Widening Participation in Higher Education: Exploring factors that prevent secondary school students, from disadvantaged/non-traditional backgrounds, from engaging in Higher Education with 'elite' universities

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

A. L. O'Brien

Signature: …………………………………………………..

Abstract

This thesis set out with the aim to create change by finding new ways to improve the Higher Education system and promote a more socially inclusive environment. 'Widening Participation is not only about increasing the numbers of entrants to higher education, it also involves engaging learners from currently under-represented groups' (Gordon et al. 2010:169).

This research involved 10 months of data collection with 12 students within two schools. The schools were in an urban and a rural area. The data collection involved in-depth qualitative research through a variety of research instruments including: interviews over three timepoints, a variety of narrative elicitation tasks and journal work. This was in an attempt to better understand the decision-making of students when thinking about their post-18 choices.

The sample of students included: four middle class students and 8 working class students. Of this sample 6 were male and 6 female. The students volunteered to participate in the study following a presentation and/or introduction at each of the schools. The methodological approach of the study was advocacy ethnography, therefore, the students' voluntary involvement and continued involvement over the 10 months was essential. Students were given opportunities to comment on or change certain areas of data collection in order to ensure their voices were appropriately recorded where possible.

Following with the theme running through the thesis of an advocacy ethnographic approach, the students' names are anonymised with pseudonyms of their choosing.

The results of the study drew out four main themes. These key themes from the findings of this study were: Student Aspiration; The Role of Schools; Knowledge about Higher Education; and Open Days.

The findings indicate that open days were vital to some students' final decision making around university choice. The role of schools were invaluable to working class students in particular. Student aspiration for the working class students and their families was found to be, contrary to much of the literature, high when

considering post-18 choices. Lastly, important knowledge about higher education should be more readily available to working class students and schools and universities may be able to assist with this.

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List of Abbreviations

SES – Socioeconomic Status

WC – Working Class

MC – Middle Class

WP – Widening Participation

HE – Higher Education

HEI – Higher Education Institution

TOL – Tree Of Life

FSM – Free School Meal

S/C – Social/Cultural

RQ – Research Question

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Widening Participation Problem

The following thesis will explore and hope to contribute to the vast research already collected in pursuit of a fair and inclusive Higher Education (HE) system. In the past decade there has been a significant expansion of universities in the UK, with an accompanying significant increase in the number of 18 and 19 year olds progressing to University. As of 2012/13 there were 161 UK higher education institutions (HESA, 2014). UCAS (2015) reported that 'A total of 532,300 people entered UK higher education in 2015, an underlying increase of 3.1% (16,100) on last year and the highest number recorded'. This increase over the last few decades is evidenced further by Blanden and Machin (2004:230) who state that, 'The UK Higher Education (HE) System has expanded massively in recent decades, with student numbers rising from 400,000 in the 1960s to 2,000,000 at the turn of the new century'. However, despite this significant increase in university attendance, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities are not represented in this group. Participation in university education also varies across the country (HEFCE 2016a).

Due to under-represented groups finding it more difficult to enter and succeed in HE 'the government believes extra support should be offered to these students to help them to stay on their courses and complete them successfully' (Armstrong, 2008).The Social Mobility Commissions Report, (2016:88) supports this stance and defines the problem of widening participation in Higher Education thus:

> 'The number of young people who continue in education after 16 has risen dramatically over the last 15 years, but poorer young people are less likely than their peers to access the qualifications that give the best returns.'

Ratcliff (2015:1) also describes the problem facing young people from poor backgrounds in the following, 'Low-income children caught up in their parents' economic struggles experience the impact through unmet needs, low-quality schools, and unstable circumstances'. A significant amount of literature highlights the re-emerging trend that students from more affluent families go on to earn more over their lives than those students from poorer backgrounds (Crawford et al, 2016). This leads onto the significance of not only focussing on access to university when considering widening participation but focusing also on all forms of participation into and after university life.

When considering widening participation for disadvantaged, non-traditional, first generation or working-class students etc., it can be easy to confuse 'policies on fair access and participation' (David et al, 2010:5) with widening participation in general. The core principles of widening participation are to not only make universities more accessible and inclusive to all, but also to ensure students feel included and can participate efficiently and fairly within every aspect of university life from the first day to the last and maybe even through to postgraduate or later life. Widening participation initiatives should also seek to encourage fair access and inclusion to all universities, including the 'leading' or 'elite' universities (Chambers, 2012).

Russell Group universities are still seen to be middle class dominated in comparison to the working class who are very much under-represented within these institutions (Reay, 2018). This research project will focus on the Widening Participation (WP) problem within these 'elite' Russell Group institutions and will be exploring the factors that affect the decision-making of secondary school sixth form students with regards to their post-18 choices. With a particular focus on 'non-traditional' prospective university students, e.g. first generation and/or from a working class background. This research has been conducted in an attempt to seek knowledge and potential solutions to this widening participation problem.

As a first generation working class student this research is also important to the researcher as an area of genuine interest and importance. This has assisted in the decision to pursue a qualitative study that priorities and harnesses the

voices of those that the study is for. The project is especially important due to the overwhelming literature and data that already exists and that portrays an unfair picture of the issues surrounding fair access, but further to this, participation of all backgrounds towards a pursuit of knowledge and greater career prospects.

The following thesis explores and discusses the literature, research problem, methods and methodology, findings and conclusions from those findings. During the project the following research questions will provide research aims and a structure to the overall project, with a main research question:

- What influences the post-18 choices of working class young people?

And two sub-questions:

- How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
- What access do young people have to information for decision-making post-18?

The topic of widening participation so that working class students can not only access but be fully included within HE is significant in order to break an ongoing cycle of unfair access and reduced opportunities. Crawford et al. puts forward that:

> 'The cycle of social and economic disadvantage that exists across generations can be broken, or at least reduced, if able young people from poorer backgrounds can go to university, finish their degrees, and then pass on the benefits of doing so to their own children. In short, higher education can potentially help sever the link between childhood poverty and poor prospects in adulthood' (2017:10).

Therefore, this topic is an important social justice issue. The data will be conducted in a way that is fitting to the above quote by Crawford et al. in that working class students will be helping to provide potential solutions to the widening participation problem. This research project will be conducted in the

form of an advocacy ethnographic approach (Smyth & McInerney, 2013). This will involve privileging the voices of students rather than numerical data and will be conducted via a variety of qualitative research methods. This research began before the pandemic, however, it is important to note that the pandemic has further highlighted the many social inequalities in our education system. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to growing field of widening participation research.

1.2 Background Chapter

Widening participation is defined by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2004:289) as a way to help eliminate the 'still significant barriers of aspiration facing young people from non-traditional backgrounds, as well as disabled students and those from some ethnic minority groups'. Widening participation initiatives are essential to help 're-structure higher education…based on notions of equality', which is particularly important for the inclusion of under-represented groups into Higher Education, especially as 'Students from lower socio-economic groups have always found it notoriously difficult to enter and succeed in HE' (Armstrong, 2008). As educators widening participation and creating a more inclusive environment within any form of education is a priority that many institutions are always striving to achieve.

Matheson (2008:289) states that 'the right of access to higher education should be available to potential learners throughout their lives' and argues that 'many believe that HE itself needs to provide more support for under-represented groups'. Gorard and Smith (2006:7) support the idea put forward above by Matheson and the importance of Widening Participation within Higher Education by stating:

> 'In general, individuals from families with less prestigious occupational backgrounds, with lower incomes, the unemployed or economically inactive, the elderly, severely disabled people, and ex-offenders, are less likely than average to participate in any episodes of formal education or training after the age of 16'

Although Widening Participation is continuously promoted, it is important to note that drop-out rates are still a primary concern for universities that implement widening participation strategies; this is discussed by Reay (2009:1), 'In the UK, the universities with the most success at widening participation also have the highest drop-out rates'.

1.2.1 Why widening participation matters socially and economically

In relation to the above according to the Social Mobility Commission Report (2016:87) drop-outs with regards to HE is not the only concern but also Further Education (FE) drop-outs, 'Low-income youngsters are one-third more likely to drop out of education at 16 than better-off peers with similar GCSEs, and are 30 per cent less likely to take the A levels needed to study at a top university'. This is important when questioning/exploring the impact social class may have on a student's access to University or continuity of Higher Education. This is essential for Widening Participation initiatives and policies that seek to include, help and meet targets with certain schools or disadvantaged students. Taylor et al (no date: 4-5) argues a similar stance:

> 'universities should not be concerned solely with giving the academically gifted the opportunity to increase their lead over other members of the community. Instead, universities are seen as resources for the community where many people can prosper…The choice would seem to be between a university system that serves the interests of many or one that cultivates the talents of a few'.

As mentioned within this section, tackling inequality is at the heart of Widening Participation. Promoting equality and widening participation in Higher Education matters not only to Universities and Higher Education sectors but also matters socially and economically. HEFCE (no date-b:2) noted the importance of 'Social, cultural and economic capital'. HEFCE also discussed briefly the importance of this with regards to 'how students experience higher education, how they network and how they draw on external support' they then went on to describe how 'Students' financial situations also affect their student experience and their engagement with learning' which further supports the above statement

of why widening participation matters socially and especially economically (HEFCE, no date-b:2). The importance of widening participation socially is also reinforced by Burke et al (2013) who states, 'A recent detailed single institution study of HE pedagogies similarly noted that 'friendships act as 'coping mechanisms' and support structures and can help students feel that they 'belong' at university' (Burke et al., 2013:35). This is supported and discussed further by HEFCE (2015:35) as mature working-class students who were interviewed as part of a Scottish study by Field & Morgan-Klein (2012) commented that there was an importance on making friends from 'similar backgrounds and with common shared experiences', the study showed that although the role of student and 'social networks in student life' were commented on within the study – research into that area is still 'under-developed'.

As well as the importance of social networks within universities there are also social and economic benefits and incentives for the individual attending university as well as society. Some of the individual benefits include fairly obvious social and economic returns such as increased chances of higher-earning jobs, better health and happiness, 'less likely to require social assistance and have shorter welfare spells' (DeClou, 2014:3). Some of the societal benefits include university graduates being more likely to volunteer and donate money, lower crime-rates, and increased likelihood of voting and other political participation (DeClou, 2014).

It is important to reiterate the trend mentioned above, in 'The Widening Participation Problem' section, that students from more affluent families go on to earn more over their lives than those students from poorer backgrounds (Crawford et al, 2016). This may perhaps be due to 'the existence of family networks within these top professions, or of differences in softer skills such as greater self-confidence during interviews' (Crawford et al, 2016:14), or that 'Even when young people from low-income backgrounds do go to university, they are less likely to navigate the choices on offer and secure the degrees with the best employment returns' (Social Mobility Commissions Report, 2016:88). The Social Mobility Commissions Report (2016:88) also state:

'Many choose vocational options in the belief that they will lead to careers in a skilled industry; but the reality is that the majority of apprenticeships on offer to young people are low-skill qualifications in lower-pay sectors where there is little opportunity for progression. The higher yield apprenticeships – as with higher yield academic routes – are more likely to be taken up by more affluent young people with the social capital and academic credentials to navigate the system and secure the best positions'.

This conflicting finding of greater economic progression onto higher-paid jobs for students from more affluent backgrounds has sparked many debates, 'based on the reasonable premise that children with the same attainment should achieve more similar outcomes over the life course' (Crawford et al, 2016:2), and rightly so. However although widening participation policy is trying to combat these sorts of inequalities within our society, there is still a long way to go before participation for access to university, throughout university and after university is completely and unarguably fair.

1.2.2 Widening Participation: the Facts and Figures

Reay et al (2008:1) argue that 'in the UK and globally, there is concern about 'widening participation' and breaking down the exclusivity of university education'. Therefore taking into account current socio-political issues regarding widening participation within Higher Education it could be argued that this study – which will aim to explore why widening participation initiatives have failed or been ineffective and to find new solutions to this (in order to help 'non-traditional' or disadvantaged students from target schools attend 'elite'/leading universities), could be a worthwhile and fundamental project that could perhaps contribute to current policy for widening participation within universities. The aim to enhance widening participation initiatives and the positives of widening participation in general are supported further by Taylor et al (no date: 2) who discusses arguments for widening participation by stating that 'widening participation was not just about increasing numbers in higher education but was far more concerned with reaching those parts of society that were isolated from opportunities'. Taylor et al also encourages the positive influence of the student voice, widening participation strategies and infers the value in assessing the

successes and failures of these strategies deployed by universities. Kennedy (1997:2) supports the need for widening participation and the positives that could occur if successfully implemented by suggesting that enabling disadvantaged students to be able to pursue/continue their education could 'tackle this waste of national potential' and could help encourage social justice.

Considering the benefits mentioned above that widening participation can help create, it is important to discuss briefly the current situation. There are many ways to measure social disadvantage such as the following proxies for social disadvantage which include: Free School Meal status, low participation neighbourhoods, certain ethnicities, disability etc. Below is a table (table 1) displaying the 'Estimated percentage of 15 year old pupils from state-funded schools by Free School Meal status who entered HE by age 19'. This is from academic years 2005/06 throughout to 2013-2014. This involves data collected with regards to 'UK Higher Education Institutions and English Further Education Colleges'.

Entered HE by age 19 in Academic Year	Estimated % who entered HE			
	FSM [1]	Non-FSM [1]	Gap (pp) [2]	All
2005/06	13%	33%	19	30%
2006/07	14%	33%	19	30%
2007/08	15%	33%	18	31%
2008/09	17%	35%	18	32%
2009/10	18%	36%	18	34%
2010/11	20%	38%	18	35%
2011/12	21%	39%	18	36%
2012/13	23%	40%	17	37%
2013/14	22%	39%	17	37%

Table 1: Estimated percentage of 15 year old pupils from state-funded schools by Free School Meal status who entered HE by age 19 (DfE, 2016)

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'pp = percentage points

[1] FSM and Non-FSM refer to whether pupils were receiving Free School Meals at age 15 or not.

[2] Gap is the difference between FSM and non-FSM expressed in percentage points. Percentage figures are rounded; gap figures are calculated from unrounded data and therefore may not correspond to the gap between rounded percentages.' (DfE, 2016)

An interesting, and also somewhat worrying, finding for the years 2010 to 2011 by the Department for Education (2013) is that the South-West rate of progression to university is the lowest of all regions in the UK, see table 2 below.

Regions
Proportion going to HEI

Region	%
Greater London	56%
North West	53%
North East	51%
West Midlands	49%
Yorkshire and Humber	49%
East Midlands	48%
East of England	47%
South East	43%
South West	40%

Table 2: Key Stage 5 – For students who took A levels or equivalent qualifications: Regions Proportion going to HEI (DfE, 2013)

One area that has shown patterns of improvement within data for widening participation in HE is with regards to Black Minority Ethnic participation at Russell Group universities:

'• The number of Black students accepted by Russell Group universities has increased by 62%, from 1,690 in 2010 to 2,740 in 2015.

• The number of Asian students accepted by Russell Group universities has increased by 28%, from 7,285 in 2010 to 9,350 in 2015.

• The number of Mixed ethnicity students accepted by Russell Group universities has increased by 43%, from 2,760 in 2010 to 3,940 in 2015.' (Russellgroup.ac.uk, 2016:1).

1.2.3 Government Policy and Intervention on Widening Participation

Alongside encouraging fair access to 'leading' universities, Widening Participation initiatives are an important part of education policy with regards to Higher Education and are becoming more of a priority for universities. This is becoming and has been an important topic for discussion for years and has led to many reports and also, as a result, has also led to much media speculation. A recent newspaper article by The Independent stated that there has to be a change to widening participation initiatives that set to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter into Higher Education at certain universities, the Independent article from April 2016 stated, 'continuing the present trend in widening participation will "not be sufficient" to meet the ambition to double the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds going into higher education' (The Independent, 2016). The significance of this article is that we need to consider that the pursuit of widening participation within Higher Education and universities is not merely a quick fix solution to societal problems of social injustice, or something to be taken lightly and pursued for the sake of ticking the 'diversity box', further to this widening participation certainly is not 'a single policy but something that involves a long-term process of social and cultural change' (Taylor, no date: 1).

An example of some of the Government targets for widening participation in HE are as followed:

- 'Enable the establishment of more new high-quality higher education providers so students can choose from a wider range of institutions' (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (DfBIS), 2016:2).

Part of this target will include allowing more institutions to secure university status and ensure that these HE providers can provide funding to their students.

This will encourage new universities to 'drive more diversity and innovation, more choice for students, competitive pressure to drive up standards, and will mean that all students with the potential can access a high quality university place' (DfBIS, 2016:2).

- 'Raise teaching quality and standards so students and employers get the skills they need' (DfBIS, 2016:3).

This will include providing stronger incentives for teaching standards to be raised within institutions to help students with regards to employment after university etc.

- . 'Put more information in the hands of students through a "transparency revolution".' (DfBIS, 2016:3).

Providing information to students is especially important as Silva et al (2016) discussed the affects an information gap had on prospective university students, the positives of students having access to more information about the positives and economic gains to having a degree are deemed very important when encouraging students to apply to universities.

- 'Boost social mobility, life chances and opportunity for all' (DfBIS, 2016:5).

In order to meet government targets, Higher Education Institutions/Universities are monitored by The Office for Fair Access (OFFA). OFFA 'promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for people from lower income backgrounds and other under-represented groups' (OFFA, 2017). OFFA's main aim is to ensure that universities and colleges (that charge higher tuition fees) take necessary measures to encourage applications from and to provide support to disadvantaged students. OFFA's main targets towards ensuring widening participation and fair access are to encourage universities and HE institutions: 'remove barriers to entry for people from groups that are under-represented at that university or college', 'support them to complete their studies and achieve the best they are able', and 'support them as they prepare to progress to jobs or further study'. (OFFA, 2017)

The Social Market Foundation (2016a) describes government targets/policy regarding Widening Participation targets which includes doubling the amount of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who go onto higher education as

well as increasing the numbers of BME (Black Minority Ethnic) students by 20%. However, within the Social Market Foundation Report it has been suggested that 'the government will not achieve its ambitions for widening participation by 2020' as they had planned. The original report and the above quote has been referenced within the press in various articles, reinforcing the significance and importance we as a society place upon the success of widening participation initiatives (The Independent, 2016). The above government widening participation aim to double students from disadvantaged backgrounds going on to Higher Education 'is known as the POLAR3 measure and the government's ambition relates to young people living in the poorest 20% of POLAR3 areas' (The Social Market Foundation, 2016b:2). Government targets and policy stances are argued to be essential to ensuring and encouraging Widening Participation within Further Education and Higher Education. This is supported by HEFCE (no date-a:2) who discuss the importance of 'OFFA access agreements' when intending 'to ensure fair access for people from under-represented groups, (for example, financial support for students and outreach work)'. The 'OFFA access agreements' are predominantly used with colleges and universities charging over £6,000 in tuition fees; the success of these agreements is reported by HEFCE (no date-a: 2) who state, 'For 2015-16, 49 colleges have submitted access agreements to OFFA, with access agreement expenditure totalling over £14 million'.

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) have also commented on the call by themselves and HEFCE with regards to 'higher education institutions to submit strategic assessments of their widening participation activity' (OFFA, 2009), this is the new form of reporting for widening participation in Higher Education institutions. The HEFCE director, for education and participation, Selby (2009) stated, 'the new widening participation strategic assessments will provide HEFCE and OFFA with further vital evidence of how widening participation has become an integral part of the policies, processes and cultures in many institutions'.

1.2.4 Widening Participation and elite education

Chambers (2012) argued that access to university in general for disadvantaged groups was not the main problem, but rather access to 'elite' or 'UK leading' universities for these groups was something that should be acted upon. According to an article by the Independent (2000), seven universities received black marks 'for failing to attract enough students from poor backgrounds in official league tables', these universities were commented to be more elitist than the more traditional and exclusive Oxford and Cambridge - who have been renowned for their 'elite' status; however this is not a recent development, as mentioned above, this was raised in an article by the Independent written in 2000. The article stated that the Russell group universities 'are more exclusive than Oxford and Cambridge, according to the figures for 1998-99…Despite attempts to broaden access, working-class students still miss out' (The Independent, 2000). Although there is some significance to the press, newspaper articles and the media reporting on less access to 'elite'/ Russell group universities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is important to note that the significance, for the purpose of this chapter/research, should be placed on the media reporting on the issue – not the reliability and accuracy of the story itself or the source.

As well as various comments about Russell Group Universities and their 'elite' status by the media, other sources have commented on the aims and achievements of Russell Group Universities. Russell Group universities are described by 'The Russell Group of Universities' (no date) as world-class or leading universities that produce the best research and outstanding teaching and learning opportunities, these are made up of 24 universities. It is also worth noting that Success at school (2017) has described Russell Group Universities as also having 'more teaching staff available per student than other universities, and their graduates have a great reputation for bagging high-paying jobs'. Russell Group universities have a perceived status of being one of 24 world-leading universities. Therefore being a member of such an 'elite' group of universities has its benefits and could be argued to increase the value, allure and reputation of a university just by the indication of the status. It had been implied within a news article by Ingram, from The Telegraph, (2016) that many believed that university was only worth attending if students had been accepted into a Russell Group University, and anything less than the status and name

that a Russell Group University brings with it - was not worth the time. Although this is merely an opinion in a newspaper article it does represent the views of many who really praise the status and 'elitism' that comes with Russell Group Universities, such as The University of Exeter (and many others). Despite the excellent reviews and 'elite' status of Russell Group Universities there are others whom would disagree that status is 'the be-all and end-all' of a Higher Education decision for students, Evans (2016) argues that 'Although the Russell Group has become synonymous with elite, selective universities, it is a self-selected group and was never formed to measure university excellence'.

Although The Russell Group of Universities (no date) have claimed that Widening Participation within Russell Group Universities is very high, the statistics prove otherwise as shown within a Government report by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013:5) who state that:

     'There has been no improvement in participation at the most selective
     universities among the least advantaged young people since the mid-
     1990s and the most advantaged young people are seven times more
     likely to attend the most selective universities as the most disadvantaged'

They also go on to state that, 'While there are some Russell Group universities that have become more representative over the past few years, overall their intake has become less socially representative, not more' (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013:5). This relates back to Chambers (2012) who set out the concept that it was access to 'leading' or 'elite' universities that is the problem currently faced by young people who wish to attend universities, not merely the access to universities in general that was a problem. This is supported by Havergal (2016) who discusses research that describes Russell Group and 'elite' Universities as going 'backwards in terms of Widening Participation'. He stated 'Some of the UK's most prestigious universities have a lower proportion of students from poor backgrounds now than they did 10 years ago, research suggests'. Havergal (2016) also stated that amongst the Russell Group Universities the participation of disadvantaged students had declined over the last decade.

The data showed that:

'the proportion of students with parents who were in lower-level occupations or were unemployed increased by 4.8 percentage points across UK higher education between 2004-05 and 2014-15, from 28.2 per cent to 33 per cent. But across the 24 Russell Group universities, the average increase was only 1.4 percentage points, from 19.5 per cent to 20.8 per cent.' (Havergal, 2016)

According to the data the biggest percentage fall was the University of Exeter (see table 3).

Institution	2014-15	2009-10	2004-05	5-year change	10-year change
University of Exeter	15.5	15.5	18.1	0.0	-2.6

Table 3: Proportion of students, with parents in lower-level occupations or unemployed, access to UK Russell Group universities between 2004-05 and 2014-15 (Havergal, 2016)

1.2.5 Conclusion to the section

The purpose of this chapter has been to touch upon policies, government stances, relevant literature and some statistics to help set the scene of the widening participation problem.

The importance of widening participation now has changed significantly from the years prior. It is not like it used to be with academically and 'top' intellectuals going through private schooling and then onto University while others in poorer areas went into a more practical and usually lower-pay labourer or manufacturing type job (Social Mobility Commissions Report, 2016). This is supported by the Social Mobility Commission (2016:88) whom explain that, 'Young people now face much more complex educational options, and are likely to change jobs (and perhaps sectors) many times during their lives. This makes having the right skills vitally important. Today, higher-level skills are no longer the preserve of a tiny elite'. Higher Education was once considered to be accessible to only a select and privileged few. However now universities have attracted a broad range of students from different backgrounds, ethnicities,

ages and genders – and this can primarily be attributed to the Widening Participation agenda (Taylor et al, no date).

The significance of the above statistics and tables provides a general overview of the UK's Widening Participation problem with Higher Education institutions as well as, more specifically, the Exeter University problem and the problems Russell Group Universities face with regards to Widening Participation currently.

Explored within this chapter has been key issues regarding the widening participation (WP) problem, the social and economic importance of WP, facts and figures, government policy around WP and finally WP and 'elite' education. The key issues that have been described within the chapter are as followed, such as: the region with the smallest percentage of students going onto to university being the South-West, encouraging more access to Russell Group or 'elite' universities for students from disadvantaged groups, not only fair access to university but fair access to higher paid jobs for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds after university and reasons why students from poorer backgrounds find it more difficult to access universities and 'elite' universities. This leads onto introducing the study which will involve understanding young people's decision-making processes regarding going to university, the social and cultural capital they access, and the impact of university interventions to address WP.

2.0 Literature Review

The focus of this study is *Widening Participation in Russell Group Institutions within Higher Education.* The reason for this focus is linked to my research problem which is that within research-intensive or 'top' universities there is still an issue of under-representation of working-class students, in comparison to students from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Hemsley-Brown, 2015). Therefore, working-class students are left with fewer opportunities within the education system when faced with an apparent issue of access to 'top universities', and when also considering 'good' education prior to higher education which Reay argues is 'found in the private sector, has to be paid for,

and needs to be highly selective and exclusive' according to the 'UK elite' (Reay, 2016:329). Higher education institutions, whether Russell Group or not, must strive for an inclusive and fair learning environment, based on the age-old premise of every child having a right to a good education.

This literature Review will comprise three sections:

- Widening Participation
- Social and Cultural Capital
- Decision-making

The three sections are indicative of the themes that arose from the literature and seemed significant for my study involving Widening Participation within Higher Education. For the purpose of this review I have actively searched for relevant literature to include within the study. As a result of undergoing a systematic literature review, I have also excluded literature which did not fit the needs of my project.

2.1 Literature Review Methodology

A literature search was necessary in order to effectively exclude irrelevant and include relevant literature. A systematic literature review is defined by Higgins and Green in the following: 'a systematic search…attempts to identify all studies that would meet the eligibility criteria' (2009:4).

The literature search process involved searching for key theorists and researchers in the area of Widening Participation in Higher Education and narrowing down slightly to focus on the relevance of 'social disadvantage' or 'social class'. This process also included reading recommended literature from my supervisors. This helped ensure that the literature met the relevant criteria for my study. Search terms usually included key words relating to my three sections of enquiry within the literature review. In order to narrow down and focus on key literature, key words when searching the literature also included: 'Higher Education', 'Widening Participation' or 'Social class'.

Search terms	Key words

'Widening Participation in Higher Education'	'Widening Participation', 'Higher Education', 'Social class'
'Higher-Education Decision-Making'	'Decision-Making', 'Higher Education'
'Social and Cultural capital in Widening Participation or Higher Education'	'Social/Cultural Capital', 'Widening Participation', 'Higher Education'

Table 4: Table of literature review search terms

The process also involved following on from literature or references used in the readings and checking for newly published literature around the area by following the academic profiles of key researchers within the area. Literature search databases also proved invaluable to the reviewing process, with databases from a few university's electronic libraries such as ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and search engines such as google scholar. All literature was then documented within a 'Literature Review Record' spreadsheet, with more detailed 'Review Proformas' written up alongside. These records were then colour-coded according to appropriate themes for enquiry, consequently these themes then helped to form the structure of my literature review. Various readings were excluded from the study while undergoing the reviewing process, due to irrelevance or other reasons for exclusion.

Exclusion criteria during the literature search were as follows, articles before the year 2000 were usually excluded unless these were considered key texts, and I tried to include articles after 2010 as a priority due to the ever changing Education and Higher Education system. This was even more important due to the rise in tuition fees in 2012 and the change to remain in compulsory education until the age of 17 in 2013 and until the age of 18 in 2015 (GOV.UK). Articles were also usually excluded (particularly during reading around decision-making) if they were from a psychological or neurological angle rather than a social angle based on the decision-making processes of young people making post-18 choices.

2.1.1: Conceptualising Social Class

Within this project and informed by literature during a literature search, social class is conceptualised in order to show distinctions between the working class

and middle class students who participated in this project. Social class and how each class is defined can be dependent on many factors, and typically there can be a proxy by which to identify class groups. At its most basic level social class 'refers to divisions in society based on economic and social status. People in the same social class typically share a similar level of wealth, educational achievement, type of job and income.' (Thompson, 2016: no page) Or at a social justice level, "'Class' is about unequal resources and status, and the social hierarchies to which they give rise." (Bottero, 2009:8) In terms of this research project, the work of Ulrich Beck (1992) proved useful due to the nature of this research around middle and working class voices and decision-making. As Clark et al. (2015: 5.1) share Beck's 'conceptualisation of risk can help us to understand some of the decision-making strategies of young people faced with a range of choices around higher education and their development of personalised, biographical strategies in relation to this risk'. Importance can be placed upon this idea of risk when thinking about social class in terms of the decision of whether or not to pursue higher education. Factors such as tuition fees or moving away may be seen as more of a risk to students from a working class background due to a financial barrier, and the risk of not attending may be present for middle class students who view this as a 'justified risk' towards a future gain (Clark et al. 2015). Beck's (1992) work on 'risk' and how risk may present itself to people depending on their class, is particularly useful when considering the decision-making processes of young people when making post-18 choices. This is due to how students may or may not choose to mitigate risk dependant on class and also what type of 'risk' the student may feel they are faced with. Goldthorpe similarly argues that working class students being more 'risk averse' may be considered perfectly rational 'given differences in security and stability of parental income and income prospects – which are in fact the most immediate manifestations of social class' (2003:236).

