and Hannah; number 10 – the one of Martin; number 13 – the one of Matt and Birdie – I mean Mark and Birdie; number 17 – the one of my tutor.

I Why?

M1 Why? 'cause they probably mean the most out of them – Dawkins: every day I see him, and he's just a good laugh and that – he supports me, so ...

I Why do you need to have a visual reminder of that person?

M1 Just to know that through that time he was my tutor and he was just there, really. Just put me through school, if you see my point.

I What do you think he would say if, for example, I were to give him this exercise with him?

M1 He'd probably say the same, sort of, that it wouldn't have been as much fun if Dawkins wasn't there. He's probably say the same – it's just, like, coming to school is not that fun, but having someone there to sort of there to come to if you see my point!

Number 13 – Mark and Birdie. I'm always with them, so that's really why I picked it – just as good mates through school.

I What do you mean, 'always with them'?

M1 Just through lessons and at lunch. Don't really do much else ... after school as well, so that's really why

I Do you see these people outside school?

M1 Yes, I see them outside school.

I What kind of stuff do you do with them?

M1 Well, Mark plays golf and that, and so does Matt, so I play golf quite a bit with them. Mark does football and stuff, so I play ... and down the beach in the summer and that.

I How would you describe the kind of relationship you've got with them?

M1 Quite good, really. Just good mates.

I In terms of conversation etcetera that you might have with them – would you say you listen to what they're saying, or would you say you value what they tell you?

M1 Yeah – if they told me something, I wouldn't go out and just blab it to someone else, 'cause there's no point. That's why we're just good mates, really. We just know that nobody's going to betray each other, whatever.

Number 10's Martin. I picked that one because – the same reason as Mark and Matt, really. Just cool – walk to school with them and stuff. Just do loads of stuff, really.

I If – I mean these people aren't in this project – if they were, would you appear in their photos?

M1 Yeah, probably. 'Cause we're all sort of together, so they probably would.

I How would you feel if you weren't to appear in their photos?

M1 I wouldn't be that unhappy, 'cause you've only got to pick ten, say if they had a big family – three brothers, three sisters or whatever – 'cause they obviously mean more. But they'd probably do a group photo, unlike clumsy me. I should really have done a big photo and then I could have a set instead of individually. Number 9 is Courtney and Hannah. Same reason for the other mates – they're just a good laugh, and just if I have to keep one of my mates. Number 25 is Charlotte, and I'm going to the Prom with her, so it just means I'll have something to remember it by.

I You say you're going to?

M1 The Prom – the Year 11 Prom.

I What does that make you feel, knowing that she's going with you?

M1 Good 'cause it's a friend as well. I'd rather go with a girl than a group of mates or whatever, 'cause it's not always that you can go.

I What kind of relationship would you say that you've got with her?

M1 Quite good – just talk and stuff – pretty good. Just give each other advice, which is good – a good friendship thing.

I How would you say she sees you?

M1 In the same way, really. We've not really been horrible to each other, so, there's nothing that you could really say that I've done to upset her or she's done to upset me, which I think's good, which is probably why I asked her to the Prom, just 'cause we're good mates and that.



- I Is that important to you?
- M1 Yeah. Yeah. I don't think it would be as easy if I didn't have good mates, like the people in the pictures.
- I You say you don't it would be 'as easy' – what do you mean by that?
- M1 Like school. I don't think that school would be as easy – what would you do at break and lunch and after school? Nothing – you'd be bored.  
Number 12 – that's my new house. Probably would remember it because it's something that me and my dad and my mum have been together doing it up, and that's sort of what I want to do when I'm older. So remembering that that was my first project would be quite fun.
- I You said you want to do this when you're older – where have those interests come from?
- M1 Making money, really! I enjoy the practical stuff rather than teaching and learning, and – I don't know – just enjoy being under pressure or whatever. So I think doing that kind of job would be enjoyable.
- I Do you think doing this kind of job – is that the only job where you can feel that kind of pressure?
- M1 Oh no, but I like to invest money and then gain something out of it, so I would gain by enjoying what I was doing and making money at the same time, so instead of just a weekly pay I could, whatever.  
Number 2 – my old house. First house in Exmouth – that's the only reason I like to remember it by. It was a good house, really – not really much to say.
- I What do you mean – you said it was a good house – what makes it a good house?
- M1 It was big, it just had all modern stuff – it wasn't like an old house; it was just modern. It was really good, 'cause my other house in Swindon was quite old –

not old old, but wasn't as old as that house there, and it was good seeing the way it was being built, 'cause we got it built and we popped up sometimes and had a look, so I can remember certain bits.

I Is it important to have these memories?

M1 Yeah, 'cause it just shows me how it was being built and how I lived there.

I How does it feel now knowing that someone else has lived in that house?

M1 I don't know – it wasn't really a home when I was there – it was more of a house , so it doesn't really bother me.

I You say it wasn't a home, it was a house?

M1 Yeah, well, my mum and dad really bought it just to make money and 'cause of the house prices it just made money, so it wasn't seen as a home – it was just there to ...

I You said it wasn't seen as a home – what's going on there?

M1 Well, we knew that we were going to move eventually, if it was back to Swindon, or ... just to another house in Exmouth, but we knew that we were going to move – we knew that even before we moved in there, so to me and everyone else it wasn't going to be a home, even if we stayed there ten years.

I OK. How would you describe 'home' then?

M1 I don't know – somewhere that you don't have any intentions of moving ...

I So what would you actually be doing differently in your house to another place where you ...

M1 I don't know, really, just like – in that house we had all the same walls and carpets, for example. That made it look bigger, and we kept that: we didn't

wallpaper; we didn't change colour; we didn't change carpets, and that's exactly what we're doing to my new house – we're doing exactly the same purposely to make it look bigger, so when people come and buy it they like it more, so in that aspect it wasn't going to be a home because it didn't like have our own carpets or whatever.

I Are there any other ways in which it differs?

M1 No, not really. That was the main thing. Sort of everything that we see really. It's just the little things, like maybe we would have changed stuff, but we didn't because there's no point, 'cause other people when they come and see the house they might not like it.

Number 4 is my dog, and she means quite a bit to me 'cause – I play with her and that – she's part of the family, really.

I When you say that, does she mean the same to all your family members, or are you closer to her than ...

M1 No – she means the same to all family members. She's part of the family.

Number 8's my grandma. I just like to remember her, being there, really. Not really much else. I just help her out a lot. That's the main reason why I took a photo.

My last photo, number 16, is my mum and dad, and they're just there to remind me.

I OK. Tell me more – you've got your mum and dad there – probably by coincidence the last photo that you put down. Why are they there? Why do we need a photo reminding us of who they are?

M1 Well, I don't know – just when I'm older or whatever – just in case. I can look back, 'cause obviously they're not going to stay like that and look exactly like that for ages, so having a picture to remind you of what you were like is quite good.

I So is it important just to have the appearance of what they were like?

- M1 Yeah, sort of. Yeah. They're just mum and dad. I'm sure everyone took one of their mums and dads.
- I And in terms of your life, what importance to they play in terms of the way you shape your life – the way you are?
- M1 Tell, guidance, really. They just guide you to the start of your life, and then ... don't know ... just there, really.
- I You said they guide you through the start of your life – when is this start?
- M1 From whenever you were born 'til you leave.
- I Leave ...?
- M1 Home, or whatever. But you can still – they sort of teach you, in a way.
- I So what you're saying is they'll stop teaching you when you leave home?
- M1 Well, no, but they teach you to like, live, and that. I don't know. They, sort of tell you everything they know, and then you can use that for your kids, or to grow up, or to do jobs and stuff.
- I When you say they're an important part of your life in terms of ...
- M1 Yeah, because maybe I'm doing something wrong, and then they can just say, 'You shouldn't be doing that,' or, 'Wear a coat,' or whatever.
- I You just said 'Wear a coat' – are there any other examples where you think 'This is a big impact'?
- M1 Picking options and stuff for school, really. They just guide you – they've been there before, haven't they? Even though my mum's a teacher, they just – with my sister and brother going on to college and then uni – they can sort of say,

'You don't want to narrow your options,' and help you out that way, which is good.

I Are there any examples when you can say you completely disregarded what either parent said?

M1 No. Not really. They wouldn't say it if they didn't mean it – if they didn't want me to do it – or there was a danger, or whatever, so, no.

I OK.  
As far as it goes, I'm happy with what we've done today. Is there anything you want to add?

M1 No, not really.

- ends -

*Interview with Clyde – June*

K The first thing to do is an activity - - -

K OK. Tell me – what are you doing when you're seventeen?

C I've just passed my A-levels; I still live at home with my parents; still be at college; still work at Tesco's part-time; have a car of my own; be the only child in the house.

K OK. So you say you've passed you're a-levels – which ones have you done?

C Well, I picked Business Studies, ICT and Media, and hopefully **2011** or something – pass my AS's, which is half an A-level, so hopefully I would be half-way there.

K So you've done those three for the year – are you looking at choosing the same three for A-level?

C Yeah.

K OK. You're still living at home; you say you're going to be the only child at home – what does that mean?

C Yeah, 'cos my sister's going to uni in Reading, and that's like a five-year course, so she obviously won't be living at home.

K Does that mean on her holidays she'll never come back?

C Yeah – well, she might come back – dunno. My brother did to start with, but he didn't come back every holiday. Like now we hardly see him – he only comes to visit.

K OK. You say you'll still be at college – where is college?