When considering differences of risk experienced by students, which are dependent on class, there must be consideration to identifying a student's social class. Although a proxy was developed for this project in order to help decide social class amongst the sample of students, in the form of parental education, whether or not students were in receipt of a bursary or pupil premium etc. Most of these factors are based on social origins such as parental education, income,

capital etc. Other factors were taken into consideration such as students identifying themselves as a certain class, or teachers input and opinion on the class of their students based on information they have access to that a researcher may not have. Beck (2007) argues that class proxies are not always as useful as they seem to counter the individual and argues for individualization of class inequality. Which does tie strongly into this project, as the data collection methods, the findings and discussion of a smaller cohort of student participants, leaves room for their voices to be shared and heard. Although some findings within this project are to show class differences with regards to decision-making, there is a great deal shared about these students' individual thoughts and findings. This resulted in a broad use of social class identifiers that was heavily influenced by other factors shared by students and teachers within interviews, tasks and discussions with teachers before the project began.

2.2: Widening Participation

Widening Participation (WP) is defined as a set of practices to address problems of under-representation of certain groups within a setting or institution (Gordon et al. 2010); therefore its importance within Higher Education (HE) is that:

> 'In spite of the relative success of the Widening Participation policy and strategies to increase the numbers of students from Black and Minority and White working-class backgrounds going to university, universities in Britain continue to be White and middle-class-dominated institutions' (Crozier et al. 2016:39).

Differences of the transition to HE between the social classes shows as Roberts (2010) describes the expansion of higher education in his paper. The paper addresses the relationship between social class and HE and notes that 'A class is said to be demographically formed…The basic positions and experiences are usually taken to be in the labour market and employment, and what is common may be an experience of stasis or mobility' (Roberts, 2010: 216). He comments on the normal and common experience of most 18-19 year olds progressing to university and notes the difference between the classes: 'Just over two-fifths from the entire middle-class now progress directly (more or less, so discounting

gap years) from secondary school education to university against just under one-fifth from the entire working-class' (Roberts, 2010: 217). These statistics do not account for graduation rates but are merely admissions to university. If drop-out rates were taken into consideration, these statistics would be significantly lower with a wider class gap (Roberts, 2010). Although these findings are from 2010 they still hold significance by showing that the under-representation of certain groups is not a new phenomenon and that Widening Participation initiatives to improve access are still far from perfected. This is supported by more recent findings that show that 'students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are still almost two and a half times less likely to enter HE than those from more advantaged backgrounds' (Thiele et al. 2017:49; UCAS, 2015).

Widening Participation research is necessary in order to improve current policies and practices that are not yet fully combatting 'the social inequalities that are institutionalised and reproduced within the academic world' (Webb et al. 2017:140). An important question and rationale for this section and study is 'what progress has been made towards social justice and equality in education for the working classes over the last hundred years?' (Reay, 2006:304). The answer is very little progress has been made in the grand scheme of things and within the time-frame. The education system continues to replicate the social inequalities found within wider society and this is apparent in all forms of formal schooling.

This section will include an exploration of the impact of schooling, university admissions and differential student outcomes. These will be discussed with regards to widening participation and social class differences.

2.2.1: The impact of schooling on Widening Participation

A key theme which was evident in the literature was the impact of schooling on widening participation. Due to higher numbers staying in secondary education until 18 and then going forward to higher education afterwards, the impact of schooling is an important area to consider as it is usually the stage of education just before university. Therefore, schooling will often have an impact on a young person's decision on whether to carry onto higher education or not. Boliver's

research (2016:2) has highlighted that 'it increasingly matters not just how much schooling people accumulate but also what kinds of schooling they receive'.

There is an apparent correlation between school type, social class, parental education, and attendance at certain universities. For example those from 'higher socio-economic backgrounds', with regards to the above credentials, are most likely to be found in a Russell Group institution (Boliver, 2016:5; Sanders et al, 2013). The indication in Boliver's paper that school type is a factor that can have some bearing on whether or not a young person attends a prestigious university further indicates the importance schooling has on Widening Participation in Higher Education. Although young people from a socially disadvantaged background or a state-funded school (rather than a private school) are less likely to apply to prestigious universities 'the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) found that state school students do better, on average, at degree level than their privately educated peers' (Boliver, 2015a; HEFCE, 2014). With 82% of state school graduates achieving a first or upper second-class degree compared to 73% of graduates from private schools in 2013-2014 (Boliver, 2015a), it is crucial that we as researchers strive to better understand why more state school students are not applying for and attending prestigious universities (or university in general). Sanders et al. (2013) also finds that students from poor backgrounds with parents who are less educated are less likely to attend a prestigious university; this suggests that social inequalities can play a significant role in the type of institution a student attends.

A problematic matter with schooling and its impact is that it has frequently been suggested that social inequalities that arise from social class are not addressed within schools (Reay, 2006). Therefore these can continue onto Higher Education, or can deter some students from applying to university at all, at which point it is too late to address and correct the problem. Reay (2016) described how the education system is eroding the freedom to learn for all children. However, Reay goes on to discuss that the children who suffer the most are still predominantly working-class children. Working-class children within state-funded or comprehensive schools are given fewer opportunities for fulfilling learning and help to realise their potential, as well as a narrowing of the school curriculum. Reay argues that this reinforces the demand and need for successful Widening Participation policies and initiatives as 'lack of informed

knowledge of the problem plus a failure to tackle the injustices where they arise, much further down in the schooling system, has meant that the vast majority of gains have gone to the middle not the working classes' (Reay, 2006:291). Reay also states that 'We still have an education system in which working class education is made to serve middle-class interests' (2006:294).

Another theme that recurred in the literature was this idea that secondary school students did not seem to fully understand the benefits of attending university (Reay, 2006; Hemsley-Brown, 2015; Loveday, 2014; Lehmann, 2013; DeClou, 2014). One example is within DeClou's paper it became clear that a lot of prospective university students assessed the benefits of Higher Education in terms of the economic returns, and therefore did not consider the possible social returns that Higher Education can bring with it (DeClou, 2014). Ensuring students are fully aware of all the benefits of university, rather than the few regularly discussed benefits such as an increased chance of a higher paying job at the end, is another area that schools and teachers could (or may already) play a part in. This can be done by answering simple questions about university for students so they fully understand the benefits of university, rather than merely learning the costs and debts that are frequently discussed within the media that may 'affect a student's desire to continue in higher education' (Bachan, 2014:850).

As well as schools offering support and answers to questions about Higher Education after school, private schools have the added benefit of seemingly imparting valuable knowledge upon students to help with Higher Education applications for Russell Group universities, for example 'while just under a third of the poorest group of students take two or more facilitating subjects, more than half of all private school students do so' (Crawford et al. 2017:82). Facilitating subjects are subjects that are considered more desirable to Russell Group universities, usually due to the high-return associated with them (Crawford et al. 2017). This could imply more knowledge is given to private school students about which subjects may be considered more valuable to 'top' universities in comparison to students in state-funded schools. This could be due to the numbers applying for universities within both types of schools and therefore the need for more knowledge on admissions process for Higher Education being more of a priority for private schools.

2.2.2: The significance of university admissions processes on Widening Participation

The admissions process to university consists of applying either independently or through an adviser to your chosen university by means of UCAS in the United Kingdom (UCAS, 2017). How much help and understanding a student receives with the application, their personal statement or the admissions process and therefore the quality of their application as a whole could perhaps mean the difference between a place at university or not. Reay describes the 'large gap between working-class applications and admissions, as disparities in rates of admission to the élite universities remain substantial for working-class applicants, even after entry qualifications have been taken into account' (Reay, 2018:4). A university's admissions process, especially when applying to a prestigious university, will directly affect the effectiveness of Widening Participation in terms of increasing the numbers of underrepresented students within the institution and can therefore act as the first barrier to overcome in order to improve Widening Participation within higher education. In order for equal access for all to be possible and for Widening Participation to improve within Higher Education; the admission process must be fair.

2.2.2.1: Fairness

Admission to university and fair access are key factors when discussing Widening Participation. In order to have a more diverse range of students from different backgrounds the admission process has to be non-discriminatory. This is to allow students who have faced unequal opportunities within previous education, to not be disadvantaged or unfairly excluded at the first hurdle into university.

Social inequalities can arise within a school setting, as can a sense of entitlement to good education and prestigious universities which seemed to be portrayed by middle class or privately schooled young people within studies (Crozier et al. 2016). Therefore schooling seems to not only influence young people from non-traditional backgrounds but also seemed to have an impact on young people from traditional/middle class backgrounds. One participant from

Crozier's study described black minority ethnic (BME) and white working class students in the following:

> "I'm kind of middle-class, we're quite well off. It's just interesting to see people who aren't so well off and live in really crowded places. They are all gangs. It's like the kind of thing you see in East Enders …. It's kind of like the programme 'How the Other Half Live' …. (White male middle-class)" (Crozier et al. 2016:46).

Many comments from white middle-class students within the university reinforced 'othering' within the institution. The students who were discussed were predominantly working-class or BME, this generates and continues the perception that these groups do not fit in, or that they stick out (Lehmann, 2007; Reay et al. 2009; Lehmann, 2013; Crozier et al. 2016).

However, a more detailed knowledge of the admissions process for university is an advantage that students from private schools, and with parents who have experience with the process, will more commonly have. This is especially the case when it comes to accessing the more prestigious or elite Higher Education Institutions. Reay states 'Private school students are 55 times more likely than FSM students to gain a place at Oxford or Cambridge' (2018:4).

2.2.2.2: Access

As briefly mentioned above, another factor to take into consideration is access to more prestigious universities, as 'top universities' tend to have lower participation rates of disadvantaged groups (Thiele et al. 2017) than 'new universities' (Boliver, 2016). This may be due to a perception students have of 'traditional' older universities that makes them seem more intimidating and less accessible, whereas 'new' universities could be thought of in a different light, as a changing of the times. It is apparent from the literature that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to prefer remaining home-based and consequently apply to local universities (Furlong & Cartmel, 2005; Roberts, 2010). This could be due to a number of reasons, from financial constraints, family obligations and responsibilities (Bathmaker et al, 2013), a want or need to stay closer to home (Crawford et al. 2017) or a view that university is

university no matter the location. According to the students these are perceived to be 'for people like me' (Roberts, 2010:221). It is important to explore why young people applying to university consider some universities more than others to be more appropriate for 'people like them'. Especially as Roberts (2010:221) found that 'If working-class students apply to the 'top' universities, they appear to be treated as fairly as other applicants with equal qualifications, they do equally well at university, and do not feel more out of place than other students.' However this somewhat contradicts what other researcher's work has said such as Lehmann (2007), Reay et al (2009), Lehman (2013), Crozier et al (2016) and Gibson et al (2016). As discussed previously within this literature review, these researchers described problems for working-class students fitting in within HE.

A possible reason for the problems with students feeling as though they do not fit in within more prestigious universities could be something as small as the wording used to describe a working-class student at the first hurdle of the admissions process, or unintentionally or unknowingly done by universities in what was meant to be helpful but consequently becomes another way to exclude. . 'Othering' is commonly used by students (as mentioned above in the schooling section) and ironically also by the institutions when trying to widen access/participation. Even small influences such as wording surrounding Widening Participation can deter students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

> 'One might argue this is due to the discourse of 'normalcy' operating throughout the HE sector, creating binary, i.e. the 'normal' or 'traditional' as opposed to the 'diverse' or 'non-traditional' student. This results in systematic, culturally created separate groups where the latter carries the stigma of the 'other', and is forced to fit into established forms of teaching and learning with additional provision added for their 'effective' integration' (Gibson et al. 2016:10).

Words used to describe working class students seeking to attend university could cause students to feel 'othered' or 'different' when confronted with words that make them feel they do not belong or fit in, such as 'non-traditional', even 'socially disadvantaged' etc. As well as words used to describe and thereby 'other' working-class students. Words to describe certain universities can come

across as intimidating and inaccessible to the 'non-traditional', working-class students that universities seek to recruit within their widening participation initiatives; such as 'elite', 'prestigious', 'top university'. For example it may be common to feel out-of-place in a 'traditional' university as a 'non-traditional' student. Following the above quote by Gibson et al (2016), it is important to comment on the use of the word 'integration' when initiatives seek to widen participation. Widening Participation is more than merely integration, an inclusive environment is not about making diverse groups more like the norm but rather embraces and accommodates the diversity. Furthermore, Widening Participation should be a drive to create an inclusive environment where under-represented groups are not merely able to attend university and gain access, but where they can stay throughout and possibly progress onto further study. This can result in students raising their confidence and therefore their aspirations as a result of Higher Education.

2.2.2.3: Aspiration

As discussed by the researchers above, fitting in within a HE environment is still a problem for working-class students. However, if we take the above findings from Roberts (2010) that argue that working-class students would do just as well at 'top universities' as their middle-class peers, this shows that there is clearly an underlying problem with disadvantaged groups accessing and perhaps feeling they can access more prestigious universities. Many have argued that a key issue within Widening Participation is not under-represented group's attainment but rather their aspiration. As Sanders et al. argue:

> 'pupils from poor backgrounds, or whose parents are less educated, are significantly less likely to attend a prestigious university…the driving cause is an aspiration gap, where young people with suitable grades but less advantaged backgrounds are simply not applying to prestigious universities' (Sanders et al. 2013:3).

Another concept to arise from literature around Widening Participation is the significance of 'aspiration' on an individual's decision to apply for university. Grant (2017) explores the relevance aspiration has on working-class young people contemplating Higher Education. Although progressing to university or

Higher Education has become a 'mainstream transitional experience for young people in the UK in the last 20 years', there still remains a difference in progression rates for those from under-represented groups and a big factor thought to influence this is aspiration (Grant, 2017:289). Grant discusses further the significance aspiration has with regards to working-class students in the following:

> 'New Labour's widening participation policy…formed a link between local areas of deprivation and low levels of social mobility. This made having 'low aspirations' synonymous with being working-class' (Grant, 2017:291).

In recent years, under a new labour government, Widening Participation initiatives have sought to raise aspirations as 'high aspirations equate to participating in HE' (Grant, 2017:289). However, it is important to note that raising aspirations so that students apply for university and thereby gain access, does not secure equal outcomes. It is also worth noting that there is a wide range of literature that criticises the concept of high aspirations equalling university participation. Harrison and Waller (2018) argue that working class aspirations are generally not low and that this is misinformed information.

2.2.3: Differential Student Outcomes for Socially Disadvantaged Students

> 'While participation in higher education has increased and, to some extent, widened to include more diverse learners, it has been argued that UK policies to address inequality of access have only been 'marginally successful', with the most powerful groups in society still being the most likely to benefit from educational opportunities' (Gordon et al. 2010:170).

Even with more socially disadvantaged students getting through the admissions process to university, there is no guarantee that they will be afforded the same student outcomes as their middle-class peers. Feeling left out, anxiety and unequal opportunities are some of the problems that can affect non-traditional students within a Higher Education institution. Feeling left out due to a student's class background can create fears about their academic confidence and competency which can in turn be argued to affect the amount the student

commits themselves to their course. This is also argued by Reay who states, 'the class background of working-class students in an elite American university positioned them as cultural outsiders and led to crises in competency and fears of academic inadequacy' (Reay, 2009:1112).

Even if socially disadvantaged students do access Higher Education there can still be unfair disadvantages compared with more socially advantaged students. This is shown by Reay when discussing disadvantages felt by working-class students with regards to unfamiliarity with the field, 'While many of the middle-class students were relatively familiar with the field of higher education, the working-class students are dealing with a very unfamiliar field' (Reay, 2009:1110).

With more socially disadvantaged students applying to 'new universities' or local universities and not what are considered by many to be 'top universities' or Russell Group Universities, it could be argued that they will not be afforded the same advantages as middle class students graduating from top universities. This is the norm, which could be why the social disadvantage goes on and on and is replicated each time.

> '…degree from a top quartile university (in the academic league tables) boosts lifetime earnings by an estimated 10–16% vis-a`-vis a degree from a bottom quartile institution... Net of all other characteristics, a degree from a higher-ranked university increases the chances of being called for an interview by a company that recruits graduates' (Roberts, 2010:222)

Differential student outcomes have been discussed in various reports carried out by HEFCE (HEFCE, 2014; 2015). Factors that are described to influence student's differential outcomes are as follows: 'a sense of belonging' which, as discussed by HEFCE, could be improved with good teacher-student relationships and by an increased effort to encourage students to feel as though they do in fact fit within their institution. The 'user-friendliness of learning, teaching and assessment practices', making sure that all students, regardless of background, understand and engage with the curricula is essential to fair outcomes from Higher Education. 'Students' financial situations also affect their

student experience and their engagement with learning', students who lacked the support from familial and social networks were said to experience higher education differently to their financially better-off peers (HEFCE, 2015:iii). These factors can act as potential barriers to students from working-class backgrounds who do not have the same fair access to the above.

The first factor discussed by HEFCE of the importance of a sense of belonging and good teacher-student relationships is reiterated in Gibson et al's paper. Schooling and teacher influence can have an important impact on student attainment and most importantly aspiration. Although set within a HE setting the work of Gibson et al. (2016) revealed the difference having someone, whether it is a lecturer, tutor or teacher, to talk to can make. It became apparent that this was especially the case for students who felt they 'do not belong' or are 'non-traditional' learners. Since widening participation is concerned with not only 'increasing the numbers of entrants to higher education, it also involves engaging learners from currently under-represented groups' (Gordon et al. 2010:169), it is fundamental that steps are taken to encourage learners to not only apply to HE institutions but to feel they can be fully-included. This can include students feeling as though they are able to stay throughout the course and even onto postgraduate courses or further study. Reay (2016) also discussed the impact a poor student-teacher relationship can have on a student's education and their aspiration to go onto Higher Education.

When considering the potential factors that encourage student's aspiration and capability to go onto Higher Education, it is worth noting that within an earlier report by HEFCE it was reported that 'Students with better A-levels do better in higher education… More than 80 per cent of students with grades AAB or above gain a first or upper-second degree; approximately 50 per cent or less of those with CCC or lower do so' (2014:3). Success rates with degree outcomes also appeared to be more favourably with white students as opposed to students from different ethnicities and also with the female populace in contrast to males. Other key points for this study from the HEFCE report were: the effect coming from a disadvantaged area had on students with the same prior educational attainment as students from advantaged backgrounds, and that 'Independent school students enter higher education with better A-level grades

than those from state schools' (2014:4). When considering the first point, HEFCE reported that:

> '77 per cent of those from the most advantaged areas with ABB at A-level go on to gain a first or upper-second degree. This figure drops to 67 per cent when ABB students from the most disadvantaged areas are considered' (2014:4).

If the grades achieved by students are equal then there has to be more to the reason why students from more disadvantaged backgrounds cause a figure drop in students achieving a first or upper-second class degree. The possible reason for this could be due to the points raised in HEFCE's (2015) report above: a sense of not-belonging, a lack of user-friendly learning and teacher practices, and the financial aspects involved. Crawford et al. discuss working class students choosing to remain closer to home when attending university due to 'psychological reasons, such as concerns about not fitting in' (2017:80). It is entirely possible, therefore, that this fear of fitting in could extend to when students are attending university as well as prior to university attendance. With regards to the second point raised regarding independent schools vs state schools, HEFCE reported that the average A-level attainment for students in independent schools was much higher than that within state schools. However, it is important to not ignore the findings by HEFCE discussed above within the schooling section of this literature review, that students from state schools with the same A-level grades as their independent school counterparts tended to do better in their degree (HEFCE,2014). Therefore, students from state schools are just as, if not more (by the above finding), capable at undergoing the Higher Education process and coming out with a good degree. And yet unequal student outcomes are an issue faced by many working-class students, even when the same grades are achieved. 'The middle-class girls typically follow from GCSE to A levels to university, while working-class girls have more disrupted, fragmented and chequered educational careers' (Abbott et al. 2005:90). Despite the increase in the minimum secondary school leaving age, students from disadvantaged groups are still not progressing to university or Higher Education at the same rates and with the same ease of middle-class students (Boliver, 2017).

This indicates that further study is needed to help discover what other reasons affect the under-represented, full-participation of students from working-class backgrounds.

'Social class is often regarded as an important factor which contributes towards social exclusion from HE' (Grant, 2017:291). This is an essential area to consider when discussing widening participation, as those from socially disadvantaged areas are three times less likely to participate in Higher Education as those from advantaged areas (Gibson et al. 2016). As mentioned previously socially disadvantaged students are more unlikely to apply to prestigious universities than those from more advantaged backgrounds, Gibson et al. share this stance and state that 'There has been no improvement in participation at the most selective universities among the least advantaged young people since the 1990s' (2016:9-10). As explored within this section, working-class students from different schools to their (dominant) middle-class peers felt 'othered' and as though they did not fit into the HE institution. This could be due to a lack of classmates from their school being at the same university or simple a lack of 'people like them' in an unfamiliar and daunting field. The last important point argued within the schooling section was the concept that working-class students felt that the 'traditional' prospective students, from private schools, were given more support than them when it came to the application process and university knowledge in general. It is important that if this is consistently the case for many students that fall into the widening participation bracket, that this is rectified in order to ensure equal access for these high-achieving working-class students who slip through the net.

2.2.4: Summary: The relationship between social class, social disadvantage and widening participation

Literature surrounding Widening Participation has highlighted themes including: the effect of schooling, the admissions process to Higher Education, and differential student outcomes.

When discussing participation at selective universities it is worth considering the impact schooling has on widening participation in HE. A reoccurring theme

when discussing Widening Participation is the impact schooling has on young people considering HE. As many researchers will state, the classroom can represent a microcosm of wider society, and therefore social inequalities within schooling can be then replicated to later life. HE can also seem impenetrable to working-class students who are not as familiar with the structure of the HE system. Adjustments and improvements to Widening Participation policy and initiatives can help 'non-traditional' students to feel more comfortable. To work effectively, however, this process may have to begin at school-level. Harber (2004:86) argues similarly, stating that 'strategies to issues of schooling and group identity are often set out…where the burden is placed on those coming into the school to adopt the values and lifestyle of the existing dominant group in the school or the wider society, thereby reproducing this dominant position'.

Access, Aspiration and Fairness was discussed in terms of the admissions process within this section of the literature review. Considering these factors when discussing Widening Participation is essential to creating a dialogue that will contribute to necessary change for the better. Although Widening Participation is more than purely accessing HE, access is an important step in creating better Widening Participation initiatives within universities. This is especially important when we consider how accessible prestigious universities are to working-class students. Creating fair and equal opportunities for aspiring prospective university students is essential to enhancing Widening Participation practices.

The findings presented by HEFCE when discussing differential student outcomes shows just how important and much needed effective Widening Participation is. The figures and statistics show the extent of the differences felt by working-class students, in comparison to middle-class students, within a HE setting. All of the above points should be taken into consideration when considering improvements to Widening Participation. This can thereby help prospective students from all backgrounds progress into HE with ease and fairness.

Chapter 2.3: Social and Cultural Capital

In order to widen participation so that students from working-class backgrounds can progress to Higher Education with the same ease as traditional middle-class students, a requirement would be to look at contributing factors to this participation concern. The issue of Social and Cultural Capital in Widening Participation is argued by many writers and theorists as a key factor. Social and Cultural Capital can shape and influence students' pathways to certain job applications, University applications, as well as to build up a good CV. It is not enough these days to possess a degree, students are encouraged to build up their eligibility for jobs and courses in different ways.

Capital theory has many forms, physical capital involves physical objects and 'human capital refers to properties of individuals' (Putnam, 2000:19). A concise definition of social capital is provided by Putnam (1995:2): '"social capital" refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'. In other words social networks are central to social capital; this includes relationships, connections between individuals and other social assets. The more rich these connections and networks the more valuable and useful these reciprocal social relationships become. Social capital can have a mutual and an individual benefit, an example of this is that networking can benefit someone's own interests when job seeking, within the parameters of "it's not what you know it's who you know" (Putnam, 2000). A person's social capital can provide them with these beneficial networks that can in turn present them with certain opportunities or, as with the example above, jobs by relevant association.

> 'Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure' (Coleman, 1994: 302).

Another important source of capital is cultural capital. Cultural capital is described by Lareau and Weininger:

> 'The concept of "capital" has enabled researchers to view culture as a resource - one that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next…emphasis on cultural capital has enabled

researchers in diverse fields to place culture and cultural processes at the center of analyses of various aspects of stratification' (2003:267).

Social and Cultural Capital may have a role to play in Widening Participation research. It is noteworthy that within The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) Clarke stated that:

> 'According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, 'capital' is not just an economic concept. He also saw an individual's knowledge and tastes as a form of cultural capital, which is 'institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications'. Bourdieu believed different levels of access to various forms of capital are the root causes of social inequality, something perhaps magnified in higher education' (2017:17).

The significance these forms of capital have on Widening Participation is the systematic reproduction of success for students from more advantaged backgrounds with an abundance of social and cultural capital; whilst students from more disadvantaged backgrounds could be struggling due to a lack of social and cultural capital before and during university. Although most students will be unaware of their capital, a student's capital can be important to their overall success within certain areas and industries. Prior to university the social and cultural capital that a student has may unknowingly assist in them accessing certain opportunities. For example, a student having parents who have attended university may provide them with a useful contact when filling out their university application. Better support for writing university applications being provided through online tools or through schools can compensate for those who lack parents with their own support. Access to university can be valuable as it can help somewhat with providing a new source of capital to students through the education, networks and opportunities within their own institution. With more and more people obtaining degrees there is a certain pressure placed upon students to 'stand out from the crowd'; the student's Social and Cultural capital can provide an advantage with regards to what could be desirable qualities for certain career fields or prestigious HE institutions. This is relevant to Widening Participation due to the, more-likely, familiarity that middle-class students have with the benefits of social and cultural capital. In

comparison to the, less-likely, familiarity that working-class students will have. Reasons for this may include parental impact, such as the above example of university application assistance or parents from middle-class backgrounds having knowledge to pass on within the area due to their own previous experience of university life for example. Or perhaps advantageous social networks created over the years through university-made networks of people now in a variety of university-educated career paths.

Bourdieu describes the concept of the 'field' and 'playing the game'. Parental impact and social networks are another piece in a game of chess. This game of chess is comparable to life, as it will take skill, logic and knowledge of the game to get the best outcome and win. Social and cultural capital are untold rules about the game, if you know about the rules and their significance you have an added advantage while playing. As described by Bourdieu (1986) and Bathmaker et al. (2013) Social and Cultural Capital is all about playing the game and having appropriate advantages to play the game better. As helpful as social and cultural capital is and as useful as the benefits are to the overall game-play, without all the knowledge on how the game is played, the other team gets an advantage and the game becomes unfair. This is where the classes become separated by capital. This concept of 'playing the game' will be discussed with more detail within the chapter.

Following on from an unequal playing field, another relevant analogy of the 'field' asserted by Bourdieu is of a 'battlefield' in which not every student possesses the necessary weapons for this battlefield (Weininger, 2005). Social and Cultural capital can be argued to be the weapons required for tackling the battlefield before them. With relation to working class students, there is a disadvantage when going into a battlefield with either no weapons or the wrong kinds of weapons. Bourdieu's idea of 'field' and the 'battlefield', could be argued to involve as Martin describes, in their paper on Field Theory, the presence of 'alliance or independence as well as conflict' (Martin, 2003:30). I would argue this concept of an alliance or independence to be a useful metaphor for social capital and how useful it may be in certain situations such as when considering access to HE. Having advantageous allies can be useful depending on the field and the usefulness of these alliances will depend on the type of field.

2.3.1: Explaining Social/Cultural Capital: Theories of Social/Cultural Capital

In order for students to tackle the 'battlefield' of Higher Education and progression to well-paid jobs, there needs to be an understanding of the relevance of Social and Cultural Capital.

The best description of the different forms that social capital take is by the OECD (no date: 103) in the following three categories:

- 'Bonds: Links to people based on a sense of common identity ("people like us") – such as family, close friends and people who share our culture or ethnicity'.
- 'Bridges: Links that stretch beyond a shared sense of identity, for example to distant friends, colleagues and associates'.
- 'Linkages: Links to people or groups further up or lower down the social ladder'.

With regards to these categories, it is worth noting that social capital can knowingly or unknowingly help people to progress through their career or life in general with greater ease. The importance of Social Capital can be taken for granted by those that do not fully understand its worth. Social capital centres on the social aspects of life.

Cultural capital differs from social capital, it is less difficult to explain than social capital and is easier to see and achieve independently through education etc. without the 'correct' contacts being of necessity for progression up the career ladder.

Lareau and Weininger (2003) provide an extensive and useful collection of theorists and their definitions of cultural capital. From this, cultural capital is perceived to take on many different forms. Cultural habits, prestigious education, manners, high-status hobbies and activities, behaviours and credentials. A definition of cultural capital that seemed the most succinct from this paper was observed by Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp (1996) who noted that cultural capital encompassed 'high status cultural signals, such as attitudes, behaviours, preferences, and credentials, … commonly used for social and

cultural inclusion and exclusion' (Lareau and Weininger, 2003:572). The measurement of cultural capital for each definition also proved to be interesting and differed greatly depending on the definition. The measurement of cultural capital for the above quote by Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp was as follows, 'did parent attend performances of plays, classical music, go to art museums, encourage child to read' (Lareau and Weininger, 2003:572). The ways in which cultural capital are measured, according to this paper and other papers alike, are fascinating. As is the accuracy of these measurements, it does seem to matter a great deal in our society and culture to employers and others. In fact, some of the measurements of good cultural capital are regarded with elitism and prestige.

Examples of some desirable qualities from the paper that seem apt are an interest in 'cultural subjects' such as the arts and literature, educational credentials, theatre visits and museum visits, reading in youth, dress and appearance, parental cultural capital, a cultured self-image (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). These examples reminiscent of a little quiz from the BBC News (2013) website. The quiz was fairly basic but was titled 'The Great British class calculator: What class are you?' One of the questions, and therefore measurements of class, on the quiz was the frequency in which someone attended the theatre or ballet. It seems bizarre that someone's class could be assumed upon this basis, yet this seems to be an example of the factors we as a society and culture deem important when deciding the social class of someone. Of course this would not be an accurate measure, as it holds no scientific merit and would not be consistently true for each person, but nonetheless this is a measure we ourselves within society consider to be of significance when measuring how cultured someone is.