- C At Exmouth Community College.
- K OK. And you work in Tesco's. Is that something you do at the moment?
- C Yeah. I started the other day – last week.
- K How many hours are you doing there?
- C Fifteen. I do four days in the evenings – normally six 'til ten.
- K Why are you working?
- C To have my own money, really, so that I can buy stuff – clothes and stuff what I want – for college, 'cos ... don't have a school uniform at college, so I'd rather do it myself than rely on my parents.
- K Why's that? Wouldn't it be much easier just to have your mum and dad give you money?
- C Yeah, but they want stuff what they want, so their money can be their own, sort of thing, apart from feeding me and stuff, but that's about it.
- K You also said you're going to have a car. Tell me more about this.
- C Yeah, well I either have my mum's car, which I'm insured on, so we share it, or I have my own car. Depends, really.
- K What does it depend on?
- C It depends on how much money I've got and if I can afford it, really, 'cos it's not just the car – it's everything else.
- K OK. You're at college. Why are you at college?
- C 'Cos I think you have to go to college to get a good job.

- K Tell me more about this.
- C Well, I reckon that if I want to have a good job, then I should have good qualifications telling someone that I can learn and understand quickly, and two years at college can give me awards.
- K You said in order to get a good job you need qualifications: what kind of job are you looking at here?
- C I don't really know, actually ... well, obviously I need a job, and I don't want a bad one – I want a good one.
- K In your mind, what would be a bad one and what would be a good one?
- C A bad one to me would be low wage – sort of what I don't enjoy; whereas a good one would be ...I like it – I'd rather go to work than do something else ...and have fun, really.
- K You just said a bad one would be a low wage – what is a low wage?
- C Where you struggle to ... if you like something and you can't buy it, basically.
- K So if you had to guess some numbers, what would be a low wage?
- C A low wage to me would be like £12000, 'cos that's £1000 a month then, and if you've got your own house, that's quite a lot, but most of the money would be gone so you can't afford sort of new clothes and whatever, whereas a high wage to me, at seventeen or a bit later, I don't know ... would be ... twenty-something – the low twenties maybe, 'cos I'm quite young.
- K OK. You're now twenty, so this is in about four years' time. What are you doing?
- C I'll be in university.



K Where?

C I don't know yet. Haven't sort of ... not near home.

K So you won't be going to Exeter?

C I don't know, really. I might, but I won't live at home, I don't think.

K Why's that?

C I dunno – I think it's time to just go. 'Cos if I live at home and do a long course, say sort of a four-year course, that means I'll be there 'til I'm twenty-two, so that's a bit boring.

K And why are we going to university?

C To learn about something specific, really. To be higher up than people who are just on A-levels.

K What's the point?

C Dunno. To show off maybe! That you've got a good award or something! To have fun – my brother's had real good fun at university. He passed the course and that, but he still had a good time. He said it was a good experience.

K So you're going to university because you want to show off to friends, and you're going to go and have fun?

C Yeah – well, not show off, but to prove that I can do it.

K What's the point in all this proving? Who do you need to prove this to?

- C To the people I want a job from. If I want a high job, then I've got to prove that I can do the job properly or better than someone else, so having a degree would mean maybe I'm higher up than the people who just left at A-levels.
- K Do you think it'll make a huge difference when you apply for a job?
- C Yeah, I reckon it does. Even if I got a degree in something like Business and I went for a completely different job, it would still show the employer that I can work real hard for something that I want, so it would give me a step up over other people who didn't get a degree.
- K How are we paying to be at university? You just said you're not going to be living at home ...
- C Well, I've got my student grant. I'll probably get a full one, because my sister will still be at university, and my mum and dad always have given me something a week.
- K So you'll rely on your parents ...
- C Yeah, a little bit, but I'll have a job as well.
- K Why's that?
- C So that I can live on my own money and stuff, and just for fun. I'll work in a bar, so I can go out in the evenings and work and still have fun, but be working and earning money.
- K OK. What will you be studying at university?
- C I dunno yet. There's one in Property Development what I might be interested in, but it all depends at the time. I haven't really made my mind up yet.
- K You've just come up with a very specific course – where has that come from?

- C I dunno – I’ve always been interested in houses and stuff and the markets and stuff.
- K Why’s that?
- C I dunno. I’ve moved quite a lot – I’ve moved to a lot of houses ... we’ve always sort of done them up and then – well, not done them up, just tarted them up – and then moved on, so I’m just interested in doing up properties what no-one wants and the selling them being a property that people would want, basically, and then making money out of it.
- K OK. What else are we doing?
- C Have a solid relationship with a girl.
- K Why’s that important?
- C I dunno – just proves that I’m grown up, probably.
- K Who is it proving it to?
- C Probably to myself, or parents ...
- K Do you think you’ll need to prove to yourself that you’re grown up?
- C No, no ...not prove – that’s probably the wrong word. Just growing up.
- K OK. Where are you living then?
- C Probably near the university – renting a house with some mates or something. For the second year – first year I’ll probably be in halls.
- K You seem to have knowledge of how it would work – where have you gained this knowledge?

- C From my brother and my sister, 'cos my brother's been to university – he had loads of problems and stuff, and it comes up in conversation quite a lot – and my sister's going, and she's having problems with her living arrangements, so when I ask her if she's all right, she goes, 'No' blah, blah, blah ... So I just kind of take that in, general knowledge.
- K So it's just talking with your brothers and sisters – those are the two main sources who help you understand what university's like and the whole process?
- C Yeah.
- K OK. Anything else you're doing at twenty?
- C Still visiting home and my grandma.
- K When you were seventeen, your grandma wasn't mentioned?
- C I just forgot to write it down, really. It's just normal, seeing my grandma, so I probably didn't see it as when I'm seventeen I change, or whatever.
- K So when you're twenty you **?114** to go and see your grandma?
- C Well, I won't be at home, will I? So it's sort of – not a reminder – but it's something I'll do. Because obviously I won't see her as much, just like my mum and dad – I won't see them as much.
- K You're still visiting home – what do you mean by that?
- C Still going home to see parents, wherever they're living.
- K Why is that important to you?
- C To keep in contact, really. They're still my mum and dad, and they've helped me; they'll probably help me through the university, so it's nice to know I'm coming home sometimes.

- K OK. You're forty now, so that's in twenty-four years' time. What are you doing?
- C I'll be married, have a child and home. I'll have lots of houses that I rent; have a nice big home for my family; be worth more than a million; maybe have my own business.
- K OK. You're going to be married. Who is your wife? Where has she come from?
- C I don't know. I haven't met her yet.
- K Where do you think you'll meet your wife?
- C Probably at university.
- K Why's that?
- C 'Cos lots of people go to university, so ... I could meet her on holiday – I don't know. No-one knows.
- K You say you're going to have a child?
- C Well, I don't know ... I'll probably have more.
- K How many children are we thinking?
- C Three, probably.
- K Why three? Why not have a football team?
- C Me, my sister and my bother – that's three, so I thought that was a good number. 'Cos there's going to be either two girls and one boy, or two boys and one girl, so someone's going to learn more. That probably doesn't make sense to you,

but it makes sense to me. But my sister's learnt from me and my brother how to stick up for herself.

K So what happens if it's three boys or three girls?

C Then I'm not really fussed. That could be a problem! Hopefully it wouldn't happen, though.

K OK. You've said you've got lots of houses and you rent them. Where are all these houses? You said you've got a house, you're married, you've got children – where are you?

C Don't know where I'll be living. Probably ... I reckon it'll be somewhere busy.

K So it's not going to be Exmouth?

C No, unless it gets busier! I doubt it very much, but ...

K You say 'somewhere busy' – what does 'busy' mean?

C Sort of on the go all the time. 'Cos with my own business and stuff ...

K Can you give me an example of a busy place?

C A city. I'll probably rent houses near the city, or, say, near a university – somewhere where people need the houses. They need houses in Exmouth, but not many, I don't think. I want to rent quite a few.

K And why are we into all this renting houses?

C Don't know – I think it's interesting. I think if I do them up, so I get them cheap, so I can rent, and in the time get my money back plus pay off the mortgage.

- K OK. How about your own house: where is this house? What kind of house is it?
- C It'll probably be in the city again, near other people, for my children. That's about it, really. Not too close together, but then again sort of close, where children can go and play.
- K OK. You've got you're going to be worth more than a million.
- C Yeah, hopefully.
- K Why's that?
- C I don't know, really. I reckon with all my houses and stuff ... average cost of a house these days ... well, say £200, so all I need is six houses paid off, and that's it.
- K How much money are you earning in a year?
- C I dunno, actually. I'll probably still have a job or my own business – probably more likely to be a job until the mortgages are paid off of say four houses, and then I can just live off the rent of those four houses.
- K So we're looking at ...
- C Rent a month is about £400.
- K So we're looking at about £16000 a year?
- C That's not enough! So I'll have to get a few more houses – say ten houses.
- K You just said £16000 isn't enough. How much is enough, then?
- C I dunno – say £30, below £30, but then I'll still hopefully be doing up houses and property development, so that will give me extra – it's just sort of a back-up really.

K You've thrown in that thing about £30000: how does that compare with what your current household has? You must have some idea of what £30000 in real terms is? How does that compare with the lifestyle you lead at the moment and what your household brings in?

C I dunno ... I reckon £30000 you could live on. I don't really know why. Sort of ... I know quite a lot about our mortgage, so if you've got a low mortgage, then obviously you don't have to pay much, so basically you've got more money left over, so you can use that against food and stuff; and I go shopping with my mum, so I know how much our food bills are – you just sort of get a rough idea.

K OK. Looking at those plans, how realistic do you think each section is?

C I reckon the first one's definitely realistic, 'cos that's only next year. That ain't going to change much. The only thing is having a car of my own – that might not happen due to the cost of it. I might not want to fork out all that money for it. Yeah, that section's going to be realistic.

When I'm twenty, going to university – that's definitely going to be.

K Why's that a definite one?

C 'Cos that's what I'm going to do next, really. I'm not going to get a job, I'm just going to stay a student a bit more. Rent a house with my mates – obviously I'm not too sure about that. I might not like university – I might drop out.

K You say you might not like university – why not?

C I don't know – just might not. Could be one of those things that I might not like.

K If you drop out, you obviously won't have the qualifications you've been talking about, so what happens next?

C Don't know – get a job, probably. Get a job so I can afford a mortgage.



- K Is it important for you to afford this mortgage?
- C Yeah, so I can do it up and sell it on, so I make a profit, until I make enough money to actually rent one house and still do what I've been doing. Obviously I'll have a job of some kind – part-time or full-time – I don't know. I don't know where I'll be if I didn't go to university, so I might be at home, so I won't have to visit my mum and dad and grandma, or I might be somewhere else. It all depends. Same with the relationship. You just don't know, do you? It's one of those things.
- K OK. And when you're forty, how realistic do you think those plans are going to be? Planning to be a millionaire?
- C Well, that's my target. I hope I will be. I'll hopefully be married, with a child, obviously.
- K Why's that a definite?
- C Well it's not a definite definite but I hope to see myself at forty with a wife and child or more, hopefully more. All depends, doesn't it, if all the sections – like when I'm twenty – finish and look good, then I can go on to the forties and they'll come through, hopefully – have a nice big house and houses to rent.
- K How would you feel if in twenty-four years' time I was to come back and ask you if you're a millionaire, and you were to say, 'Well, actually, no. I'm in debt by xx'?
- C I'd be a bit gutted. I doubt I'll be in debt, 'cos I don't like being in debt. No, I reckon I'll be close to a million, if not a million or more. But it's forty – it's quite a long way.
- K So you say you'd feel gutted if in twenty-four years I come back and you say, 'No – nowhere near this million,' – if you were to look back at your life, would you be able to say, 'This is where I'm wrong,' or 'I shouldn't have gone down this route,' ...

- C I think that's the wrong way to look at it, if you say, 'I shouldn't ...,' 'If ...,' - all that, 'cos it happens. To me it happens for a reason. So if something went wrong, obviously it wasn't meant to be.
- K If all this did go wrong, have you got ...a Plan B?
- C Don't know, really. I'd have my own business of some sort. Find a gap in the market or something.
- K It's interesting – both Plan A and Plan B now have involved you making your own business and not you going into a job that already exists: where does this come from?
- C You don't make enough money if you work for someone else, basically. That's my views. That could be snobby or whatever, but to me I want to be a person which employs other people.
- K Have you got examples of people who are doing that now?
- C Yeah, sort of. My dad owns his own business. I don't think he employed anyone, but he's still his own boss, if you see my point, and he made a lot of money through that. And my old next-door neighbour where I used to live – I still work for her sometimes – but she made her own business and she does well from it. She does stuff what I want to do, like rent houses and that – buy houses and rent them. Go and do stuff randomly, 'cos she can, basically, and that's what I want – to earn enough and then say, 'I can go and to this and that,' without saying, 'How much would this cost and that cost?'
- K And that's important to you – not having to worry about how much things cost?
- C Yeah. That I can buy things and not worry about it – that's what I want, basically, when I'm forty.

- K OK. I want to look at two different things now. One is the importance of school, and college and university. You want to straight into college and do you're A/S levels, A-levels, and then go to university, and there aren't any doubts about those two steps. Why aren't there any doubts about those two steps? You must speak to some of your peers - - -
- C That's basically the way I've always looked at it – brought up that way, really. My brother's done it; my sister's going to do it, and that's the way I want to just follow. I don't see anything other after A-levels after that. I don't see sort of 'I can go and do that job,' - I don't see it as that. It'd probably look great now, 'Oh, I can earn £20000, or £14000,' or whatever, after my A-levels – go and do that job – but then again I might not like it. It gives me a time [?] where I can actually look ahead and know what I want to do.
- K You said you've always 'been brought up that way,' ...
- C Yeah. Mum and dad have always said they'd support us through university and stuff. Again, my brother's gone, my sister's gone ... to me that's the way it goes.
- K Do you feel you have a choice?
- C Yeah, I have a choice. I can do what I want – I can not go to college now, if I want to. But then I don't think that's any future, to be honest.
- K Do you feel anybody would feel let down if you don't go to college?
- C Yeah, I think probably my mum would, but then people always feel that, don't they, if you don't do what they want or they think is right. Like if someone was leaving school now – a few of my friends – I would see them doing the jobs what people don't want to do, basically – that's the way I'd see it. I reckon they'd be like bored or whatever, and after college they'd probably go into a job what their family's offered them, which means they've got no choice really. Well, they have got a choice, but they haven't got no, 'I want to be a policeman,' or 'I want to do this or that,' – they've sort of got given the path for them.

- K And that's not the case with you?
- C Well, yeah, I'm given the path and stuff ... I can go and do whatever I want, but I just reckon A-levels and A/Ss are the best way forward for me, and then on to uni.
- K OK. Just one final bit on your peers and your friends. The way I see it at the moment - - -
- C I dunno – I reckon I'll meet new friends. I don't think it'll be like school, where the year above sort of talk to you but don't sort of like the year below, whereas college it's all together, so I'll have contact with the year above, so I can make friends there and they won't look down – whatever.
- K Is that an important part ...
- C Yeah. It's past the stage of school now, where you sort of go, 'Oh, I don't like you 'cos you're younger,' or whatever. I reckon that's a good stage.
- K And in terms of your friends that you've been with until now, who may no longer come to this school, or may go to Exeter College, or may go into employment – what happens with them?
- C Well, obviously we'll stay in touch, but I doubt whether it would last long if you don't see them ... probably see them around Exmouth or Exeter, but you really don't know – that's probably the end. Make new friends and move on, probably. People change, so they'll probably change or whatever – might even move away.
- K OK. That kind of brings everything to a close in terms of what we've done in the last three interviews – anything else you want to add?
- C No, nothing else, no.

- ends -

## APPENDIX C

Interview transcript with University staff member.

*Interview with Staff member*

K What is the current widening participation policy here?

S What is the policy? That it's a good thing - that we should be doing it. When you say, 'What's the policy?' I could talk about a document that exists on paper, that gives us a direction as to what we're supposed to be doing and sets some kind of targets for us; it's almost like having a job description that gives you a broad outline of what you're supposed to be doing, and then every so often you'll look back and think, 'Oh my God, yeah, I'd forgotten I was supposed to be doing that,' because you tend to evolve into your own way of working, so the policy here in its broadest sense has been developed in the context of government directives, and especially in respect of two things that became very clear when we started looking at our student body make-up in Exeter: (1) that we recruit disproportionately from the independent sector, and (2) that, like a lot of other universities, we're not doing much to change the balance of students who are recruited from poorer socio-economic groups, and this is the case across the whole sector, but Exeter is doing particularly badly in respect of those two groups. So the policy we have is to address those two areas as a matter of urgency because they've become politically important because the present administration has decided that it wants to do something about them, and so we've been encouraged to develop an outreach programme and work with schools and colleges to try to target students who might come from those groups - the state sector and poorer backgrounds, and we have a range of outreach activities to do that.

K OK. You mentioned that's based on guidelines from the government and you also mentioned it's because of current political drive; would you say that's the main motivation why this institution went for a widening participation policy?

S It's complicated, I think, really, because, yes, you've got to be seen to be doing it, and especially with the proposal to create an Office of Fair Access, which will determine whether or not universities are allowed to charge top up fees, it becomes even more important because it's got a financial basis that we're seen to be doing it, and I emphasise the word 'seen'; however, I think some

universities might be very good at drafting the policy, paying lip service, going through the motions, and not having a battle within the organisation to win hearts and minds, and I think because of key individuals in this university, namely the Vice Chancellor, there is a real genuine moral imperative as well as the political imperative. There's a belief right from the top that it's the right thing to do, for lots of reasons, which we'll probably go into later, but in relation just to this question, it's not just about politics: politics is the driving force, but there's a personal commitment to it from the Vice Chancellor down, and he's absolutely adamant that there will be a change within the university and he's trying to effect a cultural change, which is the hardest thing to do, really.

K OK. You've just mentioned the 'key player' which is the Vice Chancellor; as we know, he's a relatively new appointment at the university - again, your post - you're a relatively new person at the university: what happened before that?

S My understanding is that it was when the Higher Education Funding Council, HEFCE, started making measures about what they expected universities to be doing, and they produced things called benchmarks, which measured where a university was against locally, regionally, institutionally adjusted targets that took into account the range of programmes you offer, the areas you recruit from, for example, so it wouldn't be reasonable to say that they expect every university in the country to attract and recruit the same numbers of students from disadvantaged groups, so they take into account, you know, if you're broadly offering things like Classics and Philosophy and those kinds of things - Politics, Economics, you're not likely to recruit heavily from the state sector, whereas if you're offering ... I don't know ... Engineering, Design and vocational programmes, then the state sector might - you know - you might get more. So when they started looking at these benchmarks, it became apparent that Exeter was doing incredibly badly, and this would be a couple of years before I came here - about four years ago. What they actually did - what the government did, and HEFCE channelled, was to look at the universities that were doing worst. Now I forget how many there were, because we're out of that era now, but the universities that were doing worst against their benchmarks were places like Exeter, Durham, Bristol ... you name them, those kind of places, and if you were a long way behind where you were supposed to be, in order to encourage

universities to do something about it, HEFCE channelled funds, called Aspiration Funds, into universities, so there was quite a significant sum of money given as a kind of encouragement for you to establish a WP office - WP Officer. And that's what happened here - we had Aspiration Funding, which ran out in July of 2004. So that was the sweetener, and then prior to it running out, the university had to decide whether it was going to find the money to carry on the work it had started, and this is where it becomes very tricky, because if they'd then backed off and said, 'Well, we can't afford to find hundreds of thousands of pounds,' then it looks really bad when the newly formed Office for Fair Access starts looking at the access agreements, because the university's not going to put its own funds in it's only going to do it when someone else gives it the money to do it, so basically that's what happened. As well as the political drive, there was a financial encouragement to do it, but once that financial encouragement's been given, you can't just then drop it, so you've got to put your own money where you previously had money from central government.