2.3.2: How the working class are disadvantaged by S/C capital

As the above measurements of social and cultural capital seem to be more readily available to those from more advantaged backgrounds, it is clear that this is a way in which the working-class are disadvantaged by Social and Cultural capital. This is maintained further within Sommerlad's (2007) paper. Some working-class respondents from interviews within the paper described

knowing that they would have to change themselves in order to fit into the role they were going for. To be more traditional and more appropriate for the role, even if that in-turn made them a 'snob' (Sommerlad, 2007: 14). The Social and Cultural Capital gains that are not as accessible by working-class students can act as a barrier to students trying to work their way through an impenetrable and unequal playing field.

Working-class students may be disadvantaged by not increasing their social and cultural capital, whilst their middle-class peers do. Social and Cultural capital accumulation gain within Higher Education seems to be a primarily middle-class phenomena. One possible reason for this has been contributed to working-class students studying and focusing on their degree during their time at university, whilst other students from more affluent backgrounds may be applying for student ambassador positions or joining a university society or club (Bathmaker et al. 2013). This can happen before higher education too, while middle-class students may spend time learning a musical instrument or excelling at a particular hobby or extra-curricular activity, working-class students may not necessarily see the value or have the funds available and this could put them at a disadvantage during the application process, especially when applying for postgraduate positions.

Bathmaker et al. (2013:3) describes the relevance class has on a student's likeliness of engaging in Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA),

> 'middle-class students at an elite university increasingly saw the need to add value to their 'hard' academic credentials through the addition of 'soft' credentials' gained through various forms of ECA, Redmond's study of mature 'widening participation' students at a post-1992 English university found that these students 'tended to conceptualise higher education in terms of academic achievement'. There was 'an almost non-existent engagement in any non-academic related, extra-curricular activities', partly due to constraints including family responsibilities'.

Money is another factor when it comes to extra-curricular societies and clubs, as students from poorer backgrounds may find it difficult to afford the costs of applying to the societies or buying the necessary equipment.

Extra-curricular activities are just one of many examples of why students from more advantaged backgrounds have an advantage when applying to Higher Education and high-earning jobs. Clark et al. states that universities not only look for the appropriate grades as entry requirements but that 'students are asked to present themselves as a list of valuable credentials including high grades, extracurricular activities, cultural experiences and fee-paying agents in their university applications' (2015: no page). An example of how extra-curricular activities provide a useful source of capital is described by Mountford-Zimdars et al. who discusses that disadvantaged students are less likely to be involved in volunteering opportunities, committees, societies and clubs which can in-turn 'disadvantages them in showing leadership and communication skills that employers value' (2017:105). Nobel and Davies (2009) describe why access is easier for those brought up in a more advantageous environment and why it may be a struggle for those who lack the cultural capital to progress onto and, subsequently, through higher education.

One example of this is that students with low cultural capital may feel that higher education is a place where they do not belong and therefore struggle to fully participate and 'learn the rules of HE' (Mountford-Zimdars et al. 2017:105). When confronted with traditional university students who have cultural capital in abundance, feeling like an outsider within a higher form of education can be a barrier to overcome. Especially when this is a new environment altogether for first-generation working-class students, whose social networks or family networks that are available to them are unable to provide a sense of relief by offering their own previous experiences or coping strategies.

When students fail to overcome their cultural disadvantage this feeling of 'not belonging' can be enhanced. An example of disadvantages faced by these students can be anything from low educational aspirations affected by capital (Fuller, 2014), applications that are incorrectly filled out or uncompleted, to students dropping-out after enrolment due to not fitting in. Widening Participation should ensure under-represented groups do not feel left-out and consequently not feel a need to drop-out; in short effective Widening Participation should encourage lower drop-out rates for socially disadvantaged groups. Institutions that have more Widening Participation have higher drop-out rates; however, 'It is not WP per se that causes drop-out. The problem is rather

a lack of attention to the needs of a more diverse student population and a lack of a student-centred approach' (Gibson et al. 2016:28).

In this circumstance, University can be hard to stick out, especially when it is hard to see the benefits when the barriers to overcome are incredibly daunting. Explained more succinctly by Nobel and Davies (2009:593) in the following, 'In this instance, low cultural capital reduces the likelihood of application to higher education because students have miscalculated the net benefits they will receive'. The potential worth of university can be hard to consider over the crippling anxiety of not succeeding or not fitting in. As previously mentioned within this section, this can be especially intimidating for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are unfamiliar with university and its social and cultural benefits due to being unable to access the relevant information, either from their networks, school or family-network, and therefore may not apply to university.

2.3.3: Family/Friends/Parental impact

As one essential form of social capital is family (Putnam, 1995); this is another example of how working class students are disadvantaged and unprepared for 'playing the game'. One way that gives a bit of an edge when 'playing the game' (Bathmaker et al. 2013) is to have been brought up within a family or environment that is drenched and/or values the things in life that bring with them social and cultural capital. This in turn can support writing a CV and chances of getting into a good job or university. Extra-curricular activities and character building jobs can help improve your social capital (Putnam, 2000) but if you have grown up unaware of the importance of applying for such things, then students could risk setting themselves up for a fail when going up for a job, role or course against those who have enhanced their CVs in such a way. Therefore familial networks can help with prior understanding about a job or role. This is emphasised further in Sommerlad's paper on the professional identity formation of part-time and full-time law students, where she describes that 'the lack of familial links meant that few of the working-class students had had such understanding when they had first become interested in the profession. Instead their motivation and aspirations had generally been formed by television

programmes and films like *Ally McBeal* and *LA Law'* (Sommerlad, 2007:200). The absence of familial networks can mean students find their knowledge elsewhere, which may not be as helpful as the information provided through the family's accumulation of social capital through relevant social networks or experience. The role of a student's family can also help in other ways, such as providing contacts to help improve a chance at getting a job or experience, i.e. the well-known phrase *it's not what you know it's who you know*.

Another way familial network is significant to cultural capital when discussing Higher Education is described in the following:

> 'Educational Institutions are a primary means of generating and distributing cultural and symbolic capital, and so our assessment of class status was also based on patterns of familial attendance at university.' (Sommerlad, 2007:198)

It can be argued that first generation, working-class students will be at a disadvantage with regards to cultural capital prior to Higher Education, due to no prior experience of university or the cultural benefits it provides within the family network.

2.3.4: Social Networks

As well as the importance of cultural capital before and during university, social capital provides advantages to Higher Education and job access, and social capital is reliant on the social networks a student surrounds themselves with. Social networks can have immense benefits when it comes to finding internships, jobs or other opportunities. As mentioned above, the relevance of *not what you know but who you know,* is not something that should be taken for granted. Sommerlad (2007) described the importance of contacts, through family or other means of social capital, when students applied for internships and jobs within law. The success rate of students securing internships was mainly due to advantageous contacts being made by parents, other family members or by family friends. There was also a great deal of 'favours' being owed to a contact of the student and therefore internships being acquired by means of fulfilling said favour, which as social capital is largely comprised of

mutual benefit, as stated by Putnam (1995), is an example of such social capital being implemented. It comes as no surprise that middle-class students were more likely to have said contacts than their working-class peers; this unfair disadvantage was not un-recognised by the working-class students.

The importance of status and what that status can bring is prominent through social and cultural capital. Not only is the status of a person important when progressing onto 'bigger-and-better' things, but the status of an institution can be just as valuable.

Elite universities such as Russell Group institutions can be valued by some employers above the grade or even the relevance of the degree (Sommerlad, 2007). Another advantage for middle-class students as opposed to working-class students is the knowledge of the importance of the type of university and the potential networks that attendance at a university brings with it. It is worth noting the fact that middle-class students are more likely than working-class students to apply to Russell Group institutions (Boliver, 2016; Sanders et al, 2013).

Clegg (2011:98) shares the above perspective by stating that:
> 'Working-class students who are able to elaborate their intellectual selves at elite institutions are accruing greater capital appropriate to the field, and the elaboration of those intellectual selves is likely to yield a return greater than that of a seemingly similar degree in a less privileged site. The interesting question is why, in terms of the values of the field, working-class and other minority students are not getting the same intellectual value in less privileged sites'.

The issue is then that students from less privileged backgrounds are more likely to attend a lower-status university (Clegg, 2011), thus not immensely altering their current capital. This is maintained in Sommerlad's (2007) paper where a working-class respondent described Russell Group Universities as 'hierarchical' and 'unapproachable'. This is the case for many working-class students within the study who subsequently go onto choose a 'new' and usually local university, rather than a pre-1992 'traditional' university out of fear that they will not fit in. Students then progress through non-Russell group universities unaware of

potential capital gains available at Russell group universities; as well as the 'stigma attached to 'new' universities' of them not being as reputable for future employers and therefore less of a capital gain to the student (Sommerlad, 2007:199). This although not a big issue does again increase the divide of disadvantage that non-traditional working-class students are more susceptible to, in comparison to traditional middle class students.

One such disadvantage for working-class students entering prestigious universities is the unfamiliarity with university education. Working-class students can feel like 'cultural outsiders' (Lehmann, 2007). Whereas middle-class students, from private schools or from families whose parents have received a university education, have been prepped for Higher Education through their secondary education or parental advice; working-class students lacking the above opportunities can struggle to adapt to the changes that Higher Education and a 'foreign environment' can bring (Lehmann, 2013). This is just one of many social inequalities that can be caused by schooling and can affect future Widening Participation attempts to Higher Education.

2.3.5: Conclusion to section

To summarise, literature surrounding social and cultural capital theory has been invaluable when discussing Higher Education, and even more so when discussing Widening Participation in HE. Social aspects including bonds, bridges and linkages (OECD, no date), and cultural aspects such as education and cultural habits, are both shown to affect participation to HE. When discussing social and cultural capital within the above, there have been quite a few instances where working-class students have been clearly disadvantaged by social and cultural capital. Various examples include having less access to the same opportunities afforded to their 'traditional' student peers, to expand on their social and cultural capital. Another example includes the financial constraints that prevent capital gains, which can include being unable to afford or find time for extra-curricular activities. A lack of social capital in the way of not being surrounded by capital-rich family and friend networks who have advantageous links and connections, as well as family and friends with a lack of

previous experience of HE that the first-generation, non-traditional students can draw on.

Young people who are disadvantaged by not possessing the same social and cultural capital traits as their more fortunate peers can lead them to a potential fear of not fitting in or being a cultural outsider (Reay, 2009; Lehmann, 2007).

This fear of not fitting in can alter a young person's decision-making and discourage them from wanting to pursue Higher Education. Young people within Friesen and Purc-Stephenson's paper have also described a worry of compromising their own cultural values in order to fit into the Higher Education Institution,

> 'parents noted how their children had changed when they returned home, and the parents feared they were forgetting their heritage and cultural traditions. As values are fundamental to a person's core identity…it is possible that rural youths forgo pursuing university if they perceive a disparity between their values and a university's.'

And if the students do still pursue HE the conflicting values can lead to 'feelings of alienation and isolation' (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:140).

Chapter 2.4: Young People's Decision-making

When considering the part Social and Cultural capital plays within the subject area of Widening Participation in Higher Education, another element that intertwines is young people's decision-making. Within the bigger picture of Widening Participation, this could include understanding what influences a young persons' decision-making or whether or not to apply to University and if so why for working class young people in particular, this sometimes excludes Russell Group institutions. As decision-making can be thought of as a socially-embedded practice there are many ways social and cultural capital come into play with regards to decision-making (Heath et al. 2008).

> "Bourdieu's notions of habitus and cultural capital are used as starting points in order to begin to analyse sociologically the complex social and psychological processes underpinning students' decision-making practices." (Reay, 1998:523).

Some of the themes within this section are very similar or even the same themes that were discussed in the social and cultural capital section of this literature review, such as: the School or college's impact and Social networks - including family and friends. Due to having a social network around them such as family and friends that do not possess previous experience of Higher Education, some young people from working-class backgrounds can feel disadvantaged by not having the appropriate help with the application process or with the university experience as a whole. As it is a new experience for not only the young person but the whole network.

Other themes that will be discussed within the chapter are as follows: the knowledge about university or Higher Education that young people use to help inform their decision-making; this can include how this knowledge is accessed and the impact it has on the over-all decision-making process. Academic and social confidence which is comprised from various things from the readings that seems to affect young people's confidence about themselves and their ability within Higher Education Institutions. This can include not fitting in; the work-life balance that working-class students tend to feel more worried about than middle-class students (Connor, 2001). Or worry that they are not capable perhaps because they are a first-generation student and do not know what to expect, and the pressure that elite universities bring. The financial strain of university is another theme that seems to affect young people's decision-making and is one of the themes that arose the most and seemed most significant to working-class students, especially with the cost of University tuition fees today as well as living costs. Financial issues can be so broad as to also include not having the financial means to travel to open days (Heaslip et al 2015); this can mean having to rely on information on the University website or University prospectus instead of having the opportunity to ask current students questions that may influence their decision-making process (Slack et al. 2014). The final theme from the literature is personal gains; this is a positive factor that is considered by young people making a decision about University. The capital, economic and social gains from university can sometimes outweigh the above mentioned concerns.

These chosen themes that influence the decision-making of young people represent the concerns and benefits of Higher Education that arose from the

literature. Making an informed decision about attending or not attending university tends to involve all the above considerations. In order to make an informed choice all the knowledge about HE or the University must be accumulated by the young person by means of the tools and networks around them. Social class can have a significant impact on decision-making. Young people from working class backgrounds have 'to carefully think through choice. All the intricacies of choice that middleclass students take for granted have to be learned and applied in a short space of time and in a new unfamiliar situation' (Reay, 1998:523). Having access to knowledge of HE has been proven time and time again to be an influencing factor for young people contemplating HE (Crozier et al. 2008).

2.4.1: Knowledge about University/HE

The first thing to consider when discussing barriers or influencers of young people's decision-making is their knowledge about the Higher Education Institution or Higher Education (HE) in general. It can be problematic for a young person, from a disadvantaged/non-traditional background, to make a decision about going to university if they feel they do not have the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision (Heaslip et al. 2015; Slack et al, 2014). Having limited knowledge or even inaccurate information about HE can have a huge impact on the student's decision on whether to attend a Higher Education Institution or not. Therefore it is important that different sources are available so that young people have access to appropriate knowledge about HE.

Young people's knowledge regarding HE can come from a variety of sources and the value of each source is determined by the young people deciding on Higher Education. Slack et al. (2014) gave a good account of the sources of knowledge and whether the information given was 'hot', 'cold' or 'warm' depending on the source it was given by. The accumulation of this HE information was comprised from sources including: social networks ('hot' knowledge) these are instances where knowledge has been accumulated from 'first-hand' or 'second-hand' experience usually from their social network grapevine and based on direct experience. Knowledge gained from acquaintances or 'strangers' was considered 'warm' knowledge, this was valued

based on it being obtained from 'people like me'. Existing university students met at open days who could give their direct experience of university were considered sources of 'warm' knowledge. Finally the least sought after and considered the least reliable was information obtained about HE by means of university provided materials which were referred to as 'cold knowledge'. This was because it was not personal but more 'official' knowledge, usually obtained from University prospectuses or the Higher Education Institution's website. Young people in the Slack et al (2014) paper described a worry with 'cold' knowledge, as opposed to 'warm' or 'hot' knowledge; this was based on the element of bias from the Higher Education Institution. People within the young person's social network as well as strangers or acquaintances with direct experience were considered more reliable and described as having no reason to mislead them to make a decision to attend university, as they would have nothing personally to gain from it.

The relevance of social class when discussing decision-making through access to sources of 'hot', 'warm' and 'cold' knowledge is that, compared to their middle-class peers, working-class students do not have as much opportunity to use the more sought after sources of 'hot' knowledge, as family and friends around them (their social networks) have less experience or no experience with HE. Therefore working-class students tend to be forced to rely more on the 'unreliable cold knowledge' – which is the least desired (Slack et al, 2014). Whereas middle-class students tend to have more 'hot knowledge' available, giving them a slight advantage.

Another difficulty primarily faced by working-class young people making decisions on HE is the lack of knowledge about prestigious institutions and their value. This can include when a student is unsure about the impact going to a 'good' or elite university can have, over not going to one. An example of this is found in Reay's paper where a young person points out that they 'hadn't realised there was a difference' between universities (Reay, 1998:522). Many young people have discussed how they only started finding out about university rankings and other such knowledge when they enquired beyond their immediate social and familial network, 'I wouldn't have understood the difference if I hadn't mentioned that I was filling in my UCAS form to a customer who just happened to work at Guildhall University' (Reay, 1998:526).

Within Friesen and Purc-Stephenson's paper which focused on differences between young people from rural and urban areas, the lack of knowledge from the young-people's social and familial networks also led to worrying about fitting in, 'The limited exposure rural students have to information about university may make them uncomfortable with the idea of attending one' (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:140).

> 'persons from rural communities who have limited personal experience and little secondary school preparation for university may not pursue university because they may think it is an unreasonable goal for people like them' (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:140).

Reay (1998) notes that the lack of knowledge from social networks that was so readily available to middle-class students made the working-class students feel like they didn't belong in HE. This may affect decision-making for prospective students as a lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity with a certain setting can be daunting, in particular students can find the unfamiliar 'physical spaces of colleges and universities intimidating' (Burke et al. 2017:34).

2.4.2: Family and Peer Influence on Decision-making

It is more difficult for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to have access to detailed and useful information about HE without family or peers around them with hands-on experience about university life whom can answer any burning questions, questions which if left unanswered may put students off attending university altogether (Reay, 1998). This can especially be difficult when your family and peer social network is your only point of access because the university website is not fully accessible, or you cannot process it because you do not have the tools necessary to 'decode the field' (Reay, 1998:520), or you distrust it ('cold knowledge', Slack et al. 2014).

Having family members that attended university affects a young person's choice and decision-making (Reay, 1998). Two examples of the effect families had on their children's decision for university are given by young people in Reay's paper. One describes the encouragement and aspiration to achieve at university based on their family members successes, 'You see members of your

family at university and you think - I've got to do that, I have to work hard enough to get there, I'll have some of that, you know it sharpens up your ambition if anything' (1998:522). And the other describes the impact the help provided by cultural capital and family members with experience of prestigious universities:

> 'Sunil lacks Marcus' economic capital but his family are heavily endowed with cultural capital. Family members of both his mother's generation as well as his own have 'all been to university, mostly Cambridge' and he told me: 'my family provided the most help, definitely'.' (Reay, 1998:522)

Whilst taking the above into account, however, it is noteworthy that working-class young people, ironically, were described as being more autonomous with a lack of familial networks than their middle-class peers (Reay, 1998).

Another way in which family members seemed to have an effect on a young person's consideration of a University education was discussed in Friesen & Purc-Stephenson's paper where the young people described their parents as setting the standard for their education by not pursuing HE themselves and therefore feeling like University was not for them. 'If my parents had gone to college, I guess it would have encouraged me a little bit more 'cause . . . If your parents do something you feel . . . feel more like you can do it . . . sometimes, but them not having done it, I guess . . . I don't know, I guess I've never felt very pushed to go further' (2016:146). Some young people described feeling uncomfortable by getting further in education and surpassing parent's education.

In terms of peer relationships, a reliance on the young person's school or college was formed for some young people; this was in order to obtain some of the information about Higher Education or University that was inaccessible in their immediate social network. This is the case for a young person in Reay's paper, 'his parents are 'quite unsure about the whole process' and he is heavily reliant on the school to provide support and advice' (1998:522). However, although schools and colleges do provide young people with the information and assistance they need, problems can occur and an example of this is shown within Reay (1998:522) where a young person notes that: 'the school gives the posh students all the help'. This can help illuminate some of the ways working-

class young people are disadvantaged further in pursuit of HE, not only do working-class young people seem to lack the family and social networks to help support their application but on top of that some young people feel that schools are only benefitting and helping the middle-class students.

2.4.3: School/college: teacher or school's influence

Being without an experienced immediate social network to rely on when making a decision about university or seeking knowledge about higher education, can mean both the young person and family rely on schools and teachers for advice, 'because individuals from rural communities tend to have limited personal experience with university, students and parents generally rely on information provided by school counsellors or teachers' (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:139).

Teachers and schools can supply young people with a lot of the knowledge they seek about Higher Education, as they will have experience of prior student's transition from school to a Higher Education Institution. As well as this, most teachers will have knowledge about Higher Education based on their own previous experiences, as they most likely have a degree themselves. Willetts (2010:73) discusses the importance school-based education can have on university attainment by stating that students needed 'a "whole-of-education" approach, starting much earlier and supporting pupils to turn school-based achievement into success at university'. However, some young people described teachers and schools as pushing them towards university for the wrong reasons; merely encouraging their decision to pursue university and making the young people feel as though they don't have any other choice but to pursue this because it is just the generic route to follow after sixth form (Heaslip et al. 2015).

Considering the point above, there are perhaps instances when schools and teachers are not giving the encouragement and support to the demographic that need it. There are a few examples of negative advice within Heaslip et al's (2015) study. These include examples of young people being talked out of HE by painting a negative picture of University or by making the young person feel as though they do not have the right criteria to be a successful HE student.

Within Friesen and Purc-Stephenson's (2016) paper a lot of students mentioned that they heard few positive or 'success' stories about University from teachers, which did put a few of the young people off the idea of HE and applying to university altogether. One example by a young person is given here:

> "He tried making it seem like such a big deal and it kinda made me think, like . . . I'm not good enough . . . and my other teachers were like, "Yeah, the workload in university is crazy," like they were always talking about . . . how intense it is, and through all my teachers talking about their university experiences, saying how like, "Oh yea, I have had so much debt," or, "I didn't have any time to socialize 'cause I was always studying," or there were stories like, I don't know, just there weren't really any good stories from university from any of my teachers, other than what they learned, which is the benefit but ... but they like focused on the barriers, maybe a lot. (male, 20 years)". (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:148)

Young people within Reay's (1998) paper described the different support schools and colleges had provided based on the type of school or college. There was a difference between two young people each attending a private school one student felt they were actively discouraged from making decisions on their own and felt as though they were pushed in a certain direction. The other student felt it was encouraged and expected of the young people attending a private school that they would 'apply for a good university…and that you are encouraged every step of the way to go for the best'. This was in comparison to an example at a Further Education (FE) college where 'advice and support is rooted in a recognition of the considerable financial and geographical constraints many of the students are operating under'; in short the teachers and universities that had strong connections with the college encouraged the students 'to think local'. Four young people from a state comprehensive school all felt they had little support from the school. One student was left to sort all decisions for herself and another student who was considering to apply to Oxbridge was approached and prompted to apply to Oxbridge, but ultimately received 'far greater input of support and advice that came from his family' (Reay, 1998:524).

The encouragement or discouragement a young person receives from their school/college and teachers can affect a young person's academic confidence which in turn can affect their decision on whether or not to pursue HE. Academic confidence is especially affected in cases, as mentioned above, when a young person is actively discouraged from HE due to the fear of debts or them feeling as though they are not good enough for HE. Teachers can be vital sources of support and knowledge to students who are uncertain about the costs and benefits of university and the work-load and difficulty of university level. Schools and teachers are also key to a young-person's feeling of adequacy or inadequacy with regards to HE, especially if their social networks have no experience of HE (Heaslip et al. 2015; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016).

2.4.4: Academic and social confidence

Leading on from young people feeling inadequate due to some teacher's perceptions or discouragement, although the young person may use this to ignite a desire to 'prove their teacher's wrong' (Heaslip et al. 2015), these kinds of instances can test a young person's academic confidence rigorously. Intimidation from elite or prestigious universities, not fitting in and coping with the work-life balance, these are just some of the barriers that young people, usually from working-class backgrounds, may face. These may knock some young people's confidence or cause anxiety about making the wrong decision about higher education.

With regards to young people feeling as though they are not going to fit in, Reay (1998:524) gives an example where it becomes clear that for some young people; in this case at least, going to an elite university (such as Oxbridge) can present itself as a concern due to a fear of not fitting in because 'they'll be lots of posh people there' and therefore this meaning they will not have things in common with other students. Not fitting in at university, or not being what universities would be typically looking for, was a concern for many young people from working-class backgrounds, one young person within Reay's paper is told that her application 'is unsuitable because the sort of student that goes there is affluent and very middle class so it might be difficult for you to fit in'

(Reay, 1998:525). As with other sections of this literature review, fitting in and feeling as though they do not belong becomes a very important part of a young working-class person's decision-making process about HE. Therefore, this seems to be a reoccurring theme throughout the literature.

The contrast between working-class and middle-class academic confidence is shown within Reay's paper. Whereas working-class young people consider avoiding HE due to a fear of not fitting in or being cut out for University life, middle-class young people are described within the paper as wanting to go somewhere with people as good as themselves, 'Middle-class familial habitus seems to generate 'the pursuit of advantage' (Reay, 1998:526). Linking on from familial habitus, Friesen and Purc-Stephenson discuss Bourdieu's concept of habitus:

> 'The concern of "fitting in" supports Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus. Habitus refers to unconsciously learned norms and preferences, established through family upbringing, that guide how a person thinks, feels, and acts. That is, habitus is the lens through which individuals come to understand their world, where they fit in it, and what opportunities are within their reach, given their particular position in a society' (2016:140).

The norms and learned values that middle-class students, with familial networks rich in academic experience and knowledge, take for granted, can be part of the reason why university and particularly prestigious universities intimidate them less than working-class students.

This 'fear of the unknown' can be particularly daunting to working-class students without the appropriate networks from school, friends and family with prior knowledge of HE, who could provide them with a clearer idea of what to expect from HE. Therefore, fear of the unknown can not only affect a young person's academic confidence, even if they are quite clearly capable of university level education, but can put a young person off making the decision to even apply to HE (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:144).

Consequently if a young person making a decision about HE does not know what to expect, it may be difficult to risk the financial debts that will be accumulated in order to pursue HE. A lot of young people describe not being confident that they will be successful in HE and therefore not wanting to take the financial risk (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016).

2.4.5: Financial

Even when the above worries of making the wrong decision and proving their teacher or parents' right about not being cut out for university life are set aside, there is the financial side of HE to consider. Young people from working-class backgrounds may feel overwhelmed by the looming prospect of loans, living costs and all the while not being able to contribute to the household as they would if they went straight from school to full-time employment. Some young people within the literature also expressed a fear of going through three years of university just to end up in a dead-end job, a job irrelevant to their degree, or perhaps overqualified or end up no job at all (Heath et al. 2008; Conor, 2001; Archer and Hutchings, 2000).

Financial strains from university are more than merely the cost of tuition incurred. For working-class young people especially, it can include the worry of the family home struggling if they go for the choice they really want and end up moving away from home and no longer are able to contribute to the household. This particular example can lead to some young-people thinking about compromising on their initial choice of university in order to pursue a university near home, so that they are able to still work and bring money into the family home. Financial strains can also encourage students to stay at home because of accommodation costs that can be avoided by living at home. Reay stated in her paper, 'Only working-class students talked in terms of geographical constraints' (1998:523). Therefore location of universities can be an important financial consideration, Barg et al. notes that when considering influences of prospective students' decision-making 'The locality of the university impacts on the pool of less advantaged young people generally considering HE' (2020:8).

Not being able to contribute to the family home if they need it can be daunting to a young person with responsibilities (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016). After

all they could be working and making their way up the business ladder instead of racking up debts, this could lead to uncertainty over a decision to potentially choose debt over getting a job and earning money straight away (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016). Cost was a major barrier preventing rural students from attending HE. Rural students also had to take into account the costs of travel, whether this was due to living at home and commuting or living away from home. Many young people from working-class backgrounds shared the fear of ending up 'stuck' due to their choice to pursue HE (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:144).

Therefore, HE for some young people in this position could be viewed potentially as a waste of time. It is important to note, however, that the personal gains that could positively affect a young person's life and sever 'one's connections from a socially disadvantaged background' (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:140) are often forgotten or not fully clarified. It is worth noting that I and Friesen et al. would argue it is not always viewed as a positive thing to "sever one's connections from a socially disadvantaged background" by many, least of all the working-class student themselves in many cases.

2.4.6: Personal gains

Regardless of all of the above concerns that working-class young people face, some young people do still decide to pursue the HE path. A reason for this can be for the personal and economic benefits they could receive as a result of earning a degree, especially within a prestigious university. Better job prospects, a job that the young person will enjoy – these are all benefits that young people described as coming with the university experience and being some young people's main deciding factor when considering HE (Heaslip et al. 2015). Earning more money, an education and making their family proud were also deciding factors towards choosing a HE course (Archer and Hutchings, 2000).

2.4.7: Conclusion to decision-making section

As shown within this section, young people from different class backgrounds have different considerations when deciding on whether to pursue HE or not. The Heist report found that social class was a big factor in student's perceptions and understanding of HE.

> 'Despite the evident fracturing of class by ethnicity and family educational history there were still enormous differences between the taken-for-granted, self-assured certainties of the privately educated pupils and the uncertain deliberations of the working-class, ethnic minority pupils attending an inner city comprehensive'. (Reay, 1998:524).

Therefore the importance of social class on decision-making cannot be overlooked.

Many factors that affected young people's choice considerably were, as mentioned throughout the section, Knowledge about HE, Social Networks, School and Teacher influence, Academic confidence, Financial considerations and Personal gains. Within most of these were examples from young people from working-class backgrounds who stated they could feel a difference between their own and their middle-class peer's experiences of these influencers of decision-making.

Understanding young people's decision-making processes is key to understanding their reasons for participating (or not) in Higher Education. With Widening Participation initiatives still failing to include a larger proportion of working-class students, it is crucial that we incorporate the voice of these young-people in order to inform current Widening Participation initiatives and improve upon them.

This leads into the focus of my research which will be an advocacy ethnographic approach to answering the research question: 'What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?' Due to the methodological approach of advocacy ethnography, the student's voices will be key in answering my question.

2.5: Conclusion to literature review

Widening Participation to Higher Education is still necessary for ensuring that everyone who wants and is capable is given fair access to pursue a university education. 'A university education can provide an individual with greater employment options, high income potential, and improved health and quality of life' (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016:138) and yet it is still the same groups dominating the HE field. As stated by Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 'those most likely to enrol in university tend to come from families with higher incomes and higher levels of parental education' (2016:139).

When discussing Widening Participation, two key areas that seem to be intertwined with the application and attendance to HE are Social/Cultural Capital and Young people's decision-making. These three areas of widening participation, social and cultural capital, and young people's decision-making, all interlink in a variety of ways. The voices of working-class students in a variety of studies and research papers within these areas are all similar and tended to share similar perspectives and views when enquiring about HE.