K And as a quick aside, in your opinion, had that money not been offered to the institution, do you think Exeter would have gone with the route it has chosen?

S I don't know. I really don't know. I think - and I've said this before - I think what has happened here and in other places is that you're given the carrot in the first instance, it'll encourage you to do it, and then - you know that that's time-limited - but what you didn't know at the outset was that there was going to be a position where they take away the carrot and they will then impose a stick if you don't carry on doing it. Now I think in the absence of the carrot and the absence of that financial encouragement in the first instance, we would still have had to do something if we'd known we were going to be financially penalised if we didn't. So I think if we hadn't had Aspiration Funding but we were looking at the establishment of offer and the need to get their approval before we charged top-up fees, we'd still have to do something. Also there's personalities involved. I mean I don't know why the university chose to appoint Steve Smith as VC at the point that they did, but I would guess that they'd seen the writing on the wall and they knew that they needed to bring somebody in who was prepared to do something about diversification and widening participation and access, and he doesn't sound ... it sounds as though he's very different from his



predecessor, so somebody in the institution knew that a change was needed and thought that he was probably the right person to strike the right balance between research and WP, and I think he was appointed on that basis, because he made it plain right from the word 'go' two years ago that that was what he was going to be a champion for and he expressed it as a positive thing - positive for the university - but also just important that they had to do it.

K OK. You've just referred to ... you just said 'I don't know why the university did decide to appoint ...' - who do you consider is 'this university'?

S Good question! It doesn't exist, 'the university', as an entity, but it's made up of its constituent parts, its people. Ultimately, the managing bodies of the university - you would say university Council is ultimately the governing body. I know we have SENATE, but that's kind of like the House of Lords, if you like, so Council is the governing body. Council takes note of what is fed to it through the various committee structures in the university, so academic policy committee, for example ... there are channels for things to be fed through and for issues to be addressed, and the senior management of the university will pick things up, so basically when we're talking about 'the university made a decision', it didn't consult every single member of staff here and say, 'What should we be doing?' - it's not a democracy. But those who are charged with managing it, from the VC's Executive Group to the Academic Policies Committee, to Council, to various committees that feed into those, have to understand their constituencies. If you're a Head of School, you have to know what's going on in your school and you have to feed that in to the decision-making bodies. So there's a huge process within the university of picking up on the vibes and the thinking and the people and the needs and what will wash and what won't wash, and feeding that forwards, so that those who are at the top who make decisions are aware of what's actually going on on a more day-to-day level. But the university - as I'm talking about it here - you're probably talking about Academic Policy Committee, Vice Chancellor's Executive Group, and Council. The policy decisions that I've been involved in since I came here have needed to gain approval from those kind of bodies, mainly Academic Policy Committee and Vice Chancellor's Executive Group, so they're the kind of management group of the university, but they're not ... it's not like they're

sitting in some kind of ivory tower, completely separate: they have to take account of what's actually going on around them, in academic schools, in services ... They also have to look outside the university and take account of what's going on in the external environment, and politics is only part of that - you know, the social environment: changes in demographics, what's going on in the region, everything, financially, politically - the government could change - you know. It's a difficult job. It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it.

K OK. I'm going to put it to the side a second and look at the actual policy itself. We spoke earlier about what actually influenced the content of that policy in terms of - you noted several indicators, like the recruitment of students etc - and that influenced the creation of such a policy. Would you be able to outline what the key influences ... between when you actually created the policy and thought, 'This is what we need to target: the recruitment of students from a particular social area,' etc ...

S If you say, 'What influenced it?' I would say it was disproportionately target-driven, and targets were disproportionately narrow, because all emphasis is on a couple of HEFCE benchmarks to do with social class and state school, because those are the two headline measures that universities such as ours are being judged on, and what we had to argue was that we're not in the same position as a university such as Bristol or Manchester, or Birmingham, who had equal problems - well, not equally as bad as us - but they had equal problems with under-performing against those benchmarks. Because they're city-based universities, it's easy for you if you're in a position as Widening Participation Officer in Bristol or Manchester to identify pockets of disadvantaged in the inner cities and to say that you know that if you work with these five schools, those five schools will contain a high number of kids from working-class backgrounds, and that by working with them from an early age you can encourage them to think about higher education. So we had a situation where we had to explain to the people who approve the policy that we are drafting that it's not that easy in an area like the South West, and the Peninsula in particular, to isolate and target pockets of disadvantaged and to say that by working with these schools we can encourage working-class backgrounds. It's quite easy to address the state school one, but I'll come back to that; the working-class one is

very difficult, and what we've had to do is look at the geographical spread across the whole of the peninsula in the South West and try and work with distance being a problem, really, on getting the schools that we're linking with to help us by identifying and encouraging young people from poorer backgrounds or where they haven't had family experience of higher education, or where they're at risk of becoming disaffected with the system ... we're asking the teachers to help us identify those kids and to get them involved in programmes such as mentoring, summer schools, visits to university, etc - all sorts of contact, so they get a positive example of what it might be like. But because we've been driven by those two things, it makes it hard for us, because you can't visualise it - can't see it quite so easily. Some of the schools we work with will have a huge range of backgrounds; there are fewer 'ghetto' schools, as such, you know, if you're in a rural school, there'll be children who are from families who are reasonably well off, some very well off, and there'll be some from the poorest, poorest backgrounds - you know, rural poverty is a significant factor. So that's kind of ... the main driver has been to address those two things, and I've always felt it's hard for us to predict how we're going to do that. We do the best we can do in the given circumstances, and we hope that it will make a change.

What I think has been reasonable so far, and what I'm encouraged by, though we've stopped talking about the future and we'll talk about that again in a minute, I'm sure, is that I think there's a broadening in the political approach, that allows universities to start setting their own targets, looking at their own measures that are appropriate to their own region and not imposing them. But so far, we've been asked to do the impossible, which is basically predict how the work we're engaged in with schools will result in increased numbers coming through the system to us and when, and you might as well just stick your finger in the air, in that respect.

- K You've listed these two sort of key areas which have driven the whole emphasis on widening participation: would you be able to list in your opinion any others which you think should be included in that but haven't been because of political reasons or whatever?

S Well, I think, with this university, one of the first things I noticed is how few mature students there are here. I came from an ex-poly which had major links ... I suppose there would be a comparison between the university I used to work at and maybe Plymouth, who had really close links with colleges, colleges of further education, and have helped those colleges of further education set up provision for adults, so Access courses and Foundation degrees - you know, there's a clear need for adults who have missed out first time round and who probably are in the groups that we're trying to target now, but they dropped out of school at sixteen, they got pregnant when they were seventeen, they've had their babies, the kids are in school ... you know, in their late twenties or thirties and they're thinking, 'I want to do something with my life,' and through the work that I used to do in the previous job, there were real clear relationships between the colleges and the university in terms of progression routes, because a lot of the universities have helped the colleges actually set up Access courses and Foundation courses - they've validated things, and they understand the value of those kinds of adult qualifications and used them as a stepping stone to get into HE. And I think ultimately what you're talking about is a university that reflects the population around it, both locally, regionally and nationally, and that is a good learning environment because it's a good cultural mix. One of the things I think is missing is more adults in the student community here, and I think that would add a bit of vibrancy. I there's been so much emphasis on the whole state school/independent school divide that I think that's kind of thrown up this smoke screen and it's got a lot of academics hot under the collar, basically. I don't know. What I'd like to move away from is this idea - and we're all guilty of it - that there is this kind of stereotypical Exeter student, and then there is across the other side of the spectrum a WP student, and the stereotypical Exeter student, you know, somebody who's from a very well-off background; he's a hooray-henry or hooray-henrietta - has a very kind of privileged lifestyle, brings three or four cars away to university with them and brays round the campus, driving a VW ...there's the stereotype. Maybe that student exists, but there's also a lot of grades of different students, some of whom may have been to independent school but aren't from very privileged backgrounds - they might have got a scholarship, you know, they might have been pushed by their teachers; they might have grandparents who've paid for them; there might be people who've gone to state schools, who are from very

professional backgrounds; political - you know, we could have kids of politicians who knew that they'd be hung, drawn and quartered if they sent their kids to independent school so they send them to ... you know, they have enough money to move house to an area where there's a very good state school, and they buy advantage for their kids in that way. So what I think we need to look at is the fact that there is a continuum, a broad range of types of student and that we ought to be looking at having a mixed population, and that's why I'm quite keen that we don't target schools and say, 'That's a WP school' because it happens to be in a city and everyone comes from the same council estate, because you wouldn't want to flood this place with hooray-henrys from Surrey, but neither would you want to flood it with a similarly disproportionate group of working-class kids from a particular geographical location or social backgrounds. So it's about a mix, really, and the only group I think I could identify as being significant by their absence are mature students. The rest what I think we should be doing is not making this false assumption that there is a stereotypical Exeter public-school student and a stereotypical working-class oik and they're at opposite ends of the spectrum - there's a hell of a lot in between, and once we get that mix it'll be a more interesting learning environment.

K OK. Looking at the actual policy itself, who wrote this policy and what role did they play in the sort of presentation of such a policy?

S Well, it was written out of this office by myself and Nick. I mean, I have a problem, really, because I think a policy is on paper, it's filed away: it does not form the basis of what you do every day. The reason that that policy is drafted is to convince the powers that be that you know what you're doing, and to convince them that they should put the resources aside in order to do that.