Social and cultural capital, although, may be unknown and students may be unaware of its significance to themselves, is proving to be influential to working-class students participation in HE. Many studies discuss the relevance of social and cultural capital when considering its implications on working-class student's access and participation within Higher Education.

Likewise with young-people's decision-making, this process is an important area for further research, as many answers to why certain students are not participation in HE may need to be unlocked from the young person's voice. Decision-making is an important part of the process from formal schooling to HE. All prospective university students that continue onto HE will have to make decisions about whether to pursue HE, the institution they will attend and why, as well as the potential benefits or concerns to their choice. Thereby, decision-making is unavoidable to young-people considering HE and also unavoidable to researchers when asking questions and undertaking research about Widening Participation within HE institutions.

3.0: Methodology

For this study I am focussing on the problem surrounding Widening Participation in Russell Group Institutions within Higher Education. Specifically I am exploring the issues surrounding the under-representation of working class students. Although, working class young people more recently are much more likely to have the chance at university entry, they are still 'nowhere near as likely to go to university as the child of a doctor, a lawyer, or a senior company executive' (Crawford et al., 2017:3). It remains the case that 'the teenager of poor parents is much less likely to enter higher education than the offspring of a rich family' (Crawford et al., 2017:3). At the same time, recent research has indicated that even if disadvantaged students do access university, their dropout rates and final degree results do not match those of traditional entrants (Crawford, 2014) Therefore, with high drop-out rates it may be that working class students are not only less likely to access university but may also be having more of a difficult time adjusting to university life than their middle class peers (Roberts, 2010; Gibson et al. 2016).

The aim of this research is to understand the decision-making processes that young people make about their post-18 pathways, and what shapes these decisions. The intended outcome of this research is to find solutions to the problem of the under-representation of working class students in Russell Group universities and to inform future initiatives to widen participation for these groups of students. Although this study discusses Russell Group Universities, it is not a study of Russell Group Universities. Russell Group Universities are explored and discussed within this project because although widening participation initiatives are continuously being explored and implemented, access to these institutions for working class students is still relatively low. Equal access to all universities for working class students is important when considering student opportunities in higher education. The data collection methods in this project are inclusive of all university options for students and there was no sole focus within interviews or tasks on Russell Group Universities alone. To clarify the students involved within this study were not Russell Group University candidates, but sixth-form students in the decision-making phase of their post-18 choices.

In order to best research this problem, I have generated three research questions. This includes a main research question and two subsidiary questions:

What influences the post 18 choices of working class young people?

- ❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
- ❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

The key themes the research questions address are 'choices', 'decision-making', 'information' and 'social networks' because these were common themes that arose in the literature around widening participation in higher education.

Within this methodology chapter I will discuss in detail the philosophical positioning taken, advocacy ethnography as a methodology, sample size and type, data collection, data instruments and data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. Some of these sections will be informed by extracts of my research diary where I recorded difficulties, problems and resolutions during the research process.

3.1: Philosophical positioning

As with any social research project, the philosophical positioning of the researcher and their current work is an important factor to take into account when conducting research. Juxtaposed to the natural sciences, the social sciences rely on human participants who are aware and have the potential to change their responses accordingly; therefore, this can impact findings which rely on complete accuracy and truth. This is concisely described by Benton and Craib who state that unlike objects of physics and chemistry, human beings are different, 'they know they are being studied, they can understand what is said about them and they can take the scientists' findings into account and act differently' (Benton and Craib, 2001:10).

Two paradigms that are central to a social science, or more specifically an education project, are the 'positivist' paradigm and the 'interpretivist' paradigm. Positivism usually sits within the empiricist epistemology. When positivism 'is applied to educational research…All things are seen as predictable, regular and

capable of being fitted into the pre-determined structure' (McNiff, 1992:12). In short, this means that knowledge is grounded in observables (Williams, 2016), as well as definitive knowledge or facts. This can involve using more conventional scientific methods to seek to prove/disprove a theory. This is in stark comparison to when an interpretivist paradigm is applied to education research. An interpretivist paradigm works within the premise that the interpretations within a research project are formed from an individual or individuals who will bring their own subjective experiences and understandings to the project (Taber, 2013). Therefore, these interpretations cannot provide an ultimate truth as they are subjective to the individuals/participants within the research project at that time. This is described further by Johnson et al. who explain how some things are subjective and cannot be described in purely empirical or generalizable terms:

> 'For it is only by understanding the individual experience of subjective interpretation that we will understand why human beings behave in the way they do; why, for instance, thresholds of pain, attitudes to death, and so on, differ so markedly from person to person, and from culture to culture'. (Johnson et al. 1984, from Williams and May, 2005:60)

Furthermore, research projects which 'prioritize the meanings and actions of agents' (Williams & May, 2005:199), where the emphasis is placed upon the meanings constructed from the participants involved and how these findings are interpreted, fall under the interpretivist paradigm.

Interpretivism, as with positivism, is critiqued by many philosophical theorists. An important factor to take into account with any research is reflexivity. Reflexivity has been argued by many to vary depending on whether the researcher adopts a positivist paradigm or an interpretivist paradigm. When considering the interpretivist paradigm it is prudent to discuss the effect that reflective thought, or 'reflexivity', will ultimately have on the participants as well as the researcher. This is because interpretivists will usually argue that as human beings (as with our participants) we are freethinking and have prior assumptions and knowledge that must be accounted for and be acknowledged when undergoing research (Benton and Craib, 2001). This helps to ensure that although research may be affected by the researcher or participants based on

their own reflections or thoughts, that this is understood and can affect or influence how the researcher interprets the 'truth' of the study.

When looking at objectivity and ultimate 'truth' in research, both Durkheim and Weber can be thought of as influential sociologists with very different philosophies. Durkheim was philosophically a positivist, whereas Weber was fundamentally anti-positivist. Positivists can be described as valuing objective truths, which is something Durkheim valued. This was further influenced by Durkheim's strive for social research that could be carried out with the same methods as is used in the natural sciences. Durkheim strived for value-free research that needed to be free from preconceptions (Durkheim, 1964) and focused through an objective and scientific lens. Weber would argue that although value-free research is something that should be strived for it can be deemed as not always possible (Weber, 1949). Coming from an interpretivist constructivist positioning, I do believe that we as researchers do have certain values and preconceptions from which we strive to free ourselves, which means that we cannot be completely 'value-free' when undergoing research. There is, therefore, a need to make clear the limitations that may occur as a result of this within the research.

These philosophers also had very different ontologies. If we consider 'what is the nature of society?, which is an ontological question, Durkheim argued that 'society, social facts and social structures…have a real existence' (Potter, 2013:15).   On the other hand, Weber argued that 'Society exists through the activities of the individuals that comprise it' (Potter, 2013:15). Weber's ontological view, in this instance, would be viewed as aligned with an interpretivist position as there is an importance placed on the interpretations gathered from the individuals who 'comprise' society and that society, or research, exists as a result of these interpretations.

Ontological and epistemological questions and how these are answered can frame the position a researcher and their research takes. When looking at which paradigm fitted my epistemological stance for this project, the interpretivist paradigm, as described above, is considered more relevant to this type of project, due to this project being based around knowledge as interpretation, as opposed to the positivist paradigm where the aim is to find absolute knowledge (Wilson, 2009:238). The ontology of this project stands upon the desire to better

understand perspectives and how these perspectives are constructed. This then aligns the project with an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. This is by looking at how knowledge is constructed. This means that the aim for the research is not to answer a question, but to explore perspectives that may in turn help provide possible answers to this problem.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to adopt an interpretivist constructivist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Crotty, 1998; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This seems fitting to my study as researchers following this particular paradigm have been described as having an 'intent… to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:8).

It seemed that with the added 'constructivist' dimension to the paradigm that this fitted more accurately with my philosophical positioning and later helped influence my choice of data collection methods:

> 'The constructivist researcher is most likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods and analysis or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods). Quantitative data may be utilised in a way, which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description'. (Young, 2018)

Crotty (1998) and Creswell & Creswell (2018) discussed qualitative research through the constructivist lens as seeking to understand the perspective of the participants through visiting the participants in the appropriate setting and gathering the information personally. Constructivists 'also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018: 8). Both the interpretation of the knowledge from the participants and the social construction of knowledge seemed important to this study, therefore an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm seemed to fit the purpose and intent of the study. This is especially true when the interpretation and construction of the participants' voices and opinions are so important to a socially critical methodology such as advocacy ethnography.

3.2: Advocacy Ethnography

The methodological approach I have taken with this research is Advocacy Ethnography. This approach falls under an interpretivist paradigm (Hammersley, 2012), described by Benton and Craib above, as there is an importance placed upon the participants and their knowledge and contribution to the research that they are aware they are taking part in. An interpretative understanding 'goes beyond cause and effect explanation to include subjectivity, emotion, reasons, meaning etc' (Potter, 2013:238). By exploring an area around young people's decision-making, experiences, social networks and most importantly voices, it is likely that subjectivity, emotion and reasons, as mentioned by Potter, will be involved within the study. An interpretivist paradigm also centres around a belief that there are multiple truths, as opposed to a positivistic paradigm that centres on an objective truth. This is a key component within advocacy ethnography as it is important that advocacy is given to the individuals and their voice is heard in a way they would wish. There are multiple voices and multiple truths and all are valid to the research being carried out. To reiterate, it is crucial to give a voice to all individuals involved and not strip it away with an interpretation of their responses that does not do justice to their true thoughts and feelings. This is where working with participants and taking steps to ensure they can be an advocate for their own voice is essential. I will be hoping to give participants the opportunity at many occasions during this research to construct their own meaning around their decision making and voices and I will seek to interpret this accurately within this research. In short, advocacy ethnography sits within the interpretivist constructivist paradigm by acknowledging that the participants are aware they are being researched and that the results of the study are based on the interpretation and construction of knowledge.

Advocacy Ethnography as a methodology is defined by Smyth and McInerney (2013:4) as 'involving research subjects as participants, getting them to help us in identifying the pressing issues for them in their lives so that we might incorporate them into our research.' They also argue that:

> 'If we want to understand the human impact of social exclusion and educational disadvantage, we should start with the lives and histories of young people, especially those most alienated and left behind by their experience of schooling.' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013:5)

Advocacy ethnography is centred on the firm belief that research participants should be seen as the key to unlocking answers to the problems that they, and others like them, face. This type of methodology is especially useful for research projects where the group focused upon within the study is a group that is in some way disadvantaged, underrepresented or silenced. This creates the notion that they will benefit most from the use of such a methodology, as a way to give advocacy to them, through the use of their voice (Smyth & McInerney, 2013). To summarise, advocacy ethnography is an active process of listening to the voices of the participants, as well as giving them a say in the research process and how research is collected and presented, in order to inform the study and thus have assistance with targeting the problem (Smyth and McInerney, 2013). It involves participants becoming co-creators of change. In keeping with this theme, the students involved in the study were recruited following a presentation and/or introduction by me within both schools about my PhD topic.

The importance of ethnographic research approaches like advocacy ethnography is that they 'restore the political balance and… are unashamedly with and for young people' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013:2). Undergoing an advocacy ethnography project meant that it seemed appropriate for the students, who are deemed 'disadvantaged', to be at the core of the study. When considering a topic such as widening participation, I felt it was important that those who are disadvantaged are at the heart of the study, as this research cannot claim to be about and for them if their voices and experiences are not at the heart of it. Therefore, having a research methodology that was 'with and for young people' became increasingly important. Since the issue of widening participation and the under-representation of working class students within 'elite' universities is something that has been explored and unresolved time and time again, it seems appropriate that those who are disadvantaged are given an opportunity to be the ones to share their voice and hopefully help to narrow the divide.

Although advocacy ethnography is a fairly new research approach, largely proposed by Smyth and McInerney, there is also literature around advocacy and power to research participants (Gitlin et al, 1992; Fetterman, 1993; Sorensen & Iedema, 2007; González, 2010; Wikinson & Wilkinson, 2017).

Involving advocacy in research is not a new concept. Sorensen and Iedema (2007) for example, use the concept within their research methods in order to promote patient and nurse advocacy when considering end of life care. Gonzalez (2010) has written an article on 'working through the binaries' when considering a multifaceted approach of combining advocacy, anthropology and education. Wilkinson and Wilkinson reflect on two research projects that 'enabled young people the opportunity to participate in meaningful ways' (2017:219). One of the research projects involved a participatory research design in which they collaborated with 21 volunteers/staff members at a radio station. They implemented a mixed methods approach which included: '18 months of observant participation; interviews and focus groups with volunteers; interviews with management… a listener survey, listener diaries, and follow-up interviews' (2017:221). This is not dissimilar to the advocacy ethnographic approach and methods adopted in this research project. Wilkinson and Wilkinson also describe the use of advocacy in their projects by thinking 'of ways we can use the power and authority we currently possess in writing up to include participants, to more accurately represent them, and to "do justice" to their contributions' (2017:220). As well as the above papers it is important to note that advocacy ethnography has some commonality with critical ethnography.

As advocacy ethnography is an ethnographic approach to research it is important to implement methods and follow an ethnographic inquiry approach wherever possible during the study. Ethnography is described as 'a research approach aimed at understanding an insider perspective…by focusing on the meaning of social action from the point of view of the participants' (Thomson & Hall, 2017: xiii). This encouraged the idea for research to take part in the student's school environment at times convenient for them; in this way it was hoped that, although it is clear that research is taking place, it would be in a location familiar and comfortable for the participants and not a completely alien environment.

An important side to an ethnographic approach, and one that can cause difficulty, is that, 'the researcher cannot control what is happening in the situation in the field chosen for the corresponding study, so that his or her presence ends up being fleeting' (Ethnologia, 2015:49). Equally, as with much

research, the researcher may have an impact on the study or individuals – it is important to be aware of that and to not purposively influence the participants in any way. An advantage to ethnography is that it can be described as 'empirical', as it 'is essentially grounded in empirical research involving contact with the relevant people and places' (Denscombe, 2007:72) and the design of that empirical work can seek to mitigate both the risk of over-influencing participants and the risk of loss of control. The data collection methods for this study, outlined further below, have taken this into account.

3.3: Research Design

The study involved qualitative data collection from a sample of 12, made up of 17 year old (year 12) students from two schools. The data collection took place over a period of ten months, which included the term in which university applications were made. This data set out to explore these young people's decision-making about applying to university, in depth and over a critical decision-making period. In line with the principles of advocacy ethnography, the data collection tools consciously attempted to give agency and ownership to the students involved by using elicitation tasks which took the form of:

❑ A tree of life task: which asked for students to share their 'roots', skills, hopes and dreams for the future, important people who influence them, and advice that they have been given.

❑ Profile data: a basic autobiography about the students which gave a sense of their character, background, aims for the future etc. These were filled out by the students over a few meetings.

❑ Network Mapping: this sought to understand the various networks surrounding the student to understand if/how these networks affected their decision-making.

❑ Journal entries: students were encouraged to share thoughts and activities over periods such as the summer holidays and their time at sixth form, as well as any research they may have done over their whole decision-making period (A-level, GCSE). These were added to their journal via post it notes over a few meetings.

❑ Interviews: this involved 3 interviews at the start, middle and end of the data collection process. These interviews were used as opportunities to gain greater insight into the student's experiences at certain points over their time

at sixth form, as well as a chance to ask any questions that were not answered in the elicitation tasks.

3.4: Sample

In this section, I will outline the nature of the sampling decisions made in this study, and the characteristics of the sample. First, however, I will discuss the issues raised in determining what phrase to use to describe the 'socially-disadvantaged' young people in my study.

3.4.1: A problem of classification

The different forms of data described above were gathered from both middle class and working class sixth form students, with a focus on working class voice. The choice to use the term 'working class' was not a straightforward one, as there are very differing views about the appropriacy of this term: however, it was a considered choice. The terms 'socially disadvantaged' or 'low socio economic status', though in widespread use, present a deficit model of working class groups. In contrast, the term 'working class' is a recognition of a group identity. This decision was reinforced by following the work of Reay, who also uses 'working class' rather than alternative wording. Vincent et al (2008) discuss problems and benefits around using the term 'working class' within research. They give an example of a friend who 'suggests that 'working class' is an old-fashioned and, worse, a disrespectful, disreputable phrase, that those who do use it are out-of touch at best, and at worst, ignorant and prejudiced' (Vincent et al. 2008:62). However, they also argue that it is important to note that, where there is a silence of the 'working-class' as an entity, there is then also 'a denial of working class experiences, based on the false assumption that the viewpoints and perceptions of the middle classes are universal' (Vincent et al. 2008:63). In short, by giving the working class a variety of different names and descriptors, the voices and issues are lost amongst different forms of 'social disadvantage'. Working class is and has been used to empower those labelled as such, whereas it can be harder to imagine and is less common for individuals to refer to themselves as 'socially disadvantaged'.

> 'Much academic writing in this area focuses on exposing the way in which working class lives are represented in the media as deficient, portrayed as limited and limiting. To be labelled and/or identify oneself as

working class can be a source of both deep shame and pride' (Vincent et al. 2008:63).

Coming from a working class background myself, I believed that the term 'working class' held more positives such as pride in hard work, and a sense of a particular identity , and avoided the deficit discourses implied by the more commonly used 'social disadvantaged' or 'low socio-economic status'. However, I was aware that the term working class is deemed archaic by many, and a justification of this choice was included in my application for ethical approval.

Having made the decision to use the term 'working class', ensuring I had a sample that included 'working-class' students was more difficult than I had first thought. There were practical difficulties in finding the appropriate sample. Firstly, it was not realistic or appropriate to ask students to self-declare as 'working-class' or 'middle-class', and indeed not all students would necessarily know which group they aligned to. Also, there are no clear cut criteria for determining class status. In the end, to secure my sample, I relied heavily on the help of the Heads of Sixth Form for each school, who drew on information such as Free School Meals data, Pupil Premium data and their own knowledge of the students and their families.

3.4.2: The School Sample

For the purpose of this study I worked with two schools. One of the schools is located in a rural area and the other in an urban area, therefore, to protect anonymity they have been named as Rural school and Urban school throughout this project. The choice to select both an urban and rural school in order to include both urban and rural working class voices that I deemed to be representative of the group I wanted to study for the purpose of this project (Wilson, 2009). Both schools are located in South-West England; the choice of area was as a result of convenience due to living within the South-West and therefore 'individuals to whom [I] have easy access' (Wilson, 2009:140). Looking over the Ofsted reports of both schools, the rural school's report which was done in 2014 and only recently re-inspected this year received a 'good' rating for both reports. The urban school's Ofsted report carried out this year was given a 'requires improvement' status. This contrast in Ofsted report grades between the schools was hoped to give a more rounded response with the data and would give more variety than two schools of the same Ofsted grade. In

addition to the before mentioned, the choice of a rural and urban school was also partially due to knowing that rural and coastal deprivation, especially in the South West, is a key issue presently. Therefore, it was essential to this type of study that the voice of rural working class students was heard.

3.4.2.1: The Urban school

Within this school over half the students were considered 'disadvantaged'. The school is located within an area with a high white working class populace, which made this school appealing for this project because of its focus on white working class participation in Higher Education. In April 2018, the school had approximately 700 students; the proportion of pupil premium students was over half. The proportion of SEN students was deemed 'high'. Students who retake their GCSE's was higher than average.

The most recent Ofsted report described achievement and progress of sixth form students as 'too uneven' across courses. After their studies, the majority of students were described as going on to further education, training, employment or an apprenticeship after their studies. There was no direct mention of progression to university after their studies or the kinds of universities students may move into.

3.4.2.2: The Rural school

Within this school, when recruiting students for the sample of this project with help from the head of sixth form, it became apparent that the school was fairly evenly mixed in terms of social class amongst students. In October 2018, the school had approximately 1,300 students; the proportion of pupil premium students was lower than the national average. The proportion of students with SEN was deemed higher than the national average and the school has plans to improve GCSE outcomes.

The most recent Ofsted report described achievement across sixth form as mixed. Higher achieving sixth form students were described as achieving well within the sixth form, and going on to highly respected universities. They were within the national average for grades and university places. This seemed

appropriate with my project, as there is a focus on widening participation in more 'elite' or Russell group institutions. However, they were judged as needing to do more for disadvantaged students, particularly in terms of attendance. This helped to get a varied sample for the purpose of my study.

3.4.3: The Student Sample

The data was collected from a sample of year 12 students (n =12) who were broadly stratified by gender, class, school location and potential likelihood to go to university. Stratification was important when choosing the sample as it ensures specific characteristics, such as an equal male to female ratio, are represented within the sample population and that 'the sample reflects the true proportion in the population' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:150). The reason for a sample of (academically) 'high-achieving' students was to ensure that the students within the study would be considering university as a potential pathway after sixth form. Ensuring there were both middle class and working class students in the sample was to avoid the risks of drawing conclusions about working-class students which might be equally applicable to middleclass students, and to observe if there were any important differences. This choice was also reinforced by the work of Reay, which also included both middle class and working class participants when conducting similar research around working class disadvantage in education (Reay, 1998; Crozier, Reay et al. 2008; Reay et al. 2009). I developed a sampling frame to reflect this purposive sampling, outlined in Table 5 below:

Class:	Gender	Setting/school	University
MC	Female	Rural	Interested
MC	Male	Rural	Uncertain
MC	Female	Rural	Not interested
WC	Male	Rural	Interested
WC	Female	Rural	Uncertain
WC	Male	Rural	Not interested
MC	Male	Urban	Interested
MC	Female	Urban	Uncertain

MC	Male	Urban	Not interested
WC	Female	Urban	Interested
WC	Male	Urban	Uncertain
WC	Female	Urban	Not interested

Table 5: Original Target Student Sample

As noted earlier, I drew on the Head of Sixth Form in the schools to recruit the sample. It proved more difficult than I had anticipated to secure the precise sample I had within the sampling frame, largely because it was very difficult to find middle class students in the urban school, and I had to compromise. The final sample is described in table 6 below.

Class	Gender	School	University
WC	Female	Rural	Interested
WC	Male	Rural	Uncertain
MC	Male	Rural	Uncertain
MC	Male	Rural	Not Interested
MC	Female	Rural	Interested
WC	Male	Urban	Interested
WC	Male	Urban	Interested
WC	Female	Urban	Uncertain
WC	Male	Urban	Interested
MC	Female	Urban	Interested
WC	Female	Urban	Interested
WC	Female	Urban	Interested

Table 6: The Final Student Sample

3.5: Data Collection

Punch describes the importance of having an 'overall plan for a piece of research' and he breaks this down into four key areas: the strategy of collecting data, the conceptual framework, who it will be collected from and how (Punch, 2005:142). As the 'who' the data will be collected from has been discussed

within the sampling section, it is important to now look at the other three key areas Punch describes.

The strategy of collecting data for this project, as mentioned above has been an ethnographic approach, more specifically advocacy ethnography. ''Ethno' means people or folk, while 'graphy' refers to describing something' (Punch, 2005:149). Therefore, this study focusses on understanding the problems posed in the research questions from the participant's points of view. The 'conceptual framework', mentioned above, refers to the current assumptions and problems that help to understand and shape the reasons for and the direction of the research project. This research is framed around solving issues of class inequality within elite higher education institutions. The focus on interweaving the participants voice and autonomy within the research process and methods is to ensure that those who are most affected by the issue have their voices heard. As is the case with participatory and social justice frameworks, this project has sought to truly involve the participants in the research in an attempt to bring about change that will aim to address the inequality that faces underrepresented groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).   In the words of Smyth and McInerney, advocacy ethnography is about 'portraying accounts of social life in ways that honor its inherent complexity – rather than purporting to being able to render it down to fragments, "bottom lines," "recommendations" or meaningless metrics…or as Featherstone (1989) put it, "scholarship with a human face and a living voice"' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013:3; Featherstone, 1989).

As mentioned in the introduction, key themes that arose from the literature review and which are reflected in the research questions were a focus on 'choices', 'decision-making', 'information' and 'social networks'. Effective research design, most importantly, 'connects research questions to data' (Punch, 2005:63). Thus, the data collection methods were chosen and the data instruments designed with the research questions and advocacy ethnography in mind. A range of data collection approaches were used. Interviews were used on three occasions in order to elicit information about the themes mentioned. A 'Tree of life' task sought primarily to elicit student's thoughts on decision-making, as well as choices and social networks. 'Journal entries' were recorded throughout the project to show how the participants processed information and

decision-making. A Network mapping task was used within the second interview in order to find out detailed information about the social networks that support and surround the participants, and may affect their decision-making. Lastly, profile data was built up by the students throughout the various meetings in order for the students to remain autonomous while a bigger picture of all of the themes was put together.

An advocacy ethnography approach further incorporated into the data collection/methods was through giving students opportunities to view and edit their work. Another means to make this a more participant centred approach was through the use of a number of meetings with the students in order to build up a rapport and help the students feel more comfortable to be honest and share their voice. It also seemed good practice to let the students choose their own pseudonyms, in order to make their data still seem personal to them, with the added benefit of anonymity to protect their identity. Even the most basic and essential parts of a research project, such as choosing pseudonyms, can involve participant autonomy.

In keeping with the theme of allowing students to be advocates for the research, a portfolio of work was built up for each student. This work took many forms including: paper work such as the trees of life, network mapping, profile and journal tasks, as well as interview transcripts. Students were given the opportunity to look over aspects their individual portfolios of work built up over the 9 months in the last meeting in January/February 2019. This was through quotes and snippets of previous interviews being included in a more participant-specific section in interview 3, and through them editing their trees of life. The importance of the way this data collection was conducted was inspired by a more co-constructive methodology. I believe having different forms of data collection methods has implemented discussion and data collection opportunities that is more inclusive of all the students by giving them more of a say, as well as more variety in how they helped me answer the research questions that follow this research project.

3.5.1 Interviews

As previously mentioned, three interviews were conducted over the period of this ethnography. These were at the beginning of their decision making for post

18 options, end of year 12 (interview 1). The middle of their decision making just before UCAS applications for university had been sent off (interview 2). Finally the end of their decision making, after they had heard back from UCAS or have decided on other routes post 18, February-March time, year 13 (interview 3). This worked well for the purpose of this study as the period for data collection is longer within an ethnography than other methodological approaches. This gave the opportunity to see any change with the student's voice as well as the progression of their journeys and decision-making processes over the 10 month time period. Although ethnographies are typically over longer periods of time, undergoing this project has shown me just how much decision making occurs with sixth form students within this time in their lives. The interviews became the main 'check-points' for the project, a chance to stop, re-evaluate and look at what had changed since the last interview. This research instrument became one of the most important, as the data collected within these interviews was rich and true of the participants feelings and thoughts at that time. Punch describes interviews as:

> 'one of the main data collection tools in qualitative research. It is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings and definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most powerful ways we have of understanding others.' (Punch, 2005:168)

As made clear in Punch's quote, interview is a method very much suited to an advocacy ethnographic approach, as understanding other's 'constructions of reality' is essential for the purpose of this study. Accordingly, it was important that the interviews be semi-structured. This is to ensure, as Wilson discusses, that they 'are flexible and allow individual interviewees the scope to follow their own thread of thinking rather than being constrained by closed, structured questions' (2009:117). The student's freedom to explore their own perspectives whilst sharing their narratives was essential to the advocacy element of this study, as well as the ethnographic nature of the project.

To keep to the overarching nature of the methodology at the forefront of the project there was always space at the end of each interview for further thoughts or questions. This was to always give participant's opportunity to voice their views and keep their voices heard. Key areas of exploration were pulled from

important readings within my initial literature search and review; these formed the section headings of my interviews.

Interview 1 was structured as followed:

- Getting to know you questions
- Hobbies (Social Cultural Capital Theory)
- School Influence
- Parental Impact/Parental education
- Aspirations/Achievement
- Social Network
- Anything you wish I'd asked?

(Also see Appendix 3.1). Interview 1 had two main aims. To get to know the students and to start to build up a profile of each student based on key areas in the literature. Interview 1 was the first chance to speak one-to-one with each student and provided a chance to build up rapport. This did mean that out of the three that this one varied in length the most. This interview ran at the start of the 10month data collection period, when the year 12s were at the end of the year and about to go into year 13 after the summer.

Interview 2 was a little different to the first. Students were interviewed just before the deadline for sending off UCAS applications to University (November time). This was to find out whether students would be applying to university or not. Due to the questions being centred on whether or not a student was applying to university, meant that the second interview had two formats. One format was the questions that would be asked to students who were applying to university, the other was questions that would be asked to students choosing a different pathway. This was to ensure no one was excluded and no one's voices were lost. It was just as important, if not more important, to look at why students chose not to apply to university as it was to look at why they did. To find out whether students would have the 'University' interview or the 'not university' interview, they were all asked an initial question: 'So it's nearly December: have you applied to university or have you made a different decision?' (See Appendix 3.2) Depending on the response the double-sided interview schedule was flipped to whichever side of the sheet of paper was needed for the appropriate questions, the only noteworthy differences are highlighted below.

Interview 2 took this structure:

(University)

- The Decision-Making
- Support (Social Capital)
- Expectations of life at university
- Fairness?

(Not University)

- The Decision-Making
- Support (Social Capital)
- Expectations of life at choice
- Fairness?

(Interview 2 Schedule, see appendix 3.2)

Questions were changed slightly depending on the route post-18; however, they remained broadly the same. Some university-specific questions were also lost for the purpose of the 'not university' interview. The aim of this interview was to find out the decision-making processes of the students and what their thoughts were at that time for life after sixth form.

The third interview was very different to the other two interviews. This interview included a separate student-specific interview schedule that meant a more in depth individualised set of questions for each student. This was formed from previous answers and quotes students had shared in previous interviews or meetings and meant that areas that were missed and not explored fully at the time could be probed further and they would have a chance to further explain their thoughts. It also gave them more time to go into more detail about areas that were important to them in previous meetings, to ensure their voice was thoroughly heard. As well as the individual interviews (see appendix 3.3), interview 3 was comprised of a more general interview schedule. Interview 3 was conducted after the UCAS applications had gone in, meaning they would have had to have known by now if they were attending university the following year or whether they were still unsure, taking a gap year or apprenticeship or other options.