K Internally?

S Internally. And in the future it's going to have to convince the external powers that be - I'm talking about OFFA that we're moving in the right direction and that it's OK for us to charge differential fees because we're doing our utmost to make sure that that doesn't discourage those from poorer backgrounds, but a policy is not referred to on a regular basis in terms of checking whether you're

going in the right direction. A policy sets out your stall [?] and then you go away and you get on with your work, so there's some degree of thinking about the substance - what you put in the policy - but you don't constantly have to refer back to it. I can't imagine the situation where we will. We're going to be required to draft a completely new policy by early December of this year which will be sent to the Office of Fair Access so we've got to draft what's called an Access Agreement, and this'll be an interesting experience because I think I'm getting the message that we've got a bit of a broader remit than before - we're not quite so tied down to numerical performance indicators on the basis of class and state school entrance, so it might be a bit of a sea change, but I think ... I just draw that analogy again. I think a policy document is like a job description: it gives you an indication of the direction you want to go in, and it tells what you're doing to a group of people who then ignore it completely and let you get on with it, but you don't actually make reference to it on a regular basis - you just get on with the business. Like a job description, if you stop at the end of a working day and think about the things you've been doing and try and actually tie them back into your job description, there isn't always a clear match, unless you're a complete 'jobsworth'. And it's the same with the policy - you put something down on paper and then things evolve and it might not be exactly what you'd envisaged when you wrote it, so I think what I'm trying to say in a very rambling way is that a policy document is not written in tablets of stone - it's an expression of your intention at that point in time, but then it may evolve into something slightly different.

K OK. I'm going to pick up on one point you've mentioned in all this - you said, 'This policy was meant to try and convince the powers that be that we needed sufficient resources etc to carry out that work,' - two questions out of that: (a) do you feel you need to go out and convince the powers that be internally, within the university, that the work is worthwhile, and (b) upon reflection on whatever answer you do provide, should that be the case?

S Well, the answer to both questions is 'yes', in one word. But there's two reasons for that. The first reason is - we're talking about different powers here - there is a powerful group within the university that holds the purse strings. If you can't convince those people who sit on Academic Policy Committee, and

particularly people who are very powerful, like The Registrar, and Heads of School, that it's worth committing this amount of money to it, then you won't be able to do it. You have to have a logical argument that underpins your moral argument about 'this is the right thing to do' - 'yes, we know it's right, but why should we spend money on that and not on this,' because there is no bottomless pit for universities. Universities have finite resource base, and if you spend money on WP, then it means you don't spend money on something else. So the first part of the question is yes, you do have to convince that group that it's worth doing, and I think that group is the group that you don't necessarily convince by saying, 'It's the right thing to do; it's morally just, and it's fair, and it's all about social inclusion,' and they'll say, 'Sod that. Research is the right thing to do ... improving teaching facilities is the right thing to do ... making sure that our students on campus who are here have the best possible experience - that's the right thing to do, because we've got a duty to them. It's not our duty to go out and do social engineering on behalf of the government,' so you have to explain it in very pragmatic, practical, and sometimes clear-cut financial terms to that group of key people. And it's not easy. I'll come back to bursaries in a minute, because that's a very interesting example of a policy that's a kind of sub-set of the WP policy.

The second group of people that need convincing need convincing for different reasons, so we say, 'Yes, we can have the money, and we do agree your policy, and that means you're going to do A, B and C.' All right. Make it happen. How do we make it happen? We can't deliver all of the outreach activity out of this office, with two or three people doing it, and what is a university? A university is made up of academic schools; it's made up of academic subjects, so in order to sell an idea and give a taste of what university's all about to the young people we're trying to reach, we have to get academics on board, so the argument has to be one with each academic school that they're working with us - and again, partly pragmatic, partly financial, and partly - and this is where I think you can actually get to hearts and minds - I've seen evidence of people who were cynical, suspicious, think it's just the latest political hot potato and, you know, they'll get on board because they've been told to - can actually come round and see the point in what they're doing; that they're challenged by working with young people: they recognise their potential; they see that they're

not this actual image that they've got of working-class oiks over on that side of the WP independent sector, you know - great divide - and they can see the point in what they're doing other than just being told they must do it, so its possible to win them round. That's the first half of your question, which is about convincing people.

The second part I think was about 'should you' convince them. Well, it's a redundant question because if you didn't, then it wouldn't happen. If we just wrote a question and didn't go to Academic Policy Committee and argue the case, there's a risk there might be questions about it that we couldn't address, and it might fall, and if you didn't constantly bang your head against a brick wall that is academic schools, and bring them kicking and screaming, reluctantly at first and then gradually less reluctantly into delivering stuff, there would be no flesh on the bones - there'd be no substance to the policy, and it would be that thing that I'm complaining about - it'd be a piece of paper, filed somewhere, with nothing happening. So in order to - and I hate this word but I'll use it - in order to operationalise it, in order to make it something that is real, you have to bring the people on board, (1) to give you the money and the political clout, and (2) to be the ones who assist in delivering.

K I guess, looking at that, in terms of philosophically - what people should be thinking, in an ideal world - I guess you'd like all these Heads of School and powerful people who hold the strings to passionately believe in the work that you're doing; I'm guessing that's why you need to go out there - to sell the product, to sell the stance and say, 'This is why we do this', do you think this is the case solely in this institution, or do you think because of the composition of people within this institution and its history it has attracted staff members with views and thoughts that follow that pattern, or is it the same across the board, in all the other institutions?

S I think that's a very good question, and it's a difficult one to answer because it's not tangible, but it is something you can sense - it's this thing called culture - and it tends to be a kind of self-fulfilling thing ... I mean, let me say first of all, I think there are people within the university who really welcome the new direction its' going in because they're fed up with the stagnancy that can exist if



you just let the prevailing culture continue unchallenged: it can become very flat and boring and stagnant and dull and it's not an interesting environment in which to work or teach, so there are plenty of people, from Heads of School to Admissions Tutors, academics, who are pleased that they're being shaken up a bit and they're encouraged by it, and then there are those who are comfortable in their fairly stable situation, and they like things to be preserved - they like the status quo to be preserved. Whether or not Exeter attracts people - I mean I think you're talking about academic staff here and those we're talking about engaging, rather than students, aren't you?

K Yes.

S Although students - I think you could say the same thing really. I don't know ... I mean that almost presupposes that people - you know, I'm visualising it - there's some academic out there looking at The Times Higher and there's an advert for Exeter and there's an advert for ... Manchester - you know, let's say universities of equal academic standing, and one has got the reputation of being stuffy, boring, you know, archaic, rooted in the past, complacent - which is a lot of the stuff that came out of some image research we did here: that's how we're often perceived; and then another one that's a bit more forward-looking, dynamic, prepared to change, that the academic won't necessarily know that - they don't always know it before they've actually gone there. There are lots of reasons why people might come here, and one of the reasons is because it's in a lovely part of the world - you know, people will choose to live and work here because they want a lifestyle in the South West, so I don't know how the culture perpetuates itself - it's a complicated business - but I think that unless a significant individual or group of individuals decide to do something to reverse the process and shake things up, it is a self-perpetuating culture, where people get sucked in and nobody challenges it, and it just continues ... and it's fairly comfortable, for some people, and fairly boring for others. And I could give you - and I've said it loads of times before but I'll say it again - that I was told when I was being interviewed for this job by a fairly senior person in the university that they'd just lost one of their best academics because he was bored of his teaching and he said he was bored of teaching people who came from 'all four corners of Surrey' and I think that says something about homogeneity: it can

be quite dispiriting if you're involved in academic life and you want a bit more life in what you teach, really.

K OK. Looking at the policy again, who's responsible for the implementation of that policy?

S We are.

K 'We' being ...?

S Well, this office. I mean, ultimately, the Widening Participation Officer and the Education Liaison Officer are the two key individuals who will be accountable for the implementation of the policy; who holds us accountable and how is that accountability measured? You know, who do we report to? Ah, that's where it goes a bit vague, and that's what relates back to what I said about you write it, it's a statement of intent; you convince people you're doing the right thing, and they leave you to get on with it. I can't speak for other institutions about how closely it's monitored, about how things are evaluated, about whether the evaluation that's taken is fed back in; and it becomes a controlled evolutionary process, where things change and the policy's adapted in terms of continual improvement mechanisms, but it doesn't happen here, so far. The only reason that we'll look at it and re-draft and jiggle it about a bit is because somebody outside the university tells us we have to. That's why. Whether it's HEFCE or OFFA or the DfES or a new government or whatever.

K So in a sense what you're saying is there's no measurement of success or failure?

S Yes, there is, but only insofar as those questions about success or failure come from outside the university, and therefore those people inside the university will be bothered with whether or not we're moving in the right direction in terms of those external measures. Now the external measures that we've so far had is every year, HESA, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, collects information on number of state school and entrants and students from working-class backgrounds, and we have to look at how far we're moving towards getting

close to our benchmarks - and don't ask me what the precise figures are because I've forgotten - but basically the message is we're not moving very far up at all, in fact we took a backward step in terms of social class background in the last year, and despite all the belief in the media that universities are discriminating wildly against poor independent school applicants, there doesn't seem to be any evidence that they're being disadvantaged in any way. We're not making any great inroads so far. To be fair, though, to put that in context, neither would we really be expected to, because most of the work contained within the policy is not going to bear fruit immediately. If you work with pre-sixteen students, you don't expect that that will have any impact on your admissions - at least in the first and second year. However, one thing that I think is quite interesting: establishing a relationship with the college down the road, which the university had turned its nose up at in the past because it's only an FE college, has led to a massive increase in applications from that college, and it's a very big FE college and it has a huge range of academic-ability groups, and it was very disappointing to look at the poor - very poor - progression rates from there to us, but it's actually quite heartening to look at what can be done when a relationship is established from the Vice Chancellor down to our office to individual department links: there's a change in feeling within the college, and I think people are now advising students that we're a realistic option because we're friendlier. So things are starting to bear fruit slightly there. That's one of the measures that we might use: are we recruiting more people from our local area than we're recruiting from Surrey and Hampshire? Hopefully, the figures from Exeter College are an early indication, because that's where we've put a lot of emphasis and resource, and, you know a lot of relationship building, that we can change things, and it leads us on to thinking about the future and the establishment of a new policy that's looking at building links across a fairly targeted region of three counties and working with a number of schools and colleges in the same way to try and effect a better relationship with the college, not just with a small group of kids that we're targeting, but with the school, so open relationships between ourselves and the school, and learn on both sides - what are their issues; what's going on in that sector, and how can we work with them to address some of their targets, and then there'll be a thawing of relations, really.

K OK. I don't want to go into your policy, but I'm going to just ask one question. You spoke about a deterioration ... the benchmark - you'd gone down instead of up, and obviously that reflects badly on the institution as a whole, which in turn the institution must reflect and say, 'Something's going wrong' or 'some work that's being done isn't being done as well as it should be' ... who's doing that reflection?

S Well, there are two ways that you could actually change things overnight, and the Vice Chancellor's actually said this; if we want to improve our numbers of students recruited from state schools, he's simply saying, 'OK, you have to make x% of offers to the state sector and x% to the independent sector,' and that would change things overnight: if you imposed targets on admissions tutors and said, 'That's what you'll do - once you've reached that point you go no further.' That isn't allowing them to make the judgments that they have to make about the best applicants and potential students for their courses, so they won't do that. The other thing they could do is say, 'All this stuff that you're doing about concentrating on pre-sixteens and trying to change their attitudes and getting to them while they're early ... not quick enough, not fast enough,' you know, 'it doesn't look like we're doing anything, so forget about all that stuff you're doing with year 10. You need to get into 6th forms ... you need to do a harder sell ... we need to spend all our resources at that point and target those who hit a number of different buttons for us: they're reasonably well-performing, so therefore they've got the potential to get the kind of grades we're after, and they're from working-class backgrounds, so only concentrate your resources on them.' And again, you're shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted, because you're dealing with kids in the 6th form - you're dealing with those who have already decided to go to university, and all we're doing is trying to sell Exeter to them, so I think there's an awareness that there hasn't been any significant progress towards the targets yet, but there's also an understanding of why that's the case and there's also an understanding that we're not alone. No-one else is making any significant progress, because they're all doing the same thing that we're doing, so I'm not worried about it. Some people are, but I think they're misinformed and they've missed the point, that those people in political - high - office know that there's no overnight fix and what they want to encourage is a long-term approach that will change things. The situation doesn't get to be

this way overnight, you know. It's a long history of all sorts of traditions and approaches and cultural expectations and socio-economic influences that have led to the disproportionate number of working-class kids in higher education. There's nothing you can do in a university that will change that overnight. Some people might say that there's nothing you can do in a university to change what's going on in our society anyway - that's a view that you might take - but certainly you can't change it that quickly: there's no quick fix, being honest.

K You just mentioned some people may be slightly worried within the university about the slow progress - would those people happen to be people who have been involved in writing the policy ... people involved in controlling the finances for these projects? Where do these people fall?

S Yes, those kind of groups. Not the people who are involved in writing the policy, because I think we've written the policy in such a way that it makes it clear that you can't change the world - you know, the Education Liaison Office in Exeter is not going to change the culture in the South West of England towards education. However, we can hope that we can change some of the attitudes in some individuals, and some of that might actually result in ... have an impact in this university, but, you know, how much impact it will I don't know. But people that are worried are those that believe there's going to be somebody outside the university with a big whip and they're going to say, 'You've not gone far enough'. Now I believe and I'm much more encouraged by the way that OFFER is being steered, that we're going to be required to do good stuff, do good work, and be moving in the right direction, more so than fixing the figures in the way that I talked about previously, which you could do, in a crude mechanistic way, and say, 'We're only going to work with the schools in that postcode area and we're only going to work with kids who come from blue-collar families where the parents haven't been to university ...' and 'We're only going to work with them where we think that we can show a quick turnaround and we're going to tie them in to only come to Exeter, even if it's not the right place for them.' I don't think we're going to be required to do that; I think if we show the Office of Fair Access that we are moving in the right direction and we're doing the damnedest that we can - you know, the best that we can - to raise aspirations and to encourage and to motivate and to build

relationships with schools and colleges, I believe that that will actually result in some change in the medium term - not the short term, but the medium term and the longer term, but if it doesn't result in enough change, then as long as we've put our hearts into it and have done the best we can, I don't think they're going to come down on us like a ton of hot bricks. Some people think they will; I don't think they will.

K When you say 'we' that's 'we as a university - as an institution'?

S Yes, as an institution. Not 'we' as an office.

K OK. You mentioned policy changes - maybe in December seeing a brand new policy drawn up. What's determining the change in policy, and will there be a radical change in policy from what you've had the last four years?

S Well, you're asking me a question I can't answer. I don't know, because we're starting the process - we've had it imposed on us. The reason that we've got to do it is because of the whole political debate around differential fees - top-up fees - and quite rightly a lot of people have said, 'This government doesn't know what the hell it's doing, because on the one hand it's saying Widening Participation, diversification, encouraging people from poorer backgrounds,' and on the other hand it's charging them £3000 a year! And nobody can get out of paying that £3000 a year, but just because they don't have to pay it until they graduate, that's still alarming. So I would say that's probably the most heated political policy - you know, the most controversial political policy within this political administration ... possibly fox-hunting, but I think that's blown up out of all proportion. But I think everybody accepts that the Higher Education Bill was the most controversial bill to be put before Parliament in this session, and in order to gain approval ... what it boils down to is universities are grossly underfunded. There's been a massive cutting off of the per-capita funding in universities over the years. They've been required to grow and take more students; there's not been a significant growth in resource, and so they're falling apart at the seams. They can't do what they want to do and they can't compete globally; their research is in danger of losing its reputation, etc etc. So there needs to be an influx of funding and there is no way that that's going to come

from general taxation; there's no way it's going to be prioritised from other sectors of the education environment - you know, they're going to put more money into early years and child care, and it won't come from taxation so it has to come from somewhere, and the argument that's being just about won is that it should come from those who benefit from it, ie the students, who are going to receive better rewards. However, there's no doubt that the culture - we're talking about cultural debt - is going to deter the kind of people that the government are on the one hand saying it wants to encourage; on the other hand it's setting a great big obstacle in their way. So in order to get the HE Bill passed, there was an awful lot of behind-the-scenes lobbying done about what universities would be required to do if they wanted to raise more revenue through top-up fees, and the big thing that we have to do is (1) develop an outreach programme that satisfies the government that we are aiming to reach out to more people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and (2) to flesh out that outreach programme by putting aside some of the extra money that we make to offer bursaries to those who otherwise would have perhaps not come. So that's basically the driving force behind the need to create new policy, and it has to be done quite quickly, but that's been the impetus.

K And, again, you mentioned government - hypothetically if there's a change in government and a new administration goes into power, and they come along and say, 'Right, we don't agree with this whole Widening Participation - we're not going to place such emphasis on the whole drive,' in your opinion, do you think this institution would drop the case and say 'OK. We aren't going to spend so much money on Widening Participation - let's divert the funds into other projects and not place the emphasis on recruiting.'

S There's lots of hypotheticals involved in my answer, as well. Hypothetically, if we have the same Vice Chancellor and the same senior administration, I doubt very much if they would drop it completely. It depends where else they're being driven and what other financial drivers, political drivers, replace this one. So it's dependent upon individuals; it's dependent upon the new political context, and in the real world, the people who we're talking about who have power within the university to direct us in one particular way or another, would have to take into account the environment they were operating in - political, financial,

social - if it changed, then they couldn't just dig their heels in and say, 'We're not changing,' because they'd be left behind. If there was a change of personnel at the top, it could make a very drastic change. If it stays the same and people in the university have been won round to the idea that diversity's a good thing in itself, not just because somebody's told you to do it, then they might decide it's for the good of the university to do it, but the honest answer is, I don't know, because it's dependent upon so many other factors, and no-one can predict at this point in time.

K OK. Looking now at a practical level at the work that you do when you go out into schools etc, looking at the target of people you've got out there, who are these people?