Interview 3 opened with 'So it's now the New Year: This has been an important time for you let's reflect on it…' (See appendix 3.3), and included the following section headings:

- Decision making/reflections
- Teachers assumptions/school support (social capital)
- Social networks (Social capital)
- Fairness

The main aim of this interview was to give students a chance to really share their voice and what they meant to say, not what I had interpreted them as saying. Therefore, within this interview, as well as being shown previous quotes and given a chance to elaborate further or explain what was meant, they were also given the opportunity to look at and reflect on their Trees from their previous activity and alter these or add to these whatever they wanted. As with all interviews they were also given a chance at the end to share any final thoughts, 'Is there any final thoughts you'd wish to share or want to be heard?' (see appendix 3.3).

One point of learning for me as a researcher was that I over-estimated how long the interviews would last and under-estimated the importance of relationship-building. The lengths of the interviews varied greatly within the first set of interviews when rapport was basic. Interviews ranged from 25 minutes to a much smaller 9 minute interview with a student who was still warming up to the experience. However, rapport did improve and conversation became more fluid as time went on, and this reaffirms for me just how important both time and relationships are in advocacy ethnography. How much a student would share was also dependant on the mood of the student on a particular day of meeting and I will consider this when conducting future interviews as a researcher.

3.5.2 Tree of life task

Another important aspect of an advocacy ethnographic approach is the importance of finding suitable and appropriate ways to collect data in a way that keeps the student's advocacy as the main aim. A good way to get a big range of relevant data and start to get to know the student in a creative way was through the means of a 'tree of life' task. I adapted the idea from a similar tree of life activity by REPSSI (2016) who had described the task as 'The Tree of Life is a

hopeful and inspiring approach to working with children, young people and adults who have experienced hard times' (Dulwich Centre, no date). The tree took on broadly the same shape and ideas, however, some minor adjustments were made for the purpose of collecting the relevant data to the project aims. This task was a good way to get to know students and let them share as much or as little information as they felt comfortable and do it in a creative way. I chose to leave the students to this task and not interfere too much and make it more their own work. Examples were provided and prompts were used and I was around for any questions or comments they may wish to share. A problem I had with this task was that my hope for rich discussion while undergoing the task was faltered within the urban school by an unforeseen issue that I struggled to rectify. Within the rural school, students were asked for permission to record any discussion whilst they took part in the activity, which went well and some conversation was had amongst students whilst they filled out their individual trees. However, within the urban school this did not go as smoothly. Due to the setting, the students chose to take their trees away and work within their own spaces of comfort around the classroom, which were at some points far away from other students carrying out the task. Fortunately when asked, students all gathered in the same sofa area of the classroom and did start working on their trees. The noisy setting did, however, prevent the effective use of a recorder, although this was combatted slightly by the use of field notes whilst the activity was going on.

As mentioned previously, the students trees were revisited within the third and final interview and students were asked to add any changes or thoughts to their original trees on a piece of A2 paper that the trees were fixed to. This provided another opportunity to look at change and was also intended to, once again, encourage the advocacy ethnography nature of the study by giving students an opportunity to change/amend and look back on their previous work.

3.5.3 Journal work

Journal work was used throughout the data collection period as a way to keep track of any external thoughts or decision-making that happened outside of the meetings. Although a problem to this method is that some students were enthusiastic and willing to share and keep track of thoughts for the journal, and some students felt they did not have much to say at all. This is all what comes

with the territory of advocacy ethnography, as the students must feel comfortable to share or not share what they feel appropriate and wish to share. Journal work was collected from students by post-it notes. However, they were left in charge of how they wished to store the original notes and 'journal entries', these ranged from short notes made on their phone to pondering questions over holidays and coming back to write these up in meetings upon reflection. The final post-it notes written up in meetings were fixed to a make-shift journal and then added to their individual profiles after the meeting.

3.5.4 Profile data

Profiles of each student were made with the help of the student. At first I had planned to make a basic profile of each student from the answers given within their first interview, which had the main aim of getting to know the students. However, upon reflection it seemed more fitting to the nature of advocacy ethnography to have the students write their own profiles during meetings whilst I assisted them with prompts or questions. These profiles were built up over time to provide a detailed description of each student who took part in the study. The students used their chosen pseudonyms when writing the profiles and these became them.

3.5.5 Network mapping task

As an important part of this study was to answer the research sub-question, 'How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?', a task that focused on the students social networks seemed valuable to the overall project. Originally the network mapping task that was put together was a bit more structured and less fitting to the methodological approach of the study. Therefore, the original, structured task was used as a 'Plan B' to the final network mapping task. It was decided that going into the meeting with a blank piece of A3 paper and several prompts for the students to be as creative as they liked would be more appropriate to the overarching aim of this project. The original structured task was brought out as a 'help-sheet' for any students who became overwhelmed or struggled with the amount of freedom that came with the network mapping task.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of thematic analysis of each of the data collection methods. Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke as providing 'a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' through it's 'theoretical freedom' (2006:78). This concept of flexibility and freedom seemed to compliment the data collection methods, as the project included the use of a variety of methods with an intent to keep the overall voice of the participants present in the findings. The coding and organisation of the interview data, unsurprisingly due to the amount of data, took much longer than the narrative elicitation task data sets.

3.6.1 Interview data

The interview data provided the most substantial data set. Each of the twelve students took part in three interviews. These 36 interview were transcribed by hand by the researcher, this enabled the researcher to really get to know the data and voices or the students involved within the project. The transcripts were then entered into an Nvivo file and were coded and annotated. These codes and sub-codes were then organised into key themes with sub-themes. This data is displayed and shared within Chapters 6 and 7.

3.6.2 Tree of life data

Each of the narrative elicitation task data sets were coded and organised with a similar approach. The information was collated and transferred to a spreadsheet and then the responses and comments were coded and thematically analysed. The tree of life data was analysed from root to fruit. Tables of these comments from the spreadsheet are included within chapter 5.

3.6.3 Network mapping task data

The Network mapping tasks were organised within a spreadsheet table by student, school, class, the title of their map, what they had wrote, code, sub-code, and finally notes and comments as shown below:

Student	School	Social Class	Map title	What they wrote	Code	Sub-code	Notes/comments

These codes were then counted and organised and formed the relevant themes by the key information drawn out. The themes and data from the network mapping task are shared within Chapter 5.

3.6.4 Journal work data

The journal entries were collected and divided around students' thoughts and activities over: the summer holidays, in general such as their time at sixth form, and any research they had done around their decision-making either prior to their A-level years or during them. The students kept their own notes where possible such as on their phones or other methods of storing this information, these would then be transferred to post-it notes within a make-shift journal, some students did not make notes prior to the meetings but did reflect on the various points in time and filled out post-it notes during various meetings sessions regardless. These were then thematically analysed into sub-themes and each of the three journal entry points were the main themes. Each of the themes: 'Over the Summer', 'In general', 'Research' were separated into sheets within an excel spreadsheet file and the journal entries were organised, coded and sub-coded. These themes and findings are shared within Chapter 5.

3.6.5: Profile Data

The profile data collected was subsequently used as a basis for the pen portraits within Chapter 4. Therefore, data analysis was not necessary here as all of the data was used to create individual student profiles within the thesis.

3.7 Ethics

Ethical considerations had to be taken for the purpose of this study, especially when working within a school setting. As the students are over 16 they were able to give consent to the project. Students were recruited for the project by their heads of sixth form, however, the nature of this study is voluntary and this is especially important when taking into consideration the nature of an advocacy ethnography approach to research.

The school's head teachers each signed a consent form and further consent forms were given to the students who took part in the study (see appendix 1). A consent form along with an information sheet (see appendix 2.1) was also

presented to each student within the sub-group before starting the data collection; students were informed that even though they were signing the consent form, they were not obliged to carry on if they changed their mind at any point during the data collection. They were also asked a final time if they were happy to take part in the study upon our final meeting in January/February time. The individuals were informed that their data would be used for the purpose of this dissertation and possibly for any future publications or conference presentations that may occur as a result of this project.

The advocacy ethnography methodology choice aimed to put the student's voice at the heart of the research. Although the project posed no immediate major risks of possible harm, it is important to note that due to the fact students were interviewed about personal information relating to choices, decisions, as well as information shared about family and friends, does mean that there is a possibility that harm might be caused. As is always the risk with this sort of project, there may also be times where personal information is shared that may be distressing to the individual and information may be disclosed that may constitute a safeguarding issue. Therefore, to mitigate these risks, I made sure to be alert during interviewing to any signs of distress and was prepared to end that line of questioning, or cease the interview if necessary.

An extra method put in place to ensure the protection of the student's identity was through the use of providing anonymity by means of pseudonyms. Students were given the opportunity to choose their own 'new names' and all but one did this. The student who wished to not choose his own name had a generic pseudonym chose for him as this made him more comfortable. The use of this technique of allowing students to choose their own pseudonym was also put in place in order to preserve the nature of advocacy ethnography, by keeping students involved and in control of their own voices. The student's pseudonyms were used throughout the study and the students started to use these pseudonyms themselves on their work and profiles from October onwards. This helped me to get to know them by these pseudonyms early on in the research process.

All data was kept secured on a password protected laptop or within secure University drives. Some data was in a paper format and these were therefore kept secured in a locked filing cabinet. Most paper work was anonymised by the

student's chosen pseudonym also. I made sure that anything with the student or school's 'real name' on was kept locked away at all times and I was the only person who had access to this locked cabinet.

3.8 Limitations

Limitations have been explored briefly throughout the chapter. In order to discuss these in detail it is important to note that all research projects come with limitations. A major limitation with this project was the length of time. Ordinarily an ethnographic approach will involve research conducted over a long period of time, 'a distinctive feature of the data collection is that it takes place over a a relatively long period of time' (Denscombe, 2007:65). However, due to this being a PhD thesis, one of the restrictions was having limited time to do an ethnographic project to the standards some researchers would deem necessary.

3.9 Conclusion to the methodology

To conclude this chapter, I believe the methodological approach used for this project was well suited to answering the research questions. I sought to answer the sub question, 'How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?', by means of the network mapping task, as well as various questions within the interviews that targeted this specific area. The second sub-question, 'what access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?', was explored through specific interview questions as well as journal work and other narrative elicitation tasks such as the network mapping task. The overall research question of the project of 'What influences the post 18 choices of working class young people?', was explored in a variety of ways through all elicitation tasks and the interviews.

This methodological approach of advocacy ethnography has provided a frame-work with which to explore and help solve the important issue facing many 'elite' or Russell group universities today, how to effectively widen participation to the white working class population who are still under-represented in these Higher Education institutions. Using an advocacy ethnographic approach has ensured that the voices missing from these institutions are heard and utilised in a way that helps to find possible solutions to this problem. It also ensures the student's say is heard correctly as they co-construct their data and share their insight.

4.0 Pen Portraits

The following chapter offers a brief snapshot of each student in the form of a pen portrait. The profile data collected formed the basis for these pen portraits. Due to the nature of advocacy ethnography (Smyth & McInerney, 2013) being focused on preserving student voice and narrative in essence, introducing each student and their individuality seemed a valuable addition to analysis carried out on their narrative elicitation tasks and interview data. The chapter will explore key information about each student and give a concise overview of their decision-making process throughout the 10 month research project period.

4.1:   'Dave'

4.1.1:   Profile

Dave is aged 17 and is a working class student at the Rural school. He was studying his chemistry, physics and maths A-levels during his time at sixth form. Neither of Dave's parents had attended university. Dave's older brother was, at the time of the project, studying pharmacology at Cardiff University. His dad is a farmer, specifically a herdsman, and his mother is a housewife, although sometimes in part-time employment.

4.1.2:   Tree of Life

Dave's roots discussed him living on a farm, as well as where his parents originally came from and his primary school's name. He also wrote that he has two brothers and also included his education so far in terms of his A-level choices and that he has 10 GCSEs. Dave's daily tasks shown on the ground of his tree indicated that he spends his time fairly equally between school, household chores such as walking his dog and tidying his room and lastly playing football. He also stated that he was learning to drive but updated his tree during our final interview to state that he had now passed his test. Within his tree trunk, Dave listed rather practical skills. 'How to drive a tractor & a car' (Dave, Tree of Life: Trunk), part of this skill can not only be seen as a direct result of him living within a rural area, but can also reflect that he lives on a family farm. He also wrote about his skills of football and drawing. Dave's hopes and dreams consisted of things such as to 'Have a happy family', 'Not have to

stress about work', 'Do something important', 'Have enough money' and 'Get a good job' (Dave, Tree of Life: Branches). He also wrote about goals such as travelling the world and getting a good car. Dave's trees mainly consisted of his immediate family, as well as his grandparents and friends.

4.1.3 Aspirations for the Future

In the beginning, Dave was torn between pursuing a university education or an apprenticeship in engineering. During his first interview, Dave talked about how university seemed good but the debt was a little off putting, which is why he was torn between university and also a higher apprenticeship option that could also result in a degree at the end, 'in my opinion they do seem like a bit better but I think there's a lot less of them…you get the same qualification and money at the same time' (Dave, Interview 1). However, he did state that he thought that a university degree was potentially a better degree and that there may be fewer higher apprenticeships that interest him. Career-wise, Dave was interested in pursuing a career in engineering but his dream was to be high up in an engineering company.

During the timepoints Dave put off applying to university until nearer the time, but did maintain throughout that he would still be applying to university in order to keep his options open. Although Dave's interest in engineering stayed the same throughout, his decision for post-18 pathway was torn between an apprenticeship route and the university route.

In his final interview, Dave talked about his decision to apply to University based on him feeling 'not quite ready enough to get like an actual job'. Dave talked about an apprenticeship potentially being similar to a job and that he did not feel mature or ready for a job yet. He did, however, maintain that he 'might still' apply for an apprenticeship, but that he had not applied to anything apprenticeship based yet (Dave, interview 3).

4.1.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Dave's main sources of advice and support during his decision-making were his parents, his teachers, and his 'relatives in a similar position' (Dave, Network

Mapping). When it came to university, Dave tended to discuss advice and contacts he had who had more relevant experience. These included his brother - who was studying at Cardiff University, his cousin – who was studying at Bournemouth University and his aunt – who worked at a job centre. He discussed how these were helpful sources of information during stages of decision-making.

Dave's main networks that he had access to that were helpful to his decision-making post-sixth form were as mentioned above, his aunt, brother and cousin. One of Dave's main university choices was Cardiff University. He stated during his second interview that a big influence for this university choice was that his brother went to university there, 'my brother's at Cardiff so I know that's quite good'. He also talked about Bournemouth as a potential university choice, which was the university attended by his cousin. It seemed that having a first-hand account and confirmation from family members that a university was 'good' was important to Dave's decision-making. Dave also talked about Cardiff being a Russell Group and that also confirming for him that it 'should be quite good' (Dave, Interview 2).

Dave discussed finding the UCAS application fairly easy to complete independently but did state that he appreciated the help received during careers lessons and help with his personal statement from teachers and parents.

4.1.5: Summary
❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?
For Dave it is clear that a big influence of his post-18 choices was that he was career driven and seemed as though he viewed a university degree as a good qualification towards his career. Debt was a slight deterrent for Dave but not enough to sway him away from university and towards his second option of a higher-level apprenticeship.
❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
Dave's social networks did shape his decision-making in terms of him somewhat wanting to follow in his brother or cousins footsteps by applying to the universities they attended. This was based on the first-hand account of them from his networks, as well as other research around universities and ranking.

- ❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

Dave's access to first-hand experiences of university via his social networks was an important source of information. Websites such as 'unifrog' and 'UCAS' provided him with useful information about the application process and university rankings, as well as appreciating information from his teachers.

4.2: 'Poppy'

4.2.1: Profile

Poppy is aged 18 and is a working class student at the Rural school. She was studying her media studies, English language and sociology A-levels during her time at sixth form. No-one in Poppy's immediate family and only one cousin in her wider family has been to university. Poppy is brought up in a single-parent home, her mum works at a chip shop.

4.2.2: Tree of Life

Poppy's tree was beautifully presented and contained lots of detail and information (see appendix 5.6). Therefore, summarising it is a difficult task, however, the main focus of Poppy's roots were around her home and family, her job as a cleaner and her GCSE and A-levels. Poppy was very open throughout her tree, as well as during her interviews and other tasks, within her daily activities she discussed medication she took for a condition she has. Over our meetings she became somewhat of an advocate for the difficulties she faced and was a true representation of why methodologies such as advocacy ethnography can be so important for some students. Poppy also discussed ways in which she helped at home, which involved cooking 'a lot' (Poppy, Tree of life: Ground). It emerged throughout Poppy's tree that family were important to her. She reflected on this within her trunk by stating: 'My family have taught me to work hard for what I want' (Poppy, Tree of life: Trunk). Poppy seemed to have a good support network surrounding her with her family and especially with regards to her mum. Poppy stated in her leaves how important her mum was to her, especially for single-handedly bringing up Poppy and her brother. This had an important impact on her and the advice she held dear such as 'My

mum taught me to be independent and not rely on anyone else or a husband'
and that 'money isn't everything', she also discussed how her mum's support
extends to her disability as she shares that her mum has a disability too (Poppy,
Tree of life: Fruit).

4.2.3: Aspirations for the Future

From the start of her journey through sixth form, Poppy was set on going to
University. Poppy was going to be the first person in her immediate family to go
to University and her family was very encouraging of that. At the start of her
journey Poppy's dream career choices were to become a teacher, journalist or
work in PR.

Throughout the three interview timepoints Poppy's intentions regarding
University remained constant and she narrowed down her decision and plans
for University choice over time. With regards to her career aspirations, Poppy
decided she would want to pursue journalism or working within the media,
although she was interested in becoming a teacher at certain points throughout
the different timepoints.

Poppy's final decision resulted in her applying to her main choices which were
Falmouth and Cardiff, to study journalism. However, Poppy discussed in the
final interview that although she applied to University and she knew this was her
next step, she still needed to figure out where she wanted to go and what she
wanted to do. She also talked about having already received 'an unconditional
so I'm kind of like I'm okay' (Poppy, Interview 3). A big influence of her decision
making for university choices was distance, she talked about not wanting to be
really close by but also not wanting to go too far so that she could come back
home to visit easily.

4.2.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Poppy did not have access to a lot of close, personal social networks with
experience of University. Despite this, however, she did appreciate and discuss
the support of her mum who was especially helpful even if not knowledgeable
about Higher Education. She talked about how her mum supported her and

tried her best to offer help where needed and one of these ways was by buying university essentials for Poppy for when she moved away to university.

Due to not having lots of family experience with university or close relationships who have had the university experience, Poppy relied heavily on 'cold knowledge' such as university websites and prospectuses, as well as a unique source of 'warm knowledge' that Poppy found comforting, which was Youtube and online videos from university students talking about their experiences of university life and living in university dormitories. During interview 2, Poppy stated that: 'sometimes I watch like videos and they're like 'what I do at uni' but they probably like, that's probably not what they do…like I have a picture of what it'll be like but I know that's wrong, I just don't know what bits of it are wrong yet' (Poppy, Interview 2). From speaking to Poppy, although these videos gave her a small insight in university life, due to the nature of the knowledge source, it was clear that these voices were not considered completely reliable for Poppy. They did, however, provide a small comfort and form of knowledge about the unknown for Poppy to cling onto. Poppy discussed that not having familial experience of university can put prospective students like herself at a disadvantage, 'if no-one in your family's been before you don't know all like the things that uni's don't tell you…so I guess I don't really know what the actual experience is gonna be like' (Poppy, Interview 3). This unknowing has caused some students to feel daunted by the prospect of the unknown elements of university life.

Poppy talked about the usefulness of open days, she stated in her last interview that she had visited all of her university choices except her Russell group choice of Cardiff University, which she was planning to visit in the next month to see, as with the other universities, whether 'things like accommodation...was okay for *her* or not' (Poppy, Interview 3). The importance of open days was not to be overlooked for Poppy; she stated that students who could not visit universities for open days would act as a potential barrier for those students. As an open day was a good way to inform decisions more thoroughly.

Poppy was very keen, it seemed, to get as much information from those who knew and had experienced university. Although, there was never a question on

her not going, regardless of the uncertainty about what to expect, she still seemed keen to be the first to attend university and get her degree. However, the prospect of a Russell Group University was still somewhat off-putting for her, even though her teachers encouraged her to pursue it more than her other choices. Poppy often mentioned an added 'pressure' she feared could come with attending a more prestigious university. During interview 3 it was clear that this caused her some concern of how her overall enjoyment of university may be affected by the pressure to do well.

4.2.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people? Influences of Poppy's post 18 choices were based around a personal sense of achievement and desire to become the first in her family to go to university, as well as most importantly her desire to have a career and not 'just a job'. University and the experience she had seen on videos online was something Poppy longed to experience for herself.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making? Poppy's mum being supportive of her decision-making was encouraging for Poppy in terms of pursuing her post 18 choice. As well as the preparation her mother provided with getting useful utensils and items for Poppy's university life. There was some anxiety around her not fully knowing what to expect and of the accuracy of the videos about university. Therefore, this could suggest that having social networks with hands-on experience, who Poppy could speak to directly with, may have provided her with some reassurance of her next steps.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

Poppy did not have any access to family members with university experience; therefore, she relied heavily on other likeminded 'people like her' on online videos and their experiences of university and university-living. Visiting the universities was also important in her decision-making as she wanted to acquire important information on whether she could see herself living or attending the universities in question. Teacher support and university websites and prospectuses were also a valuable source of information for her.

4.3: 'Jane'

4.3.1: Profile

Jane is aged 17 and is a middle class student at the Rural school. She was studying her sociology, politics and English literature A-levels during sixth form. Her mum had been to University and had also completed her masters degree in manufacturing. Within her wider family she discussed her cousins who went to University, one who is now a teacher and the other is currently at University studying physiotherapy. Her mum is a manager and her dad is an engineer.

4.3.2: Tree of Life

One of the most interesting comments Jane made within her tree was that within the 'roots' section Jane identified herself as 'Middle-class' (Jane, Tree of Life: Roots, see appendix 5.5). The roots of Jane's tree showed that she was a very high achiever. Jane wrote about her GCSE grades, 10 of which she achieved A*-B. She also wrote about where she and her parents are from, her parents' jobs and her A-level choices. One reason for Jane's high grades could be due to her daily activities involving: 'school, including at least 1-2 extra hours independent study'. Jane also discussed within the ground section her work as a waitress, some exercise and seeing friends, family and her boyfriend 'when possible' (Jane, Tree of Life: Ground). Within her trunk, Jane discussed her various skills such as 'At home I learnt to be patient', excelling at English and art and 'being determined and working hard' (Jane, Tree of Life: Trunk). Jane had a wide range of hopes and dreams within her Tree. These included future pets, 'to tan hopefully', clothes, to have 'a family who *she* can financially support', to help people through her career (human rights), and 'to be financially stable' (Jane, Tree of Life: Branches). When it came to the important people, Jane mentioned her mum as being her biggest inspiration, along with Margaret Thatcher. Inspirational and determined women seemed to be significant as she also mentioned: 'Emma Watson, her going to uni whilst already owning millions and then becoming a feminist advocate' (Jane, Tree of Life: Leaves). Lastly, within the fruit of her tree her parents were her sources of support and advice, through helping with looking at universities and supporting her with 'maths tutoring etc.' (Jane, Tree of Life: Fruit).

4.3.3: Aspirations for the Future

Jane's initial career plans were to be a corporate solicitor, the branch of law changed over our meetings but the overall end goal of solicitor stayed the same. Jane was very confident at the beginning of our meetings that she would attend University, over the time points this changed slightly to considering a more vocational route into her career. However, in the end and after much research on her part, as well as talking to contacts at Universities and who she had met and knew, she decided University was the best route for her.

Jane was very aware and vocal in her second interview that she knew she wanted to go to a Russell Group University, 'a Russell group…or a good uni because that's gonna matter, like it's better getting a degree from Oxford than it would be from Plymouth or (.) you know somewhere that aren't known for being very good' (Jane, Interview 2). Jane also discussed that she would not have gone to University for a degree in the Arts and would only go to University if she needed the degree as an added 'building block' for her progression (Jane, Interview 1).

In her final interview Jane discussed how she had applied for University, a Russell Group University. She was very clear throughout her interviews that she would be definitely applying to a Russell Group. She applied for Exeter as her first choice and stated that it was the only one she 'really liked', she went on to say 'I've got my other four, but I don't want to go to them, I just put them down because you've gotta put them down don't you?' (Jane, Interview 3).

4.3.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Jane researched her post-18 and University choices thoroughly. She attended a lot of open days with her mum, who she went to them with because of her mum's experience and knowledge of University from her own perspective. She relied mainly on her own research, her mum and her self-made contacts, via her job or open days and family, from people who knew. She did not have much reliance on the school other than with some personal statement support. She talked about the school pushing University on students, 'all my teachers told me to do it (.) university's shoved down everyone's throats' (Jane, Interview 2).

As mentioned, Jane was influenced by open days and University visits. She talked about visiting five or six universities and that her final choice, Exeter, 'stood out'. When talking about her decision to make Exeter her firm choice she said 'that one just stood out because for law you've gotta get your contract afterwards if you wanna be a solicitor…and then basically they're just really good for networking' (Jane, interview 3). Jane also discussed speaking to a handful of second year students when she went to the Exeter open day and the fact they all had training contracts in their second year meant a lot for her decision-making. She also liked that it was still fairly close to where she lives. Jane talked about visiting lots of Universities and looking at figures and 'obviously league tables but you try not to think too much about that because it's not the only thing' (Jane, interview 3). She looked at satisfaction rates of Universities as well as the success rates of people taking the degree with regards to getting a job six months after. She even checked into how many people take the course to ensure the likelihood of getting the course. Jane was very well researched when it came to her decision making and was a predominantly independent thinker, however, she did seem to like the support of her parents, people she spoke to at Universities as well as other contacts to make sure she had thought through everything and to ensure she was making the right decision for her. In short Jane was an exceptional example of informed and thorough decision making when making a University choice.

4.3.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people? Jane was very clear about her path after sixth form and was confident that university was the best option for her in terms of her achieving her career goals as efficiently and timely as possible; it was considered a good way for her to make necessary contacts and get her training contract to become a solicitor. It was also very important to Jane that she only apply prestigious Russell Group universities.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making? Her mum's experience of university via her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees was definitely a positive source of support and knowledge for Jane throughout her decision-making process. Her mum attended all of Jane's open days with her and provided her with some advice and knowledge. Jane

appreciated her teachers' support in terms of her personal statement but relied more on her own contacts, relevant to her degree, and her mum.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

The examples above are also relevant to this question. Jane was also provided with a few useful contacts regarding her decision-making for university courses, by narrowing down her choice of law through contacts: a discussion with a man during one of her waitressing shifts who knew someone from a law firm and family friends who work for law firms (Interviews 1 and 3).

4.4: 'John'

4.4.1: Profile

John is aged 17 and is a middle class student at the Rural school. He was studying his business studies, biology and PE A-levels during his time at sixth form. John's mum had been to university, as well as his uncle. His mum is a primary school teacher and his dad is an electrician.

4.4.2: Tree of Life

John's tree roots consisted of his interest and playing of football since the age of 4, 10 GCSEs he has received, his immediate family members of his dad, mum and where they are from originally as well as his older brother. He also wrote his education journey by naming his primary, secondary school and even his kindergarten's name. The daily activities he listed were his chores of cutting the grass, washing dishes and hoovering. His tree trunk consisted of the following skills: how to write, football, driving and two video games. With regards to his hopes and dreams, John wrote about having a 'good paying job', England win the world cup (it's coming home 2k18)', having a family and winning the euro millions (John, Tree of Life: Branches, see appendix 5.10). A running theme throughout John's tree was the presence of football which held an important place within John's life; this was continued to his important people who included Steven Gerrard. He also included a grandparent, an uncle, his mum, dad and brother. John's fruit and advice were around things he could be and do such as work hard, be respectful, be kind, have fun and to do what makes him happy. He also listed: 'love from family', 'Gareth Southgate' and 'honest' as gifts (John, Tree of Life: Fruit).

4.4.3: Aspirations for the Future

John's career plans at the beginning of this journey were split between going to Babcock and becoming a teacher. Both of these career choices followed in his parents' footsteps.

During his second interview John stated he would apply for apprenticeships and university. He discussed the possibility of going to university in order to pursue teaching and specifically a football coaching based degree followed by a PGCE. He was also still drawn to the idea of apprenticeships, however, due to his preference to learn in a more practical way and his view that university would be more of a sitting and listening experience. He mentioned that he would probably end up waiting until the very last moment before making his final decision.

In the end John decided he would probably go down the apprenticeship route, however, he was still undecided. 'I know with Babcock I've got 'til March to apply so…but I've just got to have a sit down and a think…I come up with something new every week' (John, Interview 3). By the final interview John had still not applied for university or an apprenticeship. However, the route he seemed keen to pursue was an apprenticeship.

4.4.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

In terms of influencing his decision-making regarding university, John stated that his school 'kind of showed me that *he* didn't wanna go to uni' (John, Interview 3). He talked about the school pushing university on the students and that he wished they would not have talked about it so much. He wanted the school to provide more information on other choices, not just university, in order for his decision-making to be more informed. Despite the negative influence of the school, John had a lot of support from certain teachers that he had a good relationship with. His biology teacher and her belief in John was the reason he continued onto sixth form after his GCSEs, she became a good source of support for John through his decision-making.

John also talked about appreciating his parents' 'relaxed' attitude to his decision-making. He was opinionated about some of the parents of his friends'

who were not as supportive as his. When talking about applying to university John said:

> 'a lot of it does depend on your parents, cause I've had people in my like tutor group who've like had a month where they've tried really hard in school (.) got all their grades and then it comes to like a parents evening and their like mum doesn't turn up' (John, Interview 3)

He went onto say that if parents do not set a good example for their children and show they care about their future then the students end up wondering why they should care.

He talked about people who came in to visit the school being useful with regards to information and experience about university and gap years but would have liked a wider range from other post-sixth form routes as well.

John described being like his father and the relationship and influence his father and his godfather had on him as a person and who he would like to be. He talked about their likeness and the idea of following in his brother, mother, father or godfather's footsteps. Although, John was clear that his family would support his final decision as long as he was happy and it seemed that he would be the one to ultimately make his decision, regardless of any outside input.