S Who are these people? They're WP oiks who walk round with shell suits with hoodies on, and probably have graffiti cans in their bags - cans of spray paint - rather than books, and I think the girls are probably going to get pregnant at sixteen so they can get a council house. That's probably an image that some people have about the young people they're working with, and anyone who has worked on a HEFCE summer school probably know that's true! No, it's not. Who are the people? Well, it can vary, depending on which particular project you're working on. For example, if we are working on summer schools, we are talking about those people who we want to encourage to come to summer schools to have an experience of staying at university for a week and participating in a range of different activities. If the project funder for that is as it is the European Social Fund, we are very, very strictly limited in who we can work with, and we have to be absolutely 100% confident that the people who are benefiting - the beneficiaries - satisfy a criteria that's determined by some external body, i.e. Europe, and there has to be evidence that they have little or no - preferably no - family experience of higher education, and if they have got family experience of higher education, then there have to be other factors that indicate they are likely to be under-aspiring, for example, the parents are not encouraging them, or they have significant peer group pressure, or there are some other mitigating family circumstances, etc etc, and this all has to be demonstrated and ratified by teachers and recorded on forms. Where we're actually managing our own projects ... the people we're trying to reach, I would



be honest and say those I would most want to reach, are those who are intelligent but feel they've got the capability to go to university - not everyone has and not everyone wants to - but those who have the capability and those who would benefit in their life from going to university, both in terms of the experience they have while they're there, and the capacity to benefit afterwards in terms of choices and lifestyle and, let's face it, financial benefit, to open their eyes to those facts so they can make an informed choice, and I'm thinking there about kids whose parents possibly think they'd be better off not getting into debt but going and getting a job at sixteen or eighteen; who would rather they did something practical that showed immediate results; whose friends, because they happen to live in a particular area, or they've got in with a certain group - their friends might be influencing them to work in a certain way. Or perhaps because their school doesn't have a 6th form and therefore they've got nobody who's actually going to inspire them and encourage them to think about all the exciting things they could do with their life - but they've got a limited range of horizons. So to me that's the group of students we should be working with: those who have a limited range of horizons. But there's caveat to that - I think we also need to be clear that we want to work with those who do have the potential - academic potential - to progress, and there are some students who are not demonstrating that. There are some who perhaps have the capability to move up a notch or two and could go to university if they really turned things around, and I like to think that we can work with them, but I think we have to be clear that it's not just for those who have completely fallen off the bottom of the pile - that isn't our job; hopefully someone else is helping them to engage with the education process, but I think we have to ... there has to be a certain level of academic ability that is demonstrated at the time we're working with them.

K It's interesting you've mentioned a couple of factors: you've mentioned parents, you've mentioned whether there's a 6th form in the school, etc; what's informed - I guess the university's - your views - on those factors? What led you to think those are the factors that do influence students' performance whilst at school?

S Well, contact with the students is one thing. Having been through it myself - albeit many moons ago; talking to other people who've been through education

themselves; I mean, I happen to come from a very working-class background, so my own personal experience has influenced me, and I know lots of people who are from a working-class background. I grew up on a council estate; however, what was interesting from my experience was that we were a working-class family with middle-class bits, if you like, in that my dad's mum was a teacher, and although my dad did kind of very low-grade, clerical-ish type work, his mum had got aspirations and wanted what she perceived to be the best for her grandchildren, which, basically she wanted them to go into teaching or nursing. Interestingly again there was a gender bias there, because she supported my two brothers by paying for them to go to independent school, but she didn't support either myself or my two sisters to go to independent school, so she thought they needed the education - we would probably get by and be nurses. But I think that was one of the reasons why in the group of children I went to school with, I actually ... my family were more likely to go to university first time round, because we had a bit of middle-class influence in our family, although we lived in a very working-class environment. Quite interestingly, a lot of the other people I went to school with - my peer group at the time - didn't go to university at a typical age but did go back as mature students, and that's something that maybe influences my belief that that's another target group that we should be working with, because people who have not had the encouragement when they were at school find something in themselves when they're a bit older and they have been part of a disadvantaged group and we should be encouraging them back in. But, yes, my personal experience has influenced me; contact with students as individuals and groups has influenced me; being a parent has influenced me, especially being the parent of - well he's not even a teenager now - a young man, who dropped out, and looking at the influences he had around him and his friends had around him, and the parents of his friends - discussing it with them, so, yes, it comes from a variety of locations. Also reading about it - whether it's theoretical, what you read in the press, what you see on TV - you're asking me what forms my belief, what forms my world view, basically. Like everyone else in the world, my world view has changed from my personal experience, my experience at work and who that brings me into contact with, and what newspapers I choose to read and what television programmes I choose to watch, and it won't surprise you that I don't choose to read The Daily Mail or The Times, and I don't watch ITV very much, either.

- K OK. Again, looking at the 16-year-olds out there, in the higher education institutions' point of view, what preoccupies these 16-year-olds? What influences them? What makes their minds up? How do they choose what they want to do?
- S I don't think there is a view of the higher education institutes, because it is a vastly diverse range of individuals who would each have slightly different views and would concentrate on different things, but I think it would relate back to what I said in the last question - that it could be any number of things. I mean I'm expressing my personal belief but I don't think it's that far away from what most people in the institution would say - that it's probably a range of factors that you could sum up under the generic heading 'socio-cultural, socio-economic background', and the socio-economic background is quite straightforward, you know, 'What occupation have your parents got? How well off are you?' ... that doesn't always sit directly with the attitude of your family, because you could come from a family where your dad was a miner and he's been made unemployed and he hasn't worked for a long time and his family - his dad was a miner, and he's living in poverty and you've been on the dole, and, you know, you've had your house repossessed and you're now living in council accommodation, and all financial indicators could say, 'You are in the under-class - you're not working-class, you're actually under-class,' and it could be that he has seen the writing on the wall and he knows that his kids have got to do something to get themselves out of that. It could also be that miner's wife, and a lot of miners' wives, who got involved in the sort of industrial action in the 1980s, who had been quite happy with their lot as housewives and maybe went out and earned a bit of pin money, you know, working in a factory, part-time work, etc, actually got an insight into their capabilities because they were politically active during the strike, and an awful lot of those women actually went on to study, so what I'm trying to say is, we're talking about socio-economic background, we talk about socio-cultural background: sometimes the culture can be more predominant than the economics, and culture is not a fixed thing but your experiences and they change over time, and the experience of being made unemployed and, you know, not knowing ... I mean a lot of miners went back to retrain and have gone into education, but the experience of being

on your uppers and without a job and facing poverty might force you into thinking 'I'd better do something about this - I can't take it for granted that I'm always going to have a job down at the pit,' and coming from the part of the country that I come from, that's a situation that I know very well, you know, that the area that I came from was absolutely decimated by the pit closures and people who had assumed that they knew the shape of the rest of their lives had to think again. So, yes, lots of different things will influence a 16-year-old: it's their parents, it's other people in their school, it's their teachers, it's their mates, and it's themselves as well. I mean you can't take away from this whole equation the individual's free will and their own motivation, and people differ. You will come across some kids who say, 'He told me I couldn't do it, therefore I was determined to prove him wrong,' and you'll come across some kids who say, 'Well, I thought I was stupid because everyone told me it was, and it wasn't until someone told me that I could do it that I did,' so some people respond to negative stimulus and set out to prove them wrong, and some people will only respond to a positive stimulus. You're dealing with human beings - you're not dealing with scientific matter: they're all different.

K As a last issue to cover, looking at all these students out there who've been targeted by different programmes etc: how do you think they feel knowing that they're being targeted and they've sort of been pinpointed ... they've been targeted for a particular reason, maybe because of their background, financial background, family background ... how do you think they feel about this?

S I think there's a risk that it could be a negative thing - that it could be a social stigma. I used the word 'risk' because I think we all have to be aware of it and we all have to tread very, very carefully there - 'Hey, you're poor, so we're going to work with you,' 'You're disadvantaged,' you know, 'We'll just tattoo that across your forehead, you know, "WP student", and, you know, 'We'll hold your hand all the way through because you need it.' That's the worst-case scenario that could happen, that the children are branded as 'different'. Harping back to something I said earlier about not assuming that everybody's the same, because they're not, and in the light of what I've just been saying about a whole range of different influences, I think there is a way - and wherever I've had the scope to influence the people who are targeting - there is a way to address

something in a positive way. I mean kids in school who are encouraged to make use of, or encouraged to work with, a mentor - and I'm not just talking about a university mentor - you could say that each of those kids who was given the opportunity to have a mentor might think, 'What's wrong with me? Why do they think I need this? What is it that I'm doing that's so bad?' - or you could actually say, 'It's a positive thing. We recognise that if you had this person working with you, you could really go on and achieve something,' and I think that when we are involved in targeting young people, there has to be significant emphasis on that positive side of it - that somebody recognises their potential and wants to give them some encouragement to realise that potential, despite other factors that might work against it, but the positive comes first, rather than the negative factors. You don't say, 'Well, because you're from a working-class family you're going to get the chance to go on a summer school,' the reason they get the chance to go on a summer school is because they've shown the potential to progress to university, and the teachers say, 'Look, make your mind up. Have the opportunity to see what it's like, because I know the way you're thinking at the moment, and there's all sorts of reasons why you're thinking that, but go and meet people and see what you think, and then start the process of making your mind up,' so it's about giving them a broader view than the one that they have, so ... I mean, that's the ideal scenario. I've given you the worst-case scenario and I've given you the ideal scenario. I think in reality, what actually happens is probably somewhere in the middle, and I think that's because schools have a lot of different issues to deal with, and they can't always be totally, utterly confident that they've gone through all the right mechanisms and done things exactly the right way. Interesting to see how many people who get involved in the work that we do, who have had parents who've gone to university; the teachers might be targeting that kid for different reasons. Interesting also that we have been involved in mentoring some students - you know, university undergraduates mentoring students who perhaps have not got university potential, but the schools have got their own agendas of why they want to give support to that student. So it's a difficult one, and we just do the best we can within those two - the worst-case/best-case scenario - but as long as we're trying to move towards the best-case scenario and trying to work against the worst-case scenario, then that's the best we can do.

K OK. That kind of brings to an end the kind of stuff I want to cover: is there anything else you want to add?