4.4.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?
One influence of John's decision-making for post 18 options was that he noted the school's influence in him being deterred from university due to the school's nature to somewhat push students more towards higher education.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
The support of John's family coupled with his personality being 'like his dad's', meant that social networks did shape John's decision-making to a certain extent. However, unlike some other students, it seemed that social networks were more of a support towards his decision-making, rather than an influence.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

One of John's major criticisms of his time spent deciding on post 18 options was, as mentioned, the school 'pushing' university onto them. It seems that information about university was in abundance but information about other post 18 choices was a lot harder to come by, yet would have been useful in the final decision-making in terms of ruling other options out early on to focus on one post 18 choice at the end of the process.

4.5: 'Jeffrey West'

4.5.1: Profile

Jeffrey West is aged 17 and is a middle class student at the Rural school. He was studying his maths, chemistry and physics A-levels during his time at sixth form. His mum had been to University and had recently gone back into study. His older sister had also completed a teaching qualification at University. His dad is a royal marine and his mum is a nurse in child and adult protection.

4.5.2: Tree of Life

Jeffrey West's roots revolved around school grades, subjects, parents and siblings and where they are from. Jeffrey's day to day activities were described as tasks that he 'had' to do and these involved his daily responsibilities at home. His skills within his trunk were playing the guitar and playing rugby. Jeffrey's hopes and dreams centred on being happy, loving his job and not having to worry about money. Jeffrey's important people were fairly similar to other students' leaves. However, an addition to Jeffrey's important people was his Godfather who he mentioned as a big support for him.

4.5.3: Aspirations for the Future

Jeffrey West's plans did change quite frequently throughout the three interview time points. He never seemed to have a clear idea about what he wanted for the future and what path he wanted to take. He seemed undecided and like he needed more time. Even doing sixth form seemed more like an opportunity to buy more time rather than progression to his future career. This may have been to insure he made the right decision and took time to think through options carefully. During the first interview when asked his plans after sixth form, Jeffrey stated that he would be interested in taking a gap year straight away.

Subsequently he mentioned that he was torn between going to university and joining the marines and following in his dad's footsteps. With regards to university he had been looking at chemical engineering, however, he felt he was not 'fully set on it' (Jeffrey West, Interview 1).

During his second interview, when Jeffrey was asked if he would be applying to University or making a different choice, Jeffrey stated that he had not applied and would not be applying this year. He still seemed keen on applying for University eventually and possibly applying the following year, however, he stated that he did not want to apply and defer because he did not want to risk changing his mind.

> 'pigeon hole myself into doing a course I then changed my mind about…so one of the main reasons I've said for doing a gap year is to figure out more what I wanna do' (Jeffrey West, Interview 2).

In his final interview Jeffrey confirmed that he did not apply to university. He previously discussed about applying for things to do during his gap year but it seemed within the final interview that he was happy to take a year off and relax and work to save money and then 'go away to some nice places'. His main reason for not applying to University was that 'I'm just a bit sick of studying' (Jeffrey West, Interview 3).

4.5.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Jeffrey's main influence during his entire journey through sixth form and to his post-18 decision was his father. He described his dad early on as being very important when it came to decisions. He stated that he was very similar to his dad and therefore his dad seemed to understand more than anyone what he was thinking and what would be best for him. Another key influence was his Godfather, who was his dad's best friend. Both Jeffrey's dad and Godfather were in the marines and were someone who Jeffrey looked up to. Jeffrey frequently discussed the possibility of following in his dad's footsteps and joining the marines, stating that joining the marines was always something in the back of his mind. It seemed his dad's approval was very important to him but that also he was able and ready to make his own decisions for his future. This conflict between wanting to follow in his dad's footsteps and also make his own

informed decision may have been a reason for his frequent change of mind when thinking about his future, as well as his desire for more time and subsequent decision for a gap year to 'figure things out'.

Jeffrey also discussed that his main influence, when it came to his decision making post-18, was:

> 'the people I've spoken to about the decisions they made and how it affected them and the things they wish they'd done' (Jeffrey West, Interview 2).

Talking to people who had been through it and done gap years themselves was Jeffrey's main help with his final decision. This was apparent in both interview 2 and interview 3. He also discussed in interview 2 that he found websites a helpful source of information also, but that his main source of information was likeminded people.

As other students had said, Jeffrey felt that the school bringing in students from University was very helpful with decision making, as he valued their input as people who had experienced it first-hand. In terms of school related support, a unique source of support for Jeffrey was his rugby coach. He stated that because he spent a lot of time with his rugby coach during the week that this was another source of support in his life that was linked to the school but was fairly external, as this was a part of after school activities.

4.5.5: Summary

Jeffrey was quite clear that his decision-making was independent; however, it was clear that he appreciated the support of his friends and family throughout the process. As a few other students at the rural school had also mentioned, Jeffrey had felt there was less information about other post 18 options other than pursuing university. Jeffrey had a very tough time towards the end on making a final decision and ended up taking a gap year to give him more time to think through his next steps. The gap year in itself can be a perfectly acceptable post 18 option. This was an option that Jeffrey had previously mentioned wanting to pursue, however, he did not have too much of a firm idea of how this gap year would be spent. A useful source of information was when the school brought in

some students from university to give him their first-hand experience of university. This seemed to be the most useful source of information and was especially useful as Jeffrey got to speak to some students who had taken a gap year before their time at university, which gave Jeffrey another first-hand account at a potential post 18 option.

4.6: 'Ailayah'

4.6.1: Profile

Ailayah is aged 17 and is a middle class student at the Urban school. She was studying her psychology, sociology and applied science A-levels during her time at sixth form. Neither one of Ailayah's parents went to University; however, wider family such as her uncle had been to University. Her mum is a chef in a school and her dad is a senior contracts manager.

4.6.2: Tree of Life

Ailayah's tree of life indicated that her roots were made up of her parents' jobs, as well as her GCSE and A-level subjects. Her daily activities included: going to school, work and the gym. She described her skills were making friends and working for money, and judging by other students' fondness of Ailayah, such as Kieran, it would seem she was very social and made friends easily. Ailayah's hopes and dreams for the future were to be rich, have a friendly dog, have a big house, go to University and have a job she would enjoy (Ailayah, Tree of Life: Branches). Within Ailayah's tree leaves it became apparent that friends were again important to her. She was the only student to not only write friends but then name some friends who were important.

4.6.3: Aspirations for the Future

Ailayah was very clear in her first interview that her next steps after sixth form were to go to University to do forensic psychology or forensic studies. Her dream job was to be a forensic detective, this was heavily influenced by her love for forensic and crime related TV shows.

During her second interview, where previously Ailayah had considered a course around criminology, she was now certain on the forensic sciences. Ailayah was

also still keen on University as her next step following sixth form and was adamant that she did not want to become a police officer, although this was a career path some with her interest would go into.

Ailayah's post-18 plans did not change throughout the 10 month period. In her final interview Ailayah discussed her final decision. She applied to University to do forensic science. Ailayah had applied to both local and Universities that were further away. She was offered some unconditional places if she chose the University as her firm choice, as well as two universities offering monetary incentives or bursaries for good grades of ABB.

4.6.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

One of Ailayah's main influences for her chosen path of Higher Education was that she seemed very interested in the University experience including the social side of university. During her second interview, Ailayah mentioned that she spoke to a girl from the year above who went to Portsmouth University to do the same course and they spoke highly of their course and told Ailayah they enjoyed it. Ailayah then stated that that was one of the reasons for applying to Portsmouth herself.

Ailayah's main influence in terms of her future career was based on her passion for crime TV shows. According to Ailayah this definitely influenced her decision to pursue forensic science.

Ailayah talked about the positive influence her teachers had on her drive to apply to University and that she relied on her teachers to keep her motivated and productive when it came to her UCAS application. However, she did mention within her first interview that the school did not influence or change her plans, but rather the school helped her solidify what she wanted to do. Another support via school was school friends including Kieran, who was another student who took part in this study. Kieran was someone she spoke to about Alevel choices, as he chose the same Alevel subjects as Ailyah. She also discussed her Alevel choices with some other school friends.

It seemed that although Ailayah was very open with her parents and would talk to them about her decision making process, she stated that they did not influence her decision, rather they provided more listening and support. This was in the form of Ailayah telling them 'this is what I wanna do' and them supporting that decision (Ailayah, Interview 1).

As mentioned briefly above teachers were a good form of support for Ailayah and were frequently mentioned, especially the head of sixth form. Ailayah spoke about her head of sixth form's help with her personal statement and UCAS application, as well as more importantly encouraging her to spend time filling out her application. During interview 2 Ailayah described herself as lazy and stated that she needed their support to push and give her the drive to keep working on her application, even at times when she felt she needed a break from it. The school also provided designated slots to the students within the Urban school for them to work on their UCAS application.

Lastly, in her first interview, Ailayah talked about her Uncle as a member of her family who had attended University. She described her uncle as having lots of money in comparison to the rest of her family and his success. Looking back at Ailayah's tree it is apparent that money and success are important to her, as one of her hopes and dreams was to be successful with making money. Therefore, it could be assumed that Ailayah's uncle and his success from University might have been a positive influence for her choice to pursue a University education.

4.6.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people? Ailayah's love of crime shows was a big influence of her university course choice in forensic science. The social aspect of university was a big influencer of Ailayah's post 18 decision-making. The university experience of making new friends, drinking and general socialising was an appealing factor for Ailayah. It seemed as though Ailayah felt that other post 18 choices would not give her this same social experience, so this seemed an important influence to the decision-making process.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making? Ailayah's social networks were very important to her and as a result would have inevitably somewhat shaped her decision-making. However, it was clear that Ailayah's decision-making was centred on her likes and interests and that she would be making her final decision independently and that other people's opinions probably would not change that.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

A source of information for Ailayah's with regards to her post 18 decision-making came from her uncle with experience of university by him working at Cambridge University, as well as information provided by the school and former students who had attended universities of interest to Ailayah, for similar courses. As with other students, first-hand experiences and information of post 18 choices were considered very valuable sources of information.

4.7: 'Joe'

4.7.1: Profile

Joe is aged 18 and is a working class student at the Urban school. He was studying A-level Maths, Btech ICT and 'Rockschool level 3' in music during his time at sixth form. No-one in his immediate family had been to University and he did not know if any of his extended family went to University. He is raised by his father who works as a wholesale manager.

4.7.2: Tree of Life

Joe's tree roots were focused primarily on grades attained, his love for video games and his family. The ground of the tree which represented his daily activities and tasks involved making time for his hobbies, such as video games, reading and playing guitar. As well as his chore to 'empty my bin' (Joe, Tree of Life: Ground). For Joe's skills within his trunk he simply referred to his musical skill, with regards to his guitar, which was clearly very important to him. All of Joe's hopes and dreams were to do with his future career, which was influenced by and based on his love of video games. He discussed his goal to become a game developer and in turn 'help people through using games' and 'making games others enjoy' (Joe, Tree of Life: Branches). Within Joe's leaves,

important people to him were his teachers, Grandma, Mum, and Dad. Within the fruit of Joe's tree, Joe wrote exclusively about teachers' help received.

4.7.3: Aspirations for the Future

At the beginning of Joe's journey he discussed his plans to go to university and pursue a career as a game developer or computer game programmer. Joe's plans remained constant and his decision making did not change dramatically over the three timepoints. Over the meetings most of Joe's decision making revolved around narrowing down his university choices. At the beginning he was not sure specifically on where to go university or what course to study, other than 'to do some sort of games development course'. He also was quite keen on staying locally for his University choices.

During Joe's final interview, he seemed a bit uncertain at where he may end up, 'well nothing's set in stone in terms of universities' (Joe, Interview 1). He did discuss that he had all five offers back and they were Falmouth, Plymouth, Gloucestershire, Bath Spa and Bournemouth. This was a good variety of universities. However, Joe was still fairly certain that he was learning towards staying local.

4.7.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Although listed as an important person in his tree, Joe did not talk about his mother very much during any interviews or during his social network task and journal work. Joe lived with his father and brother and they were important to him. A lot of support around University came from teachers and Joe's own research or 'external advisors' that he referred to a lot during his network task.

Within his network task, a consistently called upon resource for any time of decision making or advise was his 'own research'. When it came to making decisions about future careers or the university application, Joe relied upon 'external advisors' as well as his teachers. The only advice Joe sought from his family was to do with 'Life Skills'. In an interview he discussed how his family did not have much knowledge with regards to his career plans or university and that it was not the sort of thing that was brought up or discussed at home really,

therefore, perhaps this is a reason for more of a reliance on those who know, such as teachers. Joe did talk about one family member who had potentially been through the University process, which was his aunt on his mother's side. He talked very briefly about how it was having someone who had knowledge in that area to discuss it with. Joe did seem to show appreciation for and credit teachers for their help with university and UCAS related support.

Another source of information Joe had and rated highly was going to visit the universities during open days and visits. This was through the organisation of his school. He appreciated it giving him an 'insight' into what to expect at University (Joe, Interview 3).

4.7.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people? Career was a big influence for Joe's decision to pursue a university degree. It seemed that Joe had not given much consideration to other post 18 options and was set on pursuing university from the start of sixth form.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making? It seemed that Joe's family were a good source of support with regards to Joe's decision-making. However, it seemed their limited experience with his choices of interest post 18, as well as Joe's lack of communication, for an unknown reason, to his family about his choices meant that his social networks did not seem to particularly shape his decision-making. The only social network that influenced Joe with his post 18 choice was his school and teachers who helped him with his application and narrowing down choices along the way.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

Most of Joe's access to information for post 18 options was via open days, which he rated highly, organised by his school. Another main source of information was Joe's school and teachers and the information and opportunities they provided. Other than these two sources, Joe did not seem to have much other access to information for decision-making post 18.

4.8: 'Kalen Garse'

4.8.1: Profile

Kalen Garse is aged 17 and is a working class student at the Urban school. He was studying his A level maths, BTech in Applied science and BTech Art during his time at sixth form. No-one in Kalen's immediate family has been to university. However, within his wider family, Kalen's Grandma had been to university to study history and became a civil servant and his Great Aunt had been to university to study and become a primary school teacher. Kalen's mum is a barmaid and catering assistant at a local football club and his dad was an ambulance driver and is now a coroner.

4.8.2: Tree of Life

Kalen went into a lot of detail on his Tree of Life (see appendix 5.1). Within the roots of his tree he wrote about all his previous part-time jobs including being a waiter, leaflet distributor, barman and his two current jobs as a sales assistant and waiter/barman. He also listed his primary and secondary schools and that he had achieved 11 GCSEs. He talked about certain family and wider family's jobs and careers. It seemed there was a pattern in Kalen writing about family members' jobs that were in a similar field to his own potential career prospects, such as the navy, primary school teaching and bar work. He did not write anything for his ground section. Within the trunk of his tree he listed 'communication' and 'assertiveness' as his skills (Kalen Garse, Tree of Life: Trunk). Kalen's hopes and dreams were extensive and thorough; they encompassed every planned travel destination, a gap year after university, his BEd primary education degree. He also included more immediate goals such as getting his passport and passing his numeracy and literacy skills tests for university. Within the leaves of his tree Kalen did not write anything. However, within his advice Kalen listed 'some teachers', 'friends', 'Grandma', 'Nan', 'dad' and 'mum' (Kalen Garse, Tree of Life: Fruit).

4.8.3: Aspirations for the Future

In terms of Kalen's initial intentions for post-sixth form plans, Kalen was one of the more well-researched students I worked with. Within his first interview, when asked about his future career and potential steps to take, Kalen discussed his interest in pursuing a career as a primary school teacher. He talked about

completing either a three year BA degree followed by a PGCE or studying a BEd in three years and getting his QTS, followed by a NQT year.

Kalen had already applied to university to studying primary teaching by his second interview. Kalen discussed that going through university was the most direct route for his career in teaching, as he felt an apprenticeship or working his way to their would be more time-consuming and a more long-winded approach. He talked about not wanting to continue with education longer than he had to, however, so was keen to pursue a BEd with QTS rather than a BA followed by a PGCE.

By his final interview Kalen had made his firm choice of university which was a local university. He stated that he wanted to stay local. This was due to him worrying that he would not be financially able to move away, as he felt it the maintenance loan would be insufficient to enabling him trips home to see his parents or family.

4.8.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Kalen was following in the footsteps of many family members who had pursued a similar career in teaching. However, Kalen was adamant that this had not affected his decision to pursue that career. Kalen discussed that his main influence for his desire to teach was his year 10 work experience, he talked about loving the experience, even though he was not as interested in that career before. Although, Kalen did not talk about the school directly influencing his decision-making, he did often discuss his appreciation of their support with regards to him continuing with his education, 'everytime I've sort of had a wobble and thought oh I don't want to do sixth form anymore, they always pick you back up and well sort of help' (Kalen Garse, Interview 1).

In terms of advice and help with his university application process, Kalen attributed his primary source of help to the school. He talked fondly of his heads of sixth form and several other teachers who had helped him apply to his chosen path after sixth form.

One influence for Kalen's decision to choose a particular local university was based on the size of the university. Kalen discussed the appeal of attending a smaller university and therefore having a likelihood of more access to support. He had spoken to various people within his social network such as friends and extended family members about a variety of potential university options, however, in the end a local and smaller university seemed more suited to his wants and needs.

Although Kalen had good support networks around him, he seemed to be a fairly independent decision-maker when it came to his post-18 choices. He seemed to appreciate and rely on some support and advice from his teachers when it came to the application process. Kalen also discussed how much more prepared his school made him feel when he went to university interviews in comparison to other school students he met at the interviews, who were underprepared and more nervous as a result.

4.8.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?
A main influence was his career and that this was the easiest route of career progression for his particular career choice. It was well researched in terms of degree type, (BEd vs BA). His career aspirations had arisen from work experience.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
Although Kalen had a few family members who had pursued the same career in teaching as Kalen, he was fairly adamant throughout our meetings that they had not influenced his decision. He concluded that his decision to teach was his own and based on his suitability to the role during a year 10 work experience. His teachers and friends had provided him with a good support network when making decisions, however, Kalen's decisions seemed very well informed and well-researched independently. Kalen was certainly one of the more informed and prepared students when it came to his post 18 choice.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

Kalen was very clear that he felt his school had enabled him to feel much more prepared for university interviews by the information they provided him with, in comparison to other students from other schools he met on interview days. He had also spoken to extended family members, who had experienced and lived in a variety of different locations that had universities, such as cousins, who helped inform him in the best universities and which would suit him best. That being said, Kalen decided to stay local as he realised he would not be able to afford to live away from home, therefore, finances was another key influence when it came to university location and choice.

4.9: 'Kieran'

4.9.1: Profile
Kieran is aged 17 and is a working class student at the Urban school. He was studying his psychology, applied science and maths A-levels during his time at sixth form. No-one in Kieran's immediate family or any of his wider family has been to university. His dad is a plumber and used to be a welder, his mum works as a self-employed cleaner.

4.9.2: Tree of Life
Kieran's tree suggested that his roots centred primarily on his education, where he lived and how he identified himself. He grounded himself through his day-to-day activities which involved social interaction and love of sports, as well as his part-time work in a takeaway. His hopes and ambitions were all related to what he wrote a lot about within his tree which was sport and fitness; he aspired to be a footballer or a physiotherapist that would eventually work for a local football club. One of the most striking observations from Kieran's tree was the detail he went into about each of his important people, within the leaves of the tree. Teachers who had supported him and family members who had encouraged and influenced his main goal which was to attend university and 'be the first person in the family to go university' (Kieran, Tree of Life, leaves).

4.9.3: Aspirations for the Future
From the beginning of this journey navigating through post-18 decision-making with Kieran, his aspiration to go to university, and be the first one in the family to do so, was apparent. Originally Kieran was set on becoming a physiotherapist to

fulfil his career goal of becoming a physiotherapist for a local football club. Kieran did state that footballer would have been the ultimate goal; however, it seemed that he decided this goal would be more achievable. He discussed being torn between this and the career of an accountant, because his family believed this was a good career choice and he had an aptitude for maths. However, ultimately he decided his love for sport meant that he would much rather pursue a career in this area. These career aspirations are reflected in his A-level choices as mentioned above, involving maths, science and psychology.

Kieran's intentions regarding university and his career goals did not seem to change much over the 10 months until the final interview. Within Kieran's final interview he discussed with me that he had almost made a regrettable mistake with his UCAS application. Out of all the students who were set on university post-18, Kieran's UCAS application was the last to be submitted. He often admitted to being unmotivated or 'lazy' which is why he talked so highly of the teachers who pushed him to finish things. In a last-minute discussion with his favourite teacher, Kieran decided that physiotherapy was not the dream career for him after all, as it was not necessarily a job that focussed on sport rehabilitation. Luckily Kieran managed to change his application last minute so that his final choice of university was a local university and a course in sports therapy.

4.9.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Key people who influenced Kieran's decision-making were his Gran, his auntie, his parents and his teachers. Kieran relied a lot on the support of his teachers with regards to his decision-making and applications. He noted the role his teachers played in providing him with advice about university, as well as the year above him. This advice was even more necessary as he felt that he lacked the same advice from his family as they had little or no knowledge about university life or the process of applying. From our discussions over the 10month period it became apparent that his family's influence and making them proud was a very important factor for Kieran when deciding to pursue university. Also being the first one to do attend university would give him some pride and satisfaction that he had achieved a great goal that his family would value.

Kieran also received information and support from outside of his immediate and key social networks mentioned above. As mentioned briefly above, Kieran received some support regarding university and what it would be like from the year above him. A lot of the students mentioned a closeness they all shared with the year above them that was not shared in the same way with the year below them. They had access to the phone numbers of students who had left, as well as the added benefit that those students would come back and visit them from time to time. This meant that Kieran got some information about what university was like, which put his mind at ease a little.

A possible negative to Kieran's dedication to his social networks was that he did not want to move away and make new friends, as he claimed to be more than happy with the friends he already had and would want to keep those friendships. This commitment to his friends and family was a contributing factor to Kieran's desire to attend a local university. There could also be some concern in whether Kieran's commitment to making his family proud and goal to becoming the first to attend university, may have meant he did not spend as much time as other students with his decision-making and making sure that this was the route he wanted to go down. However, from discussions with his teachers and with Kieran himself, he is intelligent and capable of utilising university and going on to pursue his dream job in sports, in whatever form that may take.

4.9.5: Summary
 ❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?
Kieran's main influence regarding his post 18 choice was his immense desire and family's pride in the possibility of him becoming the first in the family to attend university. Due to this goal, Kieran had ruled out other post 18 options very early on.
 ❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
Kieran was very heavily influenced by his family's encouragement of his university education.
 ❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?
In terms of access to information about post 18 decision-making, Kieran only really sought information around university. His main sources were via his

teachers, as well as information ascertained from school organised open days. It could be considered that Kieran was not very well informed with regards to his final post 18 decision, as his main criteria was that it was a university and preferably local with a course related to sports therapy. Although, Kieran did end up choosing a university renowned for its attention to sport degrees, his main criteria was its closeness to his current location. Nevertheless, Kieran spoke to his teachers about his final decision and seemed very content with his university choice.

4.10: 'Mia'

4.10.1: Profile

Mia is aged 17 and is a working class student at the Urban school. She was studying psychology, sociology and applied science A-levels during her time at sixth form. No-one in Mia's immediate family or any of her wider family has been to university. Both of her parents are in the catering industry at schools, and her dad is a manager.

4.10.2: Tree of Life

Mia's tree suggested that her roots centred on her education, where she listed all of her GCSE grades and subjects as well as her A-level choices, where she lives, and her parents jobs. The ground showed her day-to-day activities which involved going out with friends and her boyfriend after sixth form as well as going to work. Mia also mentioned chores that she notes are things that 'HAVE' to be done, which seems to be capitalised for emphasis. Mia listed her skills within the trunk and two which stood out from her tree and from her personality were her 'communication' and 'listening' skills. These skills were especially useful when noting her hopes and ambitions within the tree. Mia's only hopes and dreams written within the tree were 'to be a nurse', 'to be happy' and 'to be successful' (Mia, Tree of Life, branches). Mia did not note down any 'important people' within the leaves of her tree. However, she did note down a lot of advice within the 'fruit'. These involved rather classic and impersonal forms of advice, such as: 'The world is your oyster' and 'You can do anything you put your mind to'. Although, these may be quite well-known sayings, the advice may have resonated particularly with Mia for a variety of reasons. All advice was rather reassuring of abilities and having 'faith in yourself' (Mia, Tree of Life, fruit).

4.10.3: Aspirations for the Future

Mia's initial plans were to 'go uni' (Mia, interview 1), and no other potential options were suggested. She affirmed that this was something she'd always wanted to do. Mia's career plans at the start of this journey was centred on an interested in the police force and behind the scenes and that this was influenced by her interest in the crime shows that she loved. She mentioned that she was not sure if she wanted to go into the practical side. Therefore, she was split between two options that were in a similar field. This was either criminology with forensics or criminology with psychology.

Mia's decision about university had changed when revisited in our second interview which was in October/November time:

> 'I haven't completely made my choice yet because obviously I do wanna go to apprenticeship but I'm going to apply anyway just incase I do change my mind but at the minute I haven't' (Mia, interview 2).

She describes that her original choice to go to university was to continue with education, but upon reflection finds she is a more 'practical learner' and felt an apprenticeship would be less sitting and writing and more rewarding. This change is also reflected in her career path which changes to having a passion to be a nurse from a young age, which she states is reflected in all her school options. Mia felt she was deterred from this path because she felt she had gone through a phase of being influenced by her friends but feels she should go with her passion now.

In our final interview there seemed to be somewhat of a compromise in terms of a resolution between the two original plans for after sixth form. Mia ended up applying to a local university (originally was looking further away – but didn't like the idea of travelling around for interviews) to do child nursing. She felt this course was a lot more practical which suited her and yet she felt it would still give her the experience of being a student (experience of being a student – note

down comes up a few times). Her career aspirations are to go into child nursing because of her experience working with children and her passion for the career.

4.10.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

The main people Mia describes as helping her with her decision making, especially towards the end with her final decision, are her mum and the school career advisors and a teacher. However, it is important to note that Mia is quite vocal in the fact that her decision is her own and although she has support with her decision-making, the final decisions are her own. Mia also changes her mind when reflecting on her choices from the first interview, as she believes she was too influenced by friends. Therefore, Mia appears to be a primarily independent decision-making and also reflects herself on the somewhat negative influence her friends had on her earlier decision-making.

Although she would be the first in her family and wider family to attend university, her uncle worked at Cambridge University and that this was a good source of university knowledge and support for her:

> "I speak to him a lot about doing stuff about uni and he just says it's such a good opportunity to take, he wish he did cos when he was um at school he didn't really know much about it so he didn't go…. 'it would be such a good path for you and what you wanna do'" (Mia, Interview 1)

It became apparent from Mia's discussion about her uncle that after her GCSE grades he took an immediate interest in her pursuing her education further:

> "when I did get all my grades and everything at GCSE he said they were a really good set, he said it would be good to come to sixth cos he knows that I've always wanted to do stuff like that anyway cos he's um (.) he's one of the high up ones in the family like the one that's actually gone really far" (Mia, interview 1)

It seemed that Mia found her uncle as a helpful and impressive example of success via University, by describing him as 'one of the high up ones in the

family like the one that's actually gone really far'. She discussed how she spoke to him a lot regarding university and that he described it as a good opportunity and 'such a good path for (her)' (Mia, Interview 1). So this seemed to be her main source of support regarding University decision-making, as one of the only people within her family with first-hand experience.

Like other students with little first-hand knowledge of university she had help with university choices from her school. Due to her being quite an independent decision-maker, this support was provided by the school via arranged trips to fairly local universities and university fairs. Information received at a university fair seemed to be her interest in specific universities was first influenced. She also indicated that as she had not looked at the universities properly yet that this made it hard for her to make a firm decision on where specifically she would like to apply. Therefore, a local university that she could easily visit and explore seemed a more appropriate and perhaps safe option.

Her nurse career was also influenced by knowledge from first-hand experiences. Mia opened up about the many ongoing relationships she had with hospitals. How her grandad was ill and her boyfriend had an ongoing condition, as well as other close family member such as her father. She gave insight into her caring nature and how this was something she viewed positively and had, therefore, influenced her career goals and role of a caring nature.

4.10.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?
Mia was influenced by the fact she felt she was a more 'practical learner' and therefore was torn for a while between an apprenticeship route and university in order to carry on education. This influenced Mia's final decision as she ended up applying to a more vocational based university course in child nursing.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
Mia provides an example where social networks can end up becoming a negative influence. She discussed how her friends had potentially shaped her decision-making regarding post 18 options and that this had ended up changing her post 18 plans based on her feeling as though she was not making decisions for herself;

but rather to follow her friends decision-making and what their post 18 plans were. Social networks also shaped Mia's career aspirations based on the amount of time she spent and people she loved being in a hospital setting.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

A vast amount of Mia's information about post 18 options, university especially, was accumulated via her school and by means of open days and university fair outings they arranged for her and her cohort of students.

4.11: 'Rebekah'

4.11.1: Profile:

Rebekah is aged 18 and is a working class student at the Urban school. She was studying her psychology, sociology, core maths and EPQ A-levels during her time at sixth form. Neither of Rebekah's parents had been to University. Rebekah did state that her older sister studied Marine Biology at University and also obtained a masters degree, and that she also had a cousin studying business. Rebekah went into detail with regards to her parents' employment history. Her dad is currently unemployed but had previously worked as a mechanic, architect and as a fisherman. Her mum currently works in a nursing home and had previously worked as a child nurse in hospitals and a cleaner.

4.11.2: Tree of Life

Rebekah's roots consisted of her writing about being one of four sisters. Being born in Spain and schooled in Spain until the age of 12. As well as mentioning her GCSE and A-level subject choices. Rebekah left the ground on her tree blank. Rebekah's skills listed within her trunk represented a more comprehensive list than other students' trees presented. They ranged from 'communicating with people' and 'empathetic' to 'sailing' and 'drawing', most noteworthy was one skill 'Filing my work!' which she put emphasis on compared with the others (Rebekah, Tree of Life: Trunk). Rebekah's hopes and dreams, when it came to her future job, relied strongly on a sense of enjoying life: 'To have a job in life I enjoy' and 'a job I enjoy and that I don't struggle with financially'. Rebekah also wrote about wanting to do things that made her happy and to not make her job her 'whole life'. She also interestingly wrote 'To die of a natural cause, preferably old age' (Rebekah, Tree of Life: branches), as an

individual her hopes and dreams show how she seems to have a sense of what is important to her in life, and enjoyment and happiness are a big part of this. Within the leaves she listed: 'Friends', 'Family' and 'Boyfriend' (Rebekah, Tree of Life: Leaves). Lastly, her fruit simply said 'choice of education…what root to take' (Rebekah, Tree of Life: Fruit).

4.11.3: Aspirations for the Future

Initially during the first interview, Rebekah discussed wanting to go to University but after deferring for a year. Her reasoning was that although she wanted to do a psychology degree she was not '100% sure…and it would be quite a drastic thing to do so *she* thought a year break would be the best option for it' (Rebekah, Interview 1). Rebekah's career plans in the beginning were undecided, she had several different ideas. She did know that she wanted to go down a psychology based route.

Within interview 2, Rebekah had changed her mind about deferring and was in the process of sending off her UCAS application. She talked about making her decision based on it being the best route to get 'such a high qualification so quickly'. She also talked about wanting to go onto University straight away as she was 'not really too fussed about rushing to get out of education anyway' (Rebekah, Interview 2).

In her last interview, Rebekah confirmed that she had applied to University. She had applied to five choices but stated that she was not sure how she came to the decision, but she 'just knew *she* wanted to go to uni' (Rebekah, Interview 3). She did note that she did not want to move far away, therefore, location was important and she chose Universities close or local, as well as the surrounding areas. These were: Plymouth, Marjon, Bournemouth, Cardiff and Bristol. She noticed that although the main appeal was closeness, Plymouth had lower entry requirements and that if she did not get the grades for Cardiff or Bristol that that would be her fall back or that she could still do a foundation year at those Universities. However, she went on to state 'obviously *a local university* is my first choice, cause *I wanna stay local*' (Rebekah, Interview 3). Rebekah seemed to have the grades and potential for the Russell Group options, based on her

choosing them, however, she still was set on staying local. All of the courses she chose were psychology based.

4.11.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

During interview 1, when asked about potential influences of her post sixth form choices, Rebekah was very clear that she was in control of her own decision making 'I think even if someone like did try to guide me into a different direction I think I'd just go my own way anyway…so I think everything that I've came up with is my own ideas...rather than get pushed by everyone else' (Rebekah, interview 1).

As with a lot of students, Rebekah's University choices were affected by open days and University visits. She stated during her final interview that her school had regular visits and mentoring from the local University Marjon, and that this provided her and other students an opportunity to ask them questions about the University. She also had been to two open days and lecture sessions at Marjon and Plymouth University; these were arranged predominantly by the school. She had herself attended an open day in Bristol with one of her friends and had also attended a Cardiff open day, also organised by the school, and had visited Bournemouth University. Visiting Universities seemed to be very influential to Rebekah's decision making as when she listed her choices she discussed the appealing campuses.

An influence of Rebekah's University course choices was based on her checking the exam and coursework percentages of the course. She stated that: 'I'm not very good at coursework so I know that if I choose something that's high in coursework…I'm just not gonna do very well and it's just gonna be a lot harder for me' (Rebekah, Interview 3). Therefore, Rebekah stated that she chose courses that were as equally exam-based as coursework, if not more exam-based.

Rebekah seemed to appreciate also having her older sister, with first-hand experience of University life, to discuss options with. She stated that her parents 'don't really know much about it so they can't really say much, they give like an "informed" option but an "informed" opinion…but yeah it was quite helpful for my

sister to talk to me about it cos obviously she went through the experience' (Rebekah, Interview 1). Rebekah seemed happy to have a first-hand account to provide some knowledge on what she would 'probably experience as well' (Rebekah, interview 1). However, as mentioned previously, Rebekah appeared throughout the 10 months to be predominantly independent in her decision-making. She discussed her family being happy about her decision to go to University and that they were keen for her to do what she would enjoy as well as what would help her get a well earning job eventually.

4.11.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?

As was the case for other, mainly working class, students within the Urban school, Rebekah's university choices were influenced by them being local or at the very least significantly closer than other universities.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?

It seemed Rebekah appreciated having support and advice from her social networks, however, ultimately she was determined to make her final decision independently. She mentioned that her parents had no experience with university and therefore could not advise her with regards to her potential university post 18 choice. She did seem to appreciate the first-hand knowledge about university that her older sister had.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

A lot of Rebekah's information about university came from her visits to open days as well as her school, teachers and older sister who had attended university.

4.12: 'Mia X'

4.12.1: Profile

Mia X is aged 17 and is a working class student at the Urban school. She was studying her religion, sociology and English A-levels during her time at sixth form. Mia X's parents had not been to University, however, she stated her auntie, who was a nurse, and her uncle, who was a head-teacher in London, had both been to University. Her mum is a supervisor for a cleaning company and her dad is a bailiff.

4.12.2: Tree of Life

Mia X's tree suggested that her roots primarily discussed family and location such as where she and her family were from. Travel and location remained an important part of Mia X's plans throughout our meetings and also throughout her tree, she chose religious education for her plans to travel and live and work in Dubai, even for A level choices she was planning and preparing for her current goals now post-18. Mia X was very aspirational when it came to her future career and travel plans. She knew what she wanted to do and was very keen to take the necessary steps to achieve this. She discussed within the ground of her tree that she regularly set time aside for reading and studying in order to 'stay on top of things' and that this was a must (Mia X, tree of life, ground). Within her trunk she further alluded to admirable qualities such as perseverance. 'I have learned how to challenge myself & persevere even when I am struggling' (Mia X, tree of life, trunk). Her ambitions for the future were focused on studying and further study. She had already expressed a desire to pursue a masters degree. She also was keen to travel to Dubai and be a teacher in an international school, as well as also pursuing publishing. She finally discussed her dream 'white Audi A1' and her dream dogs, one going by the name of 'Roco'. Within the leaves of her tree she listed many family members as well as her cat. Lastly, key advice she received was around kindness and positivity.

4.12.3: Aspirations for the Future

As mentioned briefly above Mia X's original plans post-sixth form involved pursuing higher education as well as post graduate education. She also showed interest in a job teaching, as well as involving her English literature knowledge that she wanted to pursue further via her university education. Surprisingly Mia X was also interested in pursuing business studies via her masters degree. Mia X consistently demonstrated an interested in accumulating useful knowledge and was very driven to her career and life goals.

Over the three interview time points, Mia X's intentions remained fairly constant and her aims focused. By the second interview Mia X was one of the most certain and organised students, by being in a position where she had already

applied to university and had had offers back from all her university choices before December. She was also quite clear in her second interview that her decisions had not changed. She discussed how her university choices still reflected her career goal of being an English teacher.

In her final interview Mia X went from meticulously planning for her future and future steps to admitting that she felt 'I sort of just went into it blind' when discussing her firm university choice. She talked about picking a University that she thought she would like and that 'seemed nice' even before she had visited the University. She mentioned feeling relieved that after making her decision she visited the University for an applicant day and 'absolutely loved it…thank god' (Mia X, interview 3). Mia X's plans still involved pursuing the same career with more emphasis on the publishing side as a goal for the future.

4.12.4: Influences, Social Networks and Support

Despite noting 'teachers' as a source of support within her Network Mapping task, in her third interview when asked whether the support or advice received from her school or teachers played a big role in her final decision making, Mia X replied: 'no not particularly. This school's as much good as a chocolate teapot' (Mia X, interview 3). Previously Mia X had really valued her teachers' support highly, however, her final interview she described at times feeling like time was not made for her with her decision-making. She seemed a little frustrated by this, which could be due to her usually relying upon this support network, as stated in her mapping task that teachers, and her head of sixth form specially, 'advises me on uni choices and work' (Mia X, network mapping task). Teachers inspired her to work hard as she disclosed in her first interview that she was 'meant to fail everything' but the positive attitude of teachers when she started school meant she focused to work hard to do what she wants to do and achieve (Mia X, interview 1).

From speaking to Mia X throughout the 10 months, it seemed that she was a fairly independent decision maker. She knew her goals and her hopes for the future and family and friends were more there as a support system for her to 'vent' or to 'listen'. Mia X also discussed how 'friends support me in my

decisions', but it seemed that her actual decision making was something she took on herself (Mia X, Network mapping task). A main support for her was her mum, who she stated she talks to about everything. Her independence with decision-making was further shown by her describing her mum as 'a bit of a pessimist' about University and debt. However, she later explained she thought this was due to fear of Mia X moving away and that her mum and step dad would only want the best for her. A family member that she noted did always push her to follow her dreams for University was her Grandad.

It seemed Mia X had been planning for her future career for long before sixth form. Each of her A-level options fitted a purpose for her future or enjoyment. She chose English literature for her desire to teach the subject and her love of reading and Religion, due to her ambition to move to Dubai and teach in an international school. She felt it was important to have knowledge on different cultures and religions as her plans involved travel. Mia X was organised with her UCAS application and was one of the first to submit and one of the first to hear back and have offers, she had independently researched and knew what she needed to do for her dream career and chosen University, stating that she needed three C grades for her University but she was predicted three B grades. Her plans for masters study were founded in a desire for a higher paid job, and this was all influenced by her deeper desire of being able to give her children the life that she did not have, and spare herself of the financial issues she had seen her mum endure.

> "I want to be able to live and just be like stable and not having to worry about stuff that like my parents have had to worry about and that" (Mia X, interview 1).

Mia X had great aspiration for her life and future and her interest in post-graduate study extended to her interest and frequent questions at the end of our meetings about my journey and masters degree, as well as the PhD work. It seemed that people's experiences of a similar journey to her would resonate and inspire her and she was keen to absorb as much as she could from those she met with the experiences she aspired to, such as visiting university students.

4.12.5: Summary

❑ What influences the post 18 choices of working-class young people?

An influence for Mia X's post 18 choices was her career aspiration of becoming an English teacher, as well as her desire to pursue a postgraduate masters degree after her undergraduate degree. She was also very influenced by inspirational stories of people's success and wanted success for herself and was very keen to make her hopes and dreams a reality as efficiently as possible. For Mia X, university seemed to be the most appropriate way for her to achieve this.

❑ How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?

A lot of Mia X's decision-making was done independently and her friends and family were seen more as a source of support or there to listen to her thoughts about post 18 options, rather than to help her with the final decision. Her mum seemed to be slightly reluctant to fully support Mia X's decision to apply to university, based on her own worry around student debt. However, it was clear that Mia X's decision was made and that she was very keen to go onto university following sixth form, regardless of any student debt.

❑ What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

Information about post 18 decision-making seemed to come from her own research around universities, including the UCAS website. Another source of information was by means of her school and teacher information.

4.13: Chapter summary

These pen portraits give an insight and overview of the students involved within the study. Although the profile data collected formed the overall structure and basis of each portrait, snippets of all other forms of data are used within each student's profile. Each student within the study is an individual and their voice is important to the project. This is especially important in keeping with the research methodology. The importance of voice is valued within qualitative research and can form particularly important data and fitting when considering widening participation, as working class presence can be argued to be lacking within Higher Education.

5.0: Narrative Elicitation Tasks

A portion of the qualitative data collection took the form of narrative elicitation tasks. This chapter will discuss the variety of elicitation tasks as well as some findings. In a study where a focus is placed upon students' advocacy, these tasks offered an opportunity for students to share their voice in more varied ways. These alongside the interview data provided variety along the time-line of student data collection and student voice and encouraged a much more inclusive sharing space for students.

The tasks involved the following tasks:

- 5.1: 'Tree of Life' task
- 5.2: 'Network mapping' task
- 5.3: Journal work

The 12 students filled out these tasks at various meeting points throughout the 10-month data collection period. Collecting voice in a variety of ways was an important step in unlocking potential voices or views that may get missed in a more conventional interview style setting. As discussed in the methodology chapter these techniques are consistent with the advocacy ethnography approach taken in the thesis. As Smyth and McInerney argue these approaches are important 'because of the multiple voices and the range of perspectives, these portraits present rather more complex and varied storylines than ones possible through single narrative accounts.' (Smyth & McInerney, 2013: 8).

Each student is unique and provides an individual perspective of their schooling experience and decision-making process. Therefore, having a variety of ways to capture each student's voice weaves a new thread of understanding into the complex tapestry of each student's unique story.

5.1:   Tree of Life Task

5.1.1: Introduction

The Tree of Life task involved the use of tree templates of the tree below. Students were also given the option to draw their own trees but none of the students chose to do this. Cut-out instructions and prompts, if needed, describing each section of the tree were also provided to each of the students.

The Fruit: Advice, acts of kindness or care you have been given. These are not material gifts you have been given.

The Leaves: Important people. People who influence you or you go to for advice. Those who have taught you most in life.

The Branches: Hopes and dreams (one per branch, if there aren't enough, draw more branches!)

The Trunk: Skills (these can be skills you've learnt at school or at home, talents, things you are good at doing or people tell you you're good at doing).

The Ground: Typical daily activities/chores (things you like to do as well as things you HAVE to do)

The Roots: Where you come from (For example: your background, family, education so far)

Figure 1: Tree of Life: Student Instructions

Each section of the tree along with some findings and themes is covered within the chapter. This included:

- 5.1.2: The Roots
- 5.1.3: The Ground
- 5.1.4: The Trunk
- 5.1.5: The Branches
- 5.1.6: The Leaves
- 5.1.7: The Fruit

The Trees were completed by the students all together at the very start of the data collection process and were revisited individually during the last meeting with the students, which was interview 3. This provided students with the

opportunity to look over their trees and to see for themselves how their thinking or decision-making may or may not have changed over the 10-month period. Students were also, in keeping with the advocacy ethnography approach of the research, given the opportunity to add or take things out of their tree to update the data.

As Smyth and McInerney (2013) put it below, this creates a space for participant's voices, recognising the way in which the researcher is structuring the research encounter and their own voice is present:

> 'We do not claim that participants are the authors of the portraits. However, we do endeavour to remain faithful to the participants' intentions, create a space for their ideas, and retain their vernacular language. Hopefully, we maintain a reasonable balance between the voices of our informants and our own voices.' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013:13)

The role of the researcher is of course to analyse and notice what is believed to be key pieces of data, however, giving the participant a sense of autonomy over how they choose to display their data and what they wish to include gives richness to the data and helps to give further clarity to the points made by the voices that are at the heart of the study. Therefore, the trees and the revisit of the trees provide a 'space for their ideas'.

5.1.2: The Roots

During the Tree of Life task, the elicitation prompt for the Roots of the tree was:

> *'The Roots: Where you come from…This could include things such as your background, family (e.g.: what your parents do for a living, who you live with, what your family is like, extended family), education so far (e.g.: subject choices, GCSE grades), where you live (e.g.: a town, village, city, flat, house etc.)'*

This sought to gather student perspectives of the examples mentioned above, as well as other autobiographical descriptions of themselves and their histories.

The thematic analysis of the 'Roots' element of the Tree of Life representations, yielded four sub-themes as outlined in Table 7 below.

Sub-theme	Definition
Family	Comments which referred to family
Home	Comments which referred to living situations or places lived previously.
Education and subjects	Comments relating to schooling, education, subjects and studying. Including prior schools or study as well as current.
Who are you?	Comments that identify or provide a description of the student and what they are like or who they are.

Table 7: Sub-themes and definitions for 'The Roots' of the Tree of Life

The responses from students around the sub-theme 'Family' suggest ways in which social networks shape decision-making. Most students mentioned their parents and even brothers and sisters. However, whereas half of the working-class students mentioned their extended family, such as grandparents or family in general, none of the middle-class students mentioned any other family aside from their immediate family unit. This may show more of an importance placed upon wider family relations for the working-class students and the effect their presence has on their lives and possibly their decision making.
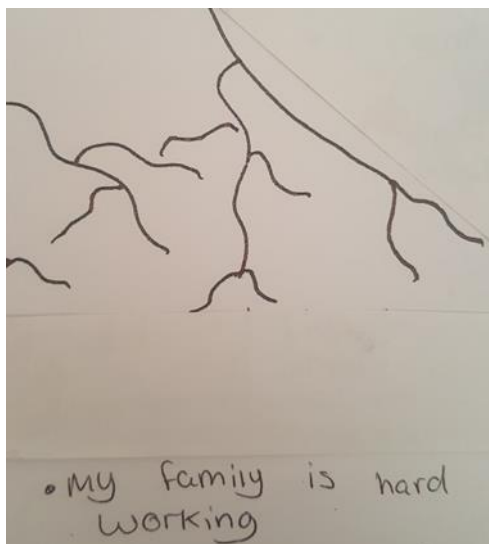
Figure 2: Tree of Life: Poppy's Roots

Comments such as '*my family is hard working*' (Poppy, Rural, working-class) may reflect the student's pride in their family and their aspiration to also be hard-

working individuals. Regardless of whether the aspiration of following on in a hard-working parent's footsteps is definitive or assumed, the increased amount that family is mentioned shows the value the students place on family and extended family. This could imply that family is a key source of social networks for working-class students within the study.

It was also noticeable that only working-class students referred to pursuing a BTEC route or mix in comparison to middle-class students pursuing an A level-only route into higher education. The BTEC qualification has been linked with differential access to and participation in HE: BTEC students are less likely to attend the high entry-tariff universities (Mian, Richards and Broughton, 2016) and have higher drop-out rates once there (Rouncefield-Swales, 2014). Therefore, it is noteworthy that, in this case, this is a predominantly working-class phenomenon. When considering what influences the post-18 choices of working-class young people (RQ1), this may be relevant in influencing the possible options open to them and the choices they may make after sixth form. This is in comparison to middle-class students' more conventional route to Higher Education via A levels.

Mentioned in over half of the middle-class students' trees were parental jobs along with concise and informed job titles to accompany them:

'My mum is a chef at school. My dad is a senior contracts manager.' (Ailayah, middle-class, urban student).
'both parents are in the engineering industry…mum is a manager, worked from the bottom of the business.' (Jane, middle-class, rural student)
'mum…works in child protection. Dad…Has been in the marines for over 30 years' (Jeffrey West, middle-class, rural student).

However, less than half of working-class students mentioned parental jobs and a proportion of those students went into very limited detail about the area of their job role, such as the actual job title. This may suggest either a lack of knowledge around parental job or career or perhaps less importance placed upon it. In either case this could be a factor in the access that they have to information for decision-making post-18 (RQ3). A starting point for decision-making post-18 will often be

family members who are the closest point of contact within their immediate social network. A lack of knowledge about parental jobs could mean that more information is sought through '*cold knowledge*' (Slack et al, 2014) and distant means of information about post-18 choices, such as university websites or prospectuses. Seeking more access to '*cold knowledge*' regarding post-18 choices, over 'hot or warm knowledge', has been shown to be less valuable to students, as well as being used more by working-class students in comparison to middle-class students, which Slack et al argue is due to lack of social networks around them to provide the knowledge they need when making decisions about HE. This is useful when exploring how young people's social networks affect their decision-making (RQ2).

The sub-theme 'Home', involved where students described they lived or came from. The way 'home' was described varied between the students. The below table shoes some student responses.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Dave	**WC**	**Rural**	'Live on a farm'
Poppy	**WC**	**Rural**	'I live in a small house in *Rural town name*'
" "	" "	" "	'I live with my mum and younger brother'
" "	" "	" "	'I come from Gosport'
" "	" "	" "	'My mum is also from Gosport'
Mia X	**WC**	**Urban**	'I come from Cumbria in the North of England. Most of my family are Scottish.'
Mia	**WC**	**Urban**	'I live in a city. In a house in a really long busy street'
Rebekah	**WC**	**Urban**	'Born in Spain'
Kieran	**WC**	**Urban**	*Local city name*
Jane	**MC**	**Rural**	'Born in *local city name*'

Table 8: Student tree root responses for the sub-theme: 'Home'

The Urban students tended to cover more distance, in terms of where they had come from or been born. Rural students seemed to describe their home more locally. Half of the working-class students, who described what 'home' meant to them, went into more detail and described their house and/or street. Only one middle-class student described their 'home' within the roots section of their tree, Jane, who wrote the name of the local city they were born in.

The final sub-theme for the roots section of the tree was: 'Who are you?' This sub-theme focused on identifiers and descriptions of students and who they were based on various codes relating to jobs and hobbies mainly. However, two students considered their race/ethnicity and class within their trees.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Poppy	WC	Rural	'I work as a cleaner'
Kieran	WC	Urban	'White British'
Kalen Garse	WC	Urban	'Takeaway assistant – Chinese'
" "	" "	" "	'Leaflet distributor – Premier'
" "	" "	" "	'Waiter - *local restaurant*'
" "	" "	" "	'Waiter/Barman at *local pub* (till 9th March)'
" "	" "	" "	Currently a Sales Assistant @ Premier stores'
Joe	WC	Urban	'Enjoy video games'
John	MC	Rural	'Played football since 4'
Jane	MC	Rural	'Middle-class'

Table 9: Student's tree root responses for the sub-theme: 'Who are you?'

Kieran, a working-class urban student, described himself within his Roots as 'White British'. Jane, a middle-class rural student, described herself as 'Middle-class'. Both of these examples were interesting findings within the roots of the trees, as they were the only two students to consider their class or ethnicity and they came from different schools.
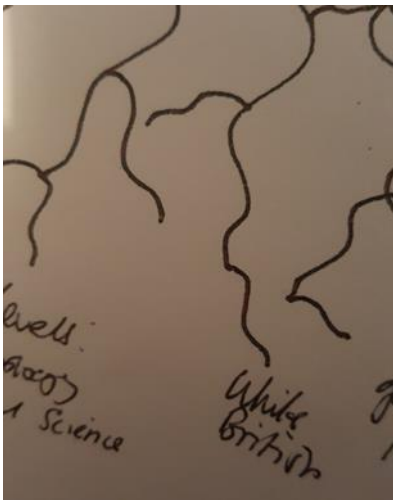
Figure 3: Tree of Life: Kieran's roots.   **Figure 4: Tree of Life: Jane's roots.**
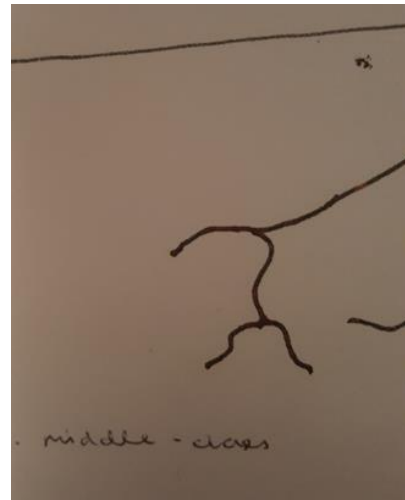
It is also noteworthy that this task was one of our first meetings, so this may have been a way of providing their basic identifying profile data as an introduction to who they see themselves as.

Key descriptions of who the students described themselves as came from their current and previous job roles. It is worth noting that these were working-class phenomena. Only working-class students described themselves within their roots by the jobs they worked.

Hobbies were also used by students to identify what made them who they are. Both Joe (working-class, urban, student) and John (middle-class, Rural, student) described their hobbies and interests within the roots of their trees. These seemed important facets of their personalities and led onto their career objectives later on within the trees.

5.1.3: Ground

The 'Ground' section of the tree of life primarily involved day to day activities that kept students 'grounded'. The elicitation prompt given to the students for this section was:

> *'Typical daily activities or chores…Things you have to do as well as things you enjoy! This could include things such as any part-time work/jobs, volunteering, sports, housework you do, extra studying you may do.'*

This section of the tree sought to collect how students spent their time. The analysis of the ground section of the tree revealed the three sub-themes (Table 10 below):

Sub-theme	Definition
Daily activities (must dos)	Comments which referred to chores, schooling or work. Things students MUST do, not necessarily want to do.
Social	Comments relating to social aspects of day to day life..
Spare time	Comments relating to how students spend their spare time, this is how students choose to spend their time and is separate from the MUST dos.

Table 10: Sub-themes and definitions for 'the ground' of the tree of life.

Looking at the working-class students' responses within the sub-theme 'social', four out of the six students, who filled in the section, mentioned social activities.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Dave	**WC**	**Rural**	'Playing football'
Poppy	**WC**	**Rural**	'I spend a lot of time with my boyfriend'
Mia	**WC**	**Urban**	'Daily activities – Go out after sixth form with friends/boyfriend or go to work'
Kieran	**WC**	**Urban**	'Meeting mates'
Jane	**MC**	**Rural**	'see friends/boyfriend/family when possible'

Table 11: Student tree ground responses for the sub-theme: 'Social'

This is in comparison to the middle-class students' responses where only one student of the four, Jane, mentioned anything social. It is also worth noting that the student Jane, who did mention something considered 'social', stated: 'see friends/boyfriend/family when possible'. The 'when possible' being key in comparison to other students who included their social activities as just as high a

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priority within their daily activities as other activities. This may show that working-class students may particularly value social activities. It could also be suggested from this that social bonds for working-class students feel stronger pre-18 and may affect decision-making post-18. This could perhaps further inform decision-making regarding location (not wanting to move too far away), or choosing to go to the same university or route as friends. Social networks and importance placed upon socialisation can be important when looking at choices for the next stages in life (RQ2).

The presence of daily chores and helping out at home was also present frequently in the ground section of some student's trees; this could be a potential influence of predominately male students' post-18 choices (RQ1). There was a considerable difference in the presence of chores within the students' list of daily activities. Although there was no particular difference in terms of class, regarding daily chores, there was a clear gender difference. Two thirds of the male students wrote about chores in comparison to just one third of female students. This could be indicative of a variety of possibilities. For example, a male student, with regular chores within the household, could be considered more capable of looking after himself, potentially being more independent and more comfortable with the idea of moving away or out for their post-18 choice. Conversely, a male student who is helping out with chores at home may be more attached to home life, making it more difficult to move away to university and leave the family household. This could reduce such student's chances of applying to non-local universities. There was also a substantial difference between rural and urban students. Four out of five rural students' included chores within their day to day activities in contrast to just two out of seven urban students (see table 12).

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Dave	WC	Rural	'Walking my dog'
" "	" "	" "	'Tidy my room'
Poppy	WC	Rural	'I cook a lot at home'
Mia	WC	Urban	'I HAVE to do the dishes and clean up the house to help my parents out.'

Joe	WC	Urban	'Empty my bin'
Jeffrey West	MC	Rural	'I have to empty the dishwasher'
" "	" "	" "	'I have to look after my sister'
" "	" "	" "	'I have to keep my room tidy'
John	MC	Rural	'Cut the grass, wash dishes, hoover'

Table 12: Student tree ground responses for the sub-theme: 'chores'

5.1.4: Trunk

The trunk of the tree included a variety of skills or talents. Students were prompted that:

> *'These can be skills you've learnt at school or at home, talents, things you are good at doing'.*

Therefore, responses within the trunk section of the tree involved things such as practical skills, emotional and social skills, skills developed around or because of students' interests, and academic skills.

The reoccurring skills above formed the sub-themes within this section and are shown in table 13 below.

Sub-themes	Definition
Skills (Practical)	Comments which referred to skills that were practical…
Skills (Interests)	Skills that related to or were developed because of certain interests…
Skills (Social & emotional)	Comments relating to skills that are of a social and emotional nature. E.g. 'communication' or 'patience'.
Skills (Academic)	Comments relating to academic skills such as schooling, education

Table 13: Sub-themes and definitions for 'the trunk' of the tree of life

The most noteworthy finding within the Trunk analysis was the presence of what were referred to as 'Academic skills'. Academic skills were more prominent on

middle-class student trees than on working-class student trees. Two (of four) middle-class students referenced to academic skills within their trunks, in comparison to one (of eight) working-class students. This shows a possible awareness of the importance and acquisition of academic skills by middle-class students, as well as perhaps a lack of academic skills or at the very least a potential lack of awareness of such skills within the working-class trees.

As well as differences between social class and the noting of academic skills, there were also apparent gender differences. Twice as many female students wrote about academic skills within their trees than male students, which may suggest these are perceived to be more important by females. This may also affect female and male students' decision making regarding an academic route over other routes post-18 (RQ1).

With working-class students, especially working-class male students, being under-represented within a university setting, the students' comments on their Trees of Life may be significant, despite the small sample. Both of the above findings are relevant to exploring potential influences of post-18 choices (RQ1) and particularly decision-making.

Practical Skills included comments such as 'how to drive a tractor & car' (Dave, working class, Rural student) and 'I'm told I'm good at cooking' (Poppy, working class, Rural student). In terms of numbers, this was roughly comparable in terms of gender and social class.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Dave	WC	Rural	'How to drive a tractor & car'
Poppy	WC	Rural	'I'm told I'm good at cooking'
Mia X	WC	Urban	'I can knit, I leant this through my mum'
Rebekah	WC	Urban	'sailing'
" "	" "	" "	'swimming'
Joe	WC	Urban	'Play guitar'

Jeffrey West	MC	Rural	'Play guitar'
John	MC	Rural	'Driving'

Table 14: Student tree trunk responses for the sub-theme: 'Practical Skills'

Some skills were more favourable based on gender. When considering skills based on 'interests', 1/3 of female students discussed interest skills, in comparison to 2/3 of male students. Gender also became apparent when looking at 'Social & emotional' skills within the trunk of the tree, it was clear that these were dominated by female students in comparison to male students. Every female student described emotional and social skills they had acquired, in comparison to the 1/3 of male students discussed such skills. It is also worth noting that this was seemingly more of a working-class skill set. 3/4 of working-class students discussed their social and emotional skills within their tree trunks, in comparison to 1/2 of middle-class students.

5.1.5: Branches

The Branches of the tree represented students' hopes and dreams. Students were asked to write their hopes, dreams and wishes on the branches. It was suggested to have one per branch and to draw more branches if needed. Students were given the following prompt with the activity:

> *'This can include hopes, dreams and wishes (one per branch, if there aren't enough, draw more branches!) These hopes and dreams may be linked to people? These could include future careers or job prospects, grades you hope to achieve, where you want to be in 2-5 years' time or what you would want to have achieved in 2-5 years' time.'*

The comments relating to hopes and dreams led to the following sub-themes being drawn out within the table below. These included hopes of a financial nature, career/ job goals, branches relating to happiness and wellbeing as well as family and animals.