S No, not really. Just that I think it's a very, very interesting time for this kind of - working in this kind of area, because the amount of political heat that there's been around some of the issues that we're discussing has been massive, and what's going to happen over the next ... five years, I would say, will test out whether or not it's been worth it. And I did say I'd mention bursaries because I think that actually sums up the tension that exists in a university like this about what we should be doing, because of what's right, and what we're required to do so that we satisfy those that have power, like funding bodies, and just an interesting sort of anecdote: the first indication of when we were required to say something about what we were going to do about bursaries - well, before we were required to - there was a lot of political shenanigans going on - and we made a very sort of public statement that we would be putting 30% of our fee income into bursaries, and for lots of reasons that I won't go into, it became apparent that we didn't actually need to put that much in, so there's been a real battle on, and that battle is actually being ... really the final stage of that battle is happening this morning, as we speak, about how little you can get away with. Now there are some people that are arguing that we should come as close to our promise - the promise we originally made - as we possibly can because that's the right thing to do, and there are some people saying, 'We don't have to. We can get away with it. We don't need to spend that much money. Revise our estimates.' And what we out of this office have been trying to draft is something that will satisfy both camps and falls somewhere in the middle, but there are those two tensions going on in the university: what are we required to do as a minimum that would satisfy people that we're doing the right thing, and what genuinely should we be doing because it will make a difference, and in Widening Participation, those people who work in it are always pulled in those two directions, and hopefully most people who work in it are always going to make the moral argument and work towards that. So I end on a moral point.

K OK. Thanks very much.

- ends -

## APPENDIX D

Interview transcript with School staff member.

K We're looking at post-16 provision at the school, and - - - One of the things to start with is to look at what the school offers in terms of post-16 – what are the options for them once they've finished their GCSEs.

S I've just thrown away all the option books – I could have just given you one! At this school it's quite academic, so it's a lot of A-levels – the traditional A-levels. I can't honestly say that we've got a wide range – they're not: they're English, Maths, Science, Biology, Sociology, Psychology ... quite basic A-levels. They also offer some vocational, at the advanced level, and – not the lot you've been looking at but the next lot – we think we've persuaded them that they need to look at the intermediate level a lot more and more vocational courses, but there are obviously – for logistic reasons – like Hairdressing and Car Mechanics: we don't have the space, we don't have the money, to build up a unit specifically for Hairdressing or something like that. We do do an NVQ Hairdressing, but we don't do a full-time. They go out, and we run the NVQ car.

K Why are you pushing the intermediate level? Why not just say, 'Stick with the higher level?'

S Because it's all about motivation and it's all about seeing futures, and you've got these young kids who at the age of sixteen think that they're going to get 4 Ds and 6 Es; they go to their interview, and they're told, 'We haven't got anything for you, 'cos you haven't got 31 points,' – they come out absolutely devastated. I have never seen kids so devastated; (a) I think it's wrong, because we don't know what they're going to get until they've taken their exams, so at that point to tell them that there's no hope ... excuse me? So what they should be able to do is offer them a range, and say, 'Right – if you can get 3 Cs and 2 Bs, you will be on that course; if you get 3Cs and 2Ds you'll be on that course, and if you get 4Ds and 6Es you'll be on that course. So they have a vision and they have a future.

K Looking at those options, how are they communicated to the students? You mentioned a booklet – is that what they're getting?



S Yes. They get careers advice – they all get a careers interview and they all get a coursing interview. The careers interviews are done by Connexions and Careers; the coursing interview is done by a team of post-16 teachers, where they have a more specific post-16 interview, and every single student – even if they say they don't want to go on to post-16 – will get a coursing interview. And obviously we do look at Bicton and Exeter: we're not that narrow that we say, 'This is all you can do,' but when it comes down to it, I think we've got 80% of the year group going on to our own post-16. Well, when you've got that and they're worth £4000 each, and in this day and age it comes down to the old pennies, that's a lot to be throwing away, if you can't offer them the courses that they want.

What I would like to do, instead of sending them a coursing sheet, which is 'Pick what you want,' I would like a booklet with all of the courses and they tell us what they want, so then when we've got everything they want, *then* we sort out teachers and courses and stuff. But what's happened this year with a lot of students, is they've been told, 'Oh, I'm sorry, your course isn't running because we haven't got enough students.' Now how they can say that when the results aren't even out ... Now if you can say that after the results are out – 'We don't have fifteen students to run this course' – that's fine. But at the moment they're doing these core [?046] thing, saying, 'We've got five students that have picked that – not going to run ... tough,' not, 'Oh, let's see what else we can sort out.'

K Do all the students in the whole year group get the same options?

S Yes.

K So there's no difference between attainment levels ...

S No.

K Looking now at the role of staff – what kind of role do they play in channelling these students into their post-16 options?

S I think we're all - generally right from year 7 - 'What do you want to be?' etc ... obviously some tutors are better at it than others. Quite often if I have a difficult student, one of my questions invariably is, 'What do you want to do when you leave school? Your behaviour isn't actually helping you, is it - because you want to be Prime Minister, and you haven't been in 20% of the lessons this year, and you keep hitting him, and as Prime Minister you can't go round hitting people, can you?' - and things like this ... so a lot of us do, in general chit-chat, sort of lead them into ... I mean, quite often students come in and say, 'Miss, I want to be a policeman - what have I got to do?' - so they are focused. The sad thing is that there is a high proportion of students that don't think that they're capable of doing anything, and that have very low self-esteem. Whether that comes from the family ... I can remember by cousin - there were six children in the family, one girl, five boys - and she was the only one that had any brains, and my uncle used to call her 'the educated idiot' - you know, so her self-esteem ... she was very intelligent - a very clever girl. And I think a lot of these students like the boosts that we do and the stuff you do with the mentoring: the academic tutoring is absolutely vital to make them believe that they can if they want to; and the visits to university and things like this ... 'My son got his degree, and he had 3 Cs at GCSE, and a bunch of Ds and a G! So if he can do it, why can't you?' ... 'Well I can't ...' - and those sorts of things, and I think that's where it's important that we do actually build up these links, so that the student can actually see that, 'Yeah, I could go there if I wanted to,' ...

K You mentioned that family sometimes suppresses their ambitions and their aims and aspirations: is there any way from your perspective that that can be changed - that their visions can be altered so that the students don't have those obstacles from early on?

S You're asking human nature to change, aren't you? What you're doing is asking them to change the ethos of what's happening. Some parents unfortunately are poorly educated, especially in Devon, and are scared that their child is actually going to be cleverer than them, which is why they suppress them. We do a lot of educating; I don't think we do enough. I don't think we do enough to support the family, but then that's not what we're here for.

- K Looking at the school now and how it accepts students on to their courses, what criteria does the school use in terms of **?085** – do you have a points system?
- S Yes. A GCSE C is 5 points; an A\* is 8 ... and then they look at their predicted grades – which, bear in mind, are done in the December on mock exams, so you've got all of Easter where we bombard them with all the motivational stuff – so the big difference in that period which is not measured yet (we hope next year to do some form of measurement there to give us a better indication of what's happening) ... [interruption] ...
- K Looking at the score points system ...
- S Yes, so if they haven't got 31 then they don't accept them on the course.
- K Are they really strict on that?
- S Yes.
- K So there's no – for example – reference to a teacher, or a statement ...
- S No. Which is awful, and it does ... I've seen kids just totally devastated. I'm hoping we can change it this year.
- K So **?104** reject these people?
- S They'll go somewhere else.
- K So they'll go to Exeter College, or employment, or ...
- S Bicton.
- K OK. Now, looking at the what we call 'wide anticipation' people, with no family history of higher education – these families come from lower socio-economic groups – does this school make any special provision for those students, in terms of promoting further education, post-16 entrance?

S Yes – we’ve done the summer school. In fact we’ve done the summer schools for several years, haven’t we? We also did the C/D borderline looking, which does tend to be from the poorer social backgrounds, surprisingly enough; we’ve done some boost sessions (which cost us a lot of money – about £3500 – which was a lot to spend on 80 children) ... and then the visits are really, really important, the visits to university. We did some master classes, and they were really, really good. We also went to Bristol, to their Open Day – it was just an Open Day, it wasn’t anything specifically laid on, and we were very disappointed not to have been notified of Royal College’s Open Day, because we don’t actually get any information in – the same as I couldn’t tell you when Exeter’s Open Day is.

K It was last week!

S There you go ... I would have taken a busload of students there, or I would have got you to give me 400 leaflets, which I would have given to every single student, you know, ‘Hey, it’s Exeter’s Open Day – go and have a look around!’ – you’re not hitting that market at all.

K Looking at the students - these are actually labelled as coming from these backgrounds and sort of family history ...

S They’re not given a star on their name or anything like that, or an underlined name; they do come to us through issues during the five years that they’re at the school. So you’ll find that there are uniform issues, or equipment issues, or ... there are some issues that we actually pick up on, so it comes through general knowledge of the year group, of understanding where they’re from, so, yes, we could tell you who they are.

K Do they get any communication that they’ve been labelled in a certain way, or they’re going to be pushed into certain programmes because of their backgrounds?

S Never, no. It's either done what we call randomly, or we find a nice reason, 'You are chosen because you've got the potential and you're on C/D borderline, and we think that you could progress and get higher,' - we never label our kids, never.

K I think, to finish off, one last bit is looking at to what extent the whole wide-anticipation – getting more students on to further education and higher education: how much is that an actual issue to the school itself?

S It's actually going to be more and more and more important. What we're hoping to do next year is have our tutor groups, but we want an academic mentor for every single tutor group. We want to 'pal up' with someone who's going to take them right the way through, up to their GCSEs, because we found last year that that was so valuable, having these students looking and saying, 'Right, well, if you can get your grades, this is where you can go and this is what you can do,' and by doing that and having a link – especially people from university, which was even better because they could talk about it: 'You can do this, you can do that, you can do an HND!' – and even perhaps taking them on a day trip up there, just to get them to see what's available – it does make a big difference. Obviously when the results come out and I do a lot of analysis on which children were involved in what processes, I'm hoping (touch wood or something!) to see that these things really have made a difference, and if I can prove it by statistics, then they will be improved and developed. We can't do everything – we're supposed to teach them – we do need other people in to lead them in the right direction. We do a lot in PD and stuff, but that one to one is just so valuable.

K OK. I'm happy with what we've covered: is there anything else you'd like to add?

S No, just can we have some more?! More, more, more, please!

- ends -

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