Sub-theme	Definition

Financial/Materialistic	Hopes and dreams relating to financial stability and things of a financial nature, as well as materialistic hopes and dreams for the students, such as cars, clothes, other 'things' to buy/have.
Career/Job	Hopes and dreams relating to students' career path or future jobs etc. This can include steps to take towards the career path such as university or education for the purpose of a future job or career.
Happiness/Wellbeing	Comments relating to a student's future happiness or wellbeing. Including things of a social nature or recreational travel.
Family/animals	Comments relating to the hopes and dreams surrounding a student's family and animals as well as future family and animals.

Table 15: Sub-themes and definitions for 'The Branches' of the tree of life

An interesting trend that came out of the Tree of Life data was 'Materialistic' as a sub-theme. A quarter of the working-class students wrote about things of a materialistic nature on their branches. This was in comparison to three quarters of middle-class students who wrote materialistic comments. This clear difference could suggest that middle-class students are more fortunate financially and can, therefore, dream and plan more materialistic hopes and dreams for the future. In comparison to working-class students who may have prioritised their hopes and dreams for the future in a different way, such as a want for financial security in comparison to financial gain. It could also suggest an appreciation for things that may be otherwise taken for granted, such as financial stability.

When looking further at other hopes and dreams that could be considered a priority for working-class students, over half of working-class students valued happiness and wellbeing within their hopes and dreams, whereas only 1 quarter of middle-class students referred to happiness within their hopes and dreams. This relates to work by Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson who found that the

aspirations of parents and young people went beyond their plan for HE and later on a career, but also included an emphasis on their emotional well-being as well as future family-life (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011:5).

The above could also link to the finding within the tree that half of working-class students commented that it was important they had a job they enjoy. Middle-class students tended to comment more on having a 'good paying job' (John, middle-class, male), in comparison to working-class students who predominantly focused on having 'enough money' (Dave, working-class, male) and to not 'struggle financially' (Rebekah, working-class, female). The previous quotes contrast to the following middle-class student's quotes of: 'be rich' (Ailayah, middle-class, female).

Lastly with regards to the sub-theme job/career, over half of working-class students mentioned the specific job they would hope for in the future with detail around the kind of job. In comparison to 1 quarter of middle-class students.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Poppy	**WC**	**Rural**	'To have a successful career – Teaching'
Mia X	**WC**	**Urban**	'Go into Publishing'
Mia	**WC**	**Urban**	'I hope to be a nurse'
Kieran	**WC**	**Urban**	'Work for a football club'
			'footballer'
			'physiotherapist'
Joe	**WC**	**Urban**	'Games Dev.'
Jane	**MC**	**Rural**	'To help people in some way through my career – human rights'

Table 16: Student tree branches responses for the sub-theme: Career/job

Most of the jobs mentioned within the table above are degree level jobs. Therefore, this could help give an indication of working-class students' aspirations for future careers.

Kieran also showed interest in ideally becoming a 'footballer'; this seemed ultimately to be his dream goal, whilst his physiotherapist goal was considered perhaps a more attainable goal. Celebrity status can be desirable especially when students are dreaming for financial security, 'Celebrity encourages and celebrates the notion of self-regulating, autonomous, individualised subjects, who are free of constraints. Poverty, unemployment and other forms of 'failure'' (Mendick et al., 2015:168). Regardless, Kieran knows from his journal entries that a career in sport is for him and his aim is to achieve that goal through a number of different routes.

It is also noteworthy that more females than males commented more specifically on which job they would want in the future. Possibly suggesting that those who were more specific about their future job have done more research or are more certain about the job they are working towards. This could mean that they are more prepared and are building their CVs and grades up to ensure they stay on the right path for the career they want.

5.1.6: Leaves

The 'leaves' of the tree represented 'important people' in the students' lives. It was explained to students in the following prompt that this could include anyone who may influence them or they may go to for advice, or those who had taught them most in life:

> 'This could include a family member, friends, staff at school, someone from a club you go to – people who you have gone to when facing a difficult decision or when you have needed advice or help. It could also include people who you want to make proud. This could include people who are alive or dead.'

The sub-themes included: family and animals, friends, teachers and celebrities and other influential figures.

Sub-theme	Definition
Family	Comments referring to family as important people.
Animals	Comments referring to animals as important.

Friends	Comments referring to friends as important people.
Teachers	Comments referring to teachers as important people.
Celebrities/influential figures	Comments referring to celebrities or other influential figures. Usually people who the students do not actually know.

Table 17: Sub-theme and definitions for 'The Leaves' of the tree of life

When exploring the 'leaves', or important people, of each student's tree, it became apparent that family was important to each student. Every student's tree discussed one or more family members as being important people in their lives. When looking more closely at the family and animal sub-theme, grandparents were mentioned by 5 working-class students, in comparison to 2 middle-class students. This could suggest that working-class students include wider family just as much as immediate family when discussing important people or important decisions or advice.

Although animals were discussed within other sections of the tree, such as hopes and dreams, in terms of future pets. Within the leaves of the tree only one student discussed important animals within their life. Mia X wrote about her 'Grandad's dog (Bess)' and her cat 'Billy Bear – Mr. Bill' (Mia X, Tree of Life: Leaves).

In terms of 'Friends' mentioned within the leaves, there was no difference in terms of class, gender or school. 2 female students discussed friends as well as 2 male students, and this was the case for class and school too. It is perhaps worth noting that within the tree of life task, the middle-class students went into more detail about their friends, for example by naming them. Whereas both working-class students simply wrote 'Friends'.

Middle-class students were the only students to refer to celebrities and other influential figures within their important people. This included political figures, footballers and actresses. Half of middle-class students mentioned celebrities and influential figures, which could suggest that these students looked up to or

shared things in common with these influential people and their successes. This focus on the celebrity by young people was discussed by Mendick et al. as, 'Celebrity provides a set of resources through which young people engage in 'identity work', including their sense-making around success, failure and their imagined futures' (Mendick et al. 2015:164). Mendick et al., further discuss the role of the celebrity as well as the relations that are drawn from people and behaviours. By looking up to a celebrity, students could be imagining or striving for similar futures or identities to those they idolise. It could also indicate the students' greater interest in well paid jobs and materialistic things as mentioned previously within the 'branches' section of this chapter.

Teachers were involved within the prompt but did not make the tree for a lot of students. One working-class student mentioned their teacher as an important person. No other student commented on teachers. This may be due to the students considering other important people as more important or more of a priority for the tree than teachers, such as family.

5.1.7:   Fruit

The 'fruit' of the tree referred to 'gifts given'. Students were given the following prompt:

> *'Gifts you have been given. These are not material gifts; try to think of advice, acts of kindness or care.'*

Almost all of the comments provided referred to advice students had received. The following sub-themes refer to the types of 'fruit' within the tree:

Sub-theme	Definition
Advice (family and friends)	Comments referring to advice about or from family and friends.
Advice (cliché/sayings)	Comments referring to advice that could be considered cliché or sayings the students have heard.
Advice (personal)	Comments referring to advice that is personal to the student, advice specific to the individual.

Advice (school and teachers)	Comments referring to advice about or from the school or teachers.

Table 18: Sub-themes and definitions for 'The Fruit' of the tree of life

When exploring the fruits of the tree, one of the more novel sub-themes was cliché advice and sayings. As the fruit was near to the leaves in terms of placement on the trees, it could have been expected that most of the responses would be linked to important people and things they had been told by those important people. However, a memorable collection of advice shared by the students included all the different pieces of advice that were more cliché in nature and could have been picked up anywhere from anyone, such as *'The world is your oyster' (Mia, working-class, female student)*. This might suggest a relative poverty of concrete and realistic advice, which is worth noting when thinking about all three of the research questions posed for this project: Students' networks and how they may affect their post-18 decision-making, the information students have access to, as well as what affects post-18 choices in general.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Dave	**WC**	**Rural**	'Work hard'
Poppy	**WC**	**Rural**	'To be caring'
Mia X	**WC**	**Urban**	'Be kind to everyone because they could be going through things.'
Mia	**WC**	**Urban**	"The world is your oyster"
" "	" "	" "	"You can do anything you put your mind to"
" "	" "	" "	"Have faith in yourself"
" "	" "	" "	"Everything will work out"
" "	" "	" "	"Do what you love"
" "	" "	" "	"Always look after number 1"
Jeffrey West	**MC**	**Rural**	'Gear before beer'
" "	" "	" "	'Don't buy a red car'
" "	" "	" "	'You get out of life what you put into it'

" "	" "	" "	'Be yourself'
John	**MC**	**Rural**	'Work hard'
" "	" "	" "	'Be respectful'
" "	" "	" "	'Be kind'
" "	" "	" "	'Do what makes you happy'

Table 19: Student tree fruit responses for the sub-theme: Cliché/sayings

The importance of this type of advice was shared by most, as half of both middle-class and working-class students included cliché advice or sayings within their trees. This could suggest that more cliché advice was considered just as beneficial to the student as more personalised or individual advice the student may have received specifically for them.

Advice students had received relating to wellbeing was also mentioned within the fruit. Half of the working-class student's trees mentioned wellbeing advice. For example Mia X shared, 'Take care of yourself & fill your life with positivity and good energy' (Mia X, Tree of Life: Fruit). Mia also shared 'Don't stress' and 'Do what you love' (Mia, Tree of Life: Fruit). This advice centred around positive advice that would be intended to support their emotional wellbeing, as well as promote the importance of looking after themselves and perhaps their mental health. Advice perhaps intended to linger with them throughout life, rather than immediate advice given for a specific goal. However, none of the middle-class students made comments about wellbeing advice they may have received. This could suggest that working-class students were given more advice by people around them about their wellbeing or felt this was more important advice. Also, with further regard to the sub-theme wellbeing, more female students than male students referred to wellbeing advice. This could imply that female students receive more advice about wellbeing than their male counterparts, or it is used more and remembered more by female students.

Lastly, advice received from teachers and school was commented on by half of the working-class students. Showing a value put upon advice received from this source, however, none of the middle-class students talked about teacher or school advice. This could suggest that working-class students may rely on advice from more of a variety of sources than middle class students. Also, when

looking at students who are considering their post-18 choices, which may include university, teachers can provide a source of advice about that route that they may not otherwise get if they are the first of their families to apply to university.

STUDENT	Social Class	School	What they wrote
Rebekah	WC	Urban	'Choice of education…what root to take'
Kieran	WC	Urban	'Head of sixth form & other head of sixth form always there to give me advice on anything with univerisities'
" "	" "	" "	'Head of sixth form and other head of sixth form helped hugely with personal statement. And what course to do.'
Kalen Garse	WC	Urban	'ADVICE: some teachers'
Joe	WC	Urban	'Staff and teachers helped us to feel calm and comfortable when revising and kept us focused.'
" "	" "	" "	'Comp Sci teacher helped with coursework when needed.'
" "	" "	" "	'Teachers help us discover the best route through life for each of us'
" "	" "	" "	'Teachers help me and other with UCAS applications and personal statements where needed.'

Table 20: Student tree fruit responses for the sub-theme: 'Advice from Teachers and School'

All of the respondents who commented on teacher and school advice came from the urban school. This could suggest that the urban school provides more of an interest in their students' post-18 choices. However, it is also worth noting that the urban school sixth form size was considerably smaller than the rural sixth form size. This may suggest that having more access to one-to-one support or having a better teacher to student ratio, can help greatly with providing students

with the added support they need when making decisions post-18. This links to (RQ2) and (RQ3).

5.1.8:   Conclusion

To conclude, the Tree of Life task and analysis, though only a small data set has drawn out the following findings for consideration in relation to the research questions set out for this research project. With regards to young people's social networks and their impact on students' decision-making have varied from student to student throughout the tree task, but there are some similarities that have stuck out. As discussed within the 'fruit' section of the tree, the importance of teachers and schools as an source of advice social network for working-class urban students. This also relates to research question regarding information young people have access to for decision-making post 18. In relation to the main research question, regarding what influences post 18 choices for young people, the trees have shown that many sections of the tree included comments that would be described as influencing choices. Comments around their roots and the hard-working family of which they are proud to write about and aspire to. The branches of the trees represented the hope and dreams in the form of university destinations, career goals and travelling plans that could be argued to motivate their pursuit of certain post-18 choices. In short, the trees provided a thorough look into what each student is made up of and where their voices are grown.

5.2:   Network Mapping Task

5.2.1:   Introduction

This task was referred to as the 'Network Mapping task'. Just before their second interview, students were given a blank sheet of A3 paper and were asked to map their different networks including social networks on the piece of paper. To avoid confusion with regards to 'social networks', students were specifically told this did not mean Facebook; twitter etc. Each network map took a different shape visually due to the students being faced solely with a blank piece of A3 and some prompts, if needed, to keep thoughts flowing.

The blank canvas students were given for this task meant that most students gave their maps different titles.

STUDENT	Class	Title
Jane	(MC)	Social network
Poppy	(WC)	Networking
Dave	(WC)	Who I ask for advice
John	(MC)	No title
Jeffrey West	(MC)	Advice givers
Mia	(WC)	Choices
Rebekah	(WC)	Advise/Decisions
Mia X	(WC)	Advice
Ailayah	(MC)	No title
Kalen Garse	(WC)	Social works/advice
Kieran	(WC)	Advice
Joe	(WC)	Advice

Table 21: Network Mapping Task: Student titles.

Key:

Green *= Rural*

Purple *= Urban*

I believe the prompts for the task influenced some students' titles. They were asked who they turn to for advice or help with decision-making, hence why lots of titles refer to 'advice givers' or 'advice'. The students were left to their own devices with the task but if they looked puzzled or were confused then they were asked the following prompts:

- o Who do you turn to for advice or help with decision-making?
- o What sorts of advice did they give?
- o Which do you think is the most useful information you've received or sources you've drawn on?
- o Have some sources been more useful at some points than others?
- o Are there any sources that have not been helpful?

These prompts were also used for some students at the end just to ensure students had not missed anyone or anything out that they may have wished to include. Not all of the prompts were said to all students, they were there to provide help or explain the task/make it more understandable. Each student required different prompts depending on how they understood the task. This

task mainly relied on the students own understanding of it, and how they wanted to use their paper to display their maps.

The task gave a good indication of each of the student's support networks, including some of the support their networks provided to help them with decision-making. This section of the chapter will explore some of the similarities and differences amongst students and their networks based on the mapping task. It will also explore the usefulness of these networks for the students involved in the study and will help to better answer two of the research questions put forward for this study.

This elicitation task focused mainly on answering the question:

- How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making? (RQ2)

Due to the nature of this task being centred on students' social networks, as well as some of the prompts used asking about whom students may go to for advice etc. Some aspects of the data also sought to answer:

- What access do young people have to information for decision-making post-18? (RQ3)

This subsequently came out of this data as students talked about the benefits open days, university information and parental information had on their information for decision-making post-18.

5.2.2: University-related Advice and Decision-making

5.2.2.1: Open days

When looking at decision-making and advice specifically about university, open days and university events were considered a noteworthy source of information by the students (RQ3).

> 'Uni Open Days -> speaking to students was great, gave an honest idea of the course.' (Jane, middle-class, rural student).

More working class students mentioned open days than middle class students. This could indicate that, for working class students, open days are a particularly

useful source of information about university and may provide information about university by providing students with the opportunity to talk to other likeminded students or current university students or staff to help provide them with information they may otherwise not have. However, it could be argued that the potential costs of accessing open days in terms of travelling longer distances could impact the decision to attend these useful events.

It was also more female students than male students who mentioned open days. Which could suggest that both female and working class students see the value in visiting universities than the latter.

Open days became an important topic discussed throughout the 10 month data collection period. Therefore, the importance of these days as a source of information as well as a provider of a social network to university, by means of university students and staff, cannot be overlooked.

5.2.2.2: Teachers

Following on from the importance of open days, some students attended open days only due to them being organised and or paid for by their schools. This leads us onto the importance of school and teacher advice and support. Teachers provided support with potential career options and general decision-making but most teachers were noted as a key source of advice regarding university, 'Head of sixth form advises me on uni choices and work' (Mia X, working-class, urban student).

In terms of general advice supported by teachers, half of the middle class students mentioned their teachers or school. However, all but 1 working-class student mentioned their teachers or school with regards to general advice or decision-making.

When it came to support or advice specifically about university, three working-class students wrote about their school and or teachers, whilst no middle-class students did. Mia X discussed above that her head of sixth form advised her on university choices and work, this was her main source of advice for university choices, as no other network was mentioned in regards to university decision-making. Joe stated that teachers were a source of support with his university application. Finally, Poppy wrote about her careers teacher as a source for

university support. For these students, teachers were a key social network for university-based advice. Other support for university advice involved 'cold-knowledge' methods such as 'uni-websites' (Poppy, working-class, rural student). Or two vague mentions of friends and 'external advisors' by Poppy and Joe.

5.2.3 Social networks that influence

People that were part of the student's social networks that were also, or had been, in a similar position to the students were commented on within the network task. Three students wrote about family members or parents that had faced similar circumstances to them. Two working class students discussed the role siblings played as a key social network regarding university life.

Dave wrote about his brother who went to Cardiff University, which subsequently at this point in his decision-making was one of his possible university choices. As well as mentioning his cousin who was attending Bournemouth University. He stated that his brother was a very helpful social network when thinking about his next stages after sixth form: 'Who helps most: Brother at Cardiff Uni' (Dave, working-class, rural student). Rebekah also described her sibling as a key source of advice for decision-making. She wrote that: 'My older sister as she is the only close family member I have that has been to university' (Rebekah, working-class, urban student).

The above findings are also indicative of students who have limited access to close networks who can provide a source of information about university and university life. Slack et al (2014) have discussed the impact these sources of knowledge can have in comparison to a more commonly acquired 'cold-knowledge', provided by schools and universities, which is predominantly sought after by working-class students with little access to social contacts with first-hand experience. Therefore, they were provided information about university that the students in question may not have otherwise received for other networks or family members. As students whose siblings were their first experience within their immediate family of attending university, they may be considered to be a valuable source of knowledge.

As well as siblings, another source of support and advice can be parental support. Having parents who have been in a similar position can offer them with at-home support and advice from a first-hand experience that can be helpful to their current decision-making journey. One middle class student mentioned the support of her mum and the usefulness of her support in relation to her previous university experience which resulted in her completing a masters degree. Both of these examples suggest that close family contacts could be considered very useful when accessing information about university (RQ3). This is aligned with Slack et al (2014) who found that middle class students were more likely to use 'hot knowledge' such as parents and close social contacts with first-hand experience for information about university. At the very least they were noteworthy and included within the mapping task as a key network.

5.2.4:   General support advice (personal)

The prompts that were used for this activity were for students to think about people who helped with decision making, advice or were social networks in general. When a came to discussing advice networks, 6 working class students commented on networks that specifically provided advice. This was in comparison to 1 middle class student. For example, these students actively named the network and how they provided advice or noted that they provided advice, rather than simply writing a name on the map without much context to it. This is worth considering when looking at the question 'how do young people's social networks affect their decision-making?' (RQ2). These findings could suggest that advice plays a big part, especially with working class students, when considering the question. It could also suggest that advice is considered important to working class students when considering the role of social networks on their decision-making.

5.2.5 Conclusion

The Network Mapping Task was intended to provide a free-thinking space for students to share their thoughts and experiences about social networks and support networks that were important to them or they simply wanted to discuss. As this task had more freedom of what to write and how to write it, some of the

findings from the task were particularly interesting. Similarities and differences between students based on school, class and gender were thought-provoking as the blank canvas approach to this task meant they were less influenced by the semi-structure of an interview or the structure of a tree. However, this does not mean this task was more or less useful than other elicitation tasks or interviews, it is merely another form of data from a 10 month data collection period that adds more to the portfolio of each student's journey from sixth form to post-18 choices.

5.3:   Journal work

5.3.1:   Introduction

This section focuses on some key findings from student journal work that was analysed. Students were encouraged at various points throughout the study to keep notes of any decision-making or key events or information that may relate to their post-18 choices.

The journal work was separated into three groups: Journal work collected from the summer, for this work students were encouraged to keep journal type notes of anything over the summer that may have related or have an impact on their post-18 decision-making. Some students wrote notes on their phone; others kept mental notes in their head which they wrote down within one of our sessions. The second section was the 'general' journal work. This included anything students may want to reflect on from their whole time at sixth form, or maybe even before, that might related to their post-18 choices (RQ1). Lastly is the section on 'research', which accumulated journal entries about any research students did about their post-18 choices and what it involved. Examples include websites, advice from networks, open days etc. (RQ3).

This chapter will explore these three types of journal work as well as look at some of the key findings from this work. The journal work was useful as it provided students with a chance to reflect and keep track of some of their decision-making as and when it happened. For other students who did not keep up with the journal work in their own time, the reflection time within sessions to write journal type entries gave students an opportunity to reflect on some

previous thoughts nonetheless. Journal work was collated, coded and then organised further by themes and sub-themes. This provided a good basis for the following findings.

5.3.2: Over the summer…

Few students kept detailed notes about activities and decision-making relating to post-18 choices over the summer. However, even for students who thought back to their summer break retrospectively, this work provided a good opportunity to capture decision-making that may have been otherwise lost.

The journal entries documented 'over the summer' can be split into four sub-themes:

Sub-theme	Definition
Spare time	Entries relating to students' spare time over the summer.
Post-18 choices	Entries relating to potential choices and pathways after sixth form.
Education	Entries relating to students' education.
Work and Career	Entries relating to students' work/job and their future career.

Table 22: Journal work sub-themes and definitions for: 'Over the Summer'

5.3.2.1 Spare time

When it came to reflecting on summer activities, urban students tended to talk more about spare time than rural students, who tended to focus more on plans and decision-making for post-18.

STUDENT	What they wrote
Kieran (WC)	· 'going away to boardmasters, made me realise how to be independent.
Ailayah (MC)	· 'Board masters'
Ailayah (MC)	· 'Out'
Ailayah (MC)	· 'Dawlish'
Mia (WC)	· 'Visiting a lot of care homes to see my grandad.'
Mia X (WC)	· 'Went out with my friends'
Mia X (WC)	· 'Part time job at Mcdonalds'
Mia X (WC)	· 'Sleep :)'
Kalen Garse (WC)	· 'Promoted to team leader of the waiters.'
Kalen Garse (WC)	· 'Worked most days – started working behind the bar.'

Table 23: Journal work responses within the sub-theme: 'Spare time'

As shown in the table above, all entries relating to spare time were written by urban students (purple highlighted). This could indicate that the rural school may have encouraged students to think about their post-18 pathways more than the urban school, which may have focused its students on having a more varied summer with an emphasis on having a 'break' and how they may otherwise fill their spare time. In short, the two schools may have given different advice with how students may wish to fill their time over the summer.

5.3.2.2: Post-18 Choices

Looking at the journal work findings, females seemed more certain about university as a post-18 option, whereas males had more of a variety of options as well as university. This is shown in terms of what the students' wrote about regarding their time spent preparing for post-18 options and an additional research they had done, such as exploring alternative post-18 options to university. A third of female students focused purely on university as their post-18 option, in comparison to one sixth of males. Also 5 of the 6 male students commented on other options or decision-making during the summer journal work, whereas none of the female students commented on any other post-18 decision-making other than university. This indicates the possibility that female students favour a more academic post-18 choice first and foremost, in comparison to male students who prefer to keep their options open during the initial decision-making phase.

5.3.2.3: Education

The sub-theme 'education' had only a few responses, this could be due to students perhaps taking time off thinking about education during the summer. Middle class student Ailayah and working class student Kalen discussed attending 'summer school' over the summer. Working class student Mia X wrote about carrying out revision for her Alevels over the summer. The only students to discuss education over the summer within their journal entries were Urban school students.

5.3.2.4: Work and Career

Journal entries around 'work and career' over the summer were, as above, only written by Urban school students. The only students to comment on work and career over the summer were also working-class students. Working class students Mia, Mia X and Kalen discussed changing jobs in order 'to have more experience with younger children' (Mia), working their 'part-time job at McDonalds' (Mia X), and working most days, starting a new job and a promotion (Kalen Garse).

5.3.3:   In General…

General journal work included any and all thinking or activities students wished to share regarding post-18 options, future careers or their time at sixth form.

Sub-themes	Definitions…
Movement	Entries relating to 'movement' or 'no movement'..
Post-18 Preparation	Entries relating to preparation for post-18 choices or plans
Advice/Decision-making	Entries relating to advice or decision-making

Table 24: Journal work sub-themes and definitions for: 'In general'

5.3.3.1: Movement

When looking at the question of 'what influences the post-18 choices of working class young people?' (RQ1), a reoccurring theme throughout the project and again within this journal work surrounds the influence 'movement' or 'no

movement' has. Half of the middle class students commented on movement and the role it played in their future after sixth form, whether this was by making the 'move to America' (John, middle-class, rural student) or by moving away to 'work abroad' (Jeffrey West, middle-class, rural student). Whereas only 1 student out of 8 working class students commented on movement within their journal work. Mia X had planned the necessary steps regarding movement in a much more calculated way and wrote that she: 'Took Religious Studies – studied Islam as I would like to move to Dubai' (Mia X, working-class, urban student). This plan is seemingly more thought out and is practically considered in comparison to the matter-of-fact movement described briefly by John and Jeffrey.

Subsequently, the theme of movement arose again when considering gender. More male students than female students were considering moving away or travelling when looking at their future plans. Twice the amount of males to females discussed movement.

5.3.3.2: Post-18 preparation

Within the 'general' section of the students journal work, it was apparent that more working class students had thought about and been planning or making preparations for their possible future careers as well as their post-18 options. Whereas only 1 middle class student had commented on career prospects, 7 out of 8 working class students had commented on time spent planning or preparing for their future career.
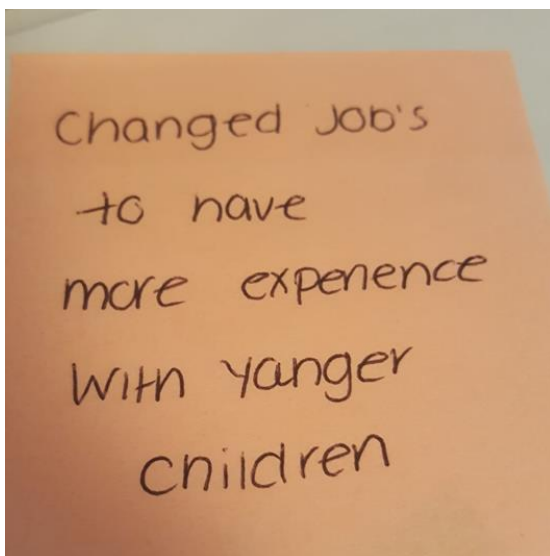
Figure 5: Mia's Journal entry: General: Job change

Work Experience
at UTC Aerospace
Systems. Aerospace
engineering company
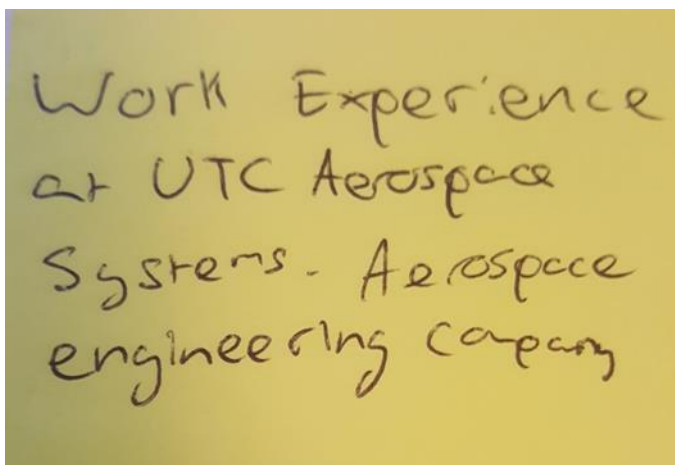
Figure 6: Dave's Journal entry: General, Work Experience

This could relate to what influences working class post-18 options (RQ1), as these findings could suggest that working class students are also considering their future careers when making their post-18 options. It could be argued, based on these findings, that middle class students could be more likely to make decisions about post-18 options based on other reasons, or have a more relaxed and explorative view on a possible path post-18, by taking some of the pressure that comes with planning a future career off their minds. The majority of working class students had written about work experience or research they had done with their future career in mind. However, all but one middle class student wrote only about their immediate next steps post-18 and not about any research for beyond that in terms of preparation for future career plans.

5.3.3.3: Advice/Decision-making

This sub-theme included comments and entries around decision-making and or advice in general. Examples of this are shown in the post-it note examples below:
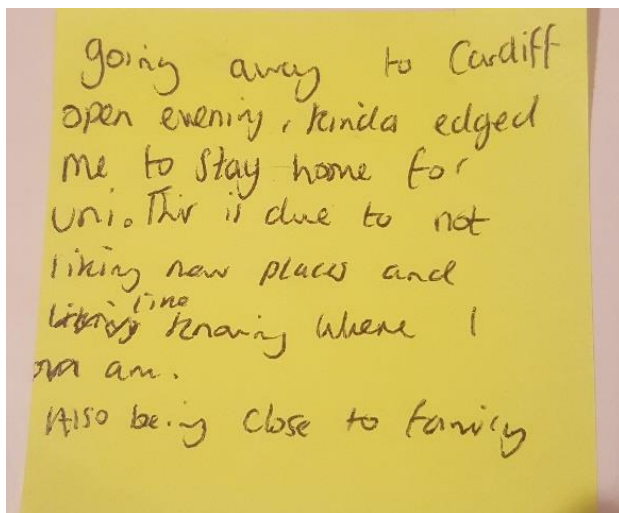
Figure 7: Kieran's Journal entry: General, Decision-making

Above working class, Urban school student Kieran shares with regards to decision-making that 'going away to Cardiff open evening, kinda edged me to stay home for uni. This is due to not liking new places and like knowing where I am. Also being close to family' (see figure…). This shows that for Kieran in order to help with his decision-making, he wanted to experience what it would be like to potentially attend a university further away, this experience helped him to decide that he would rather stay closer to home.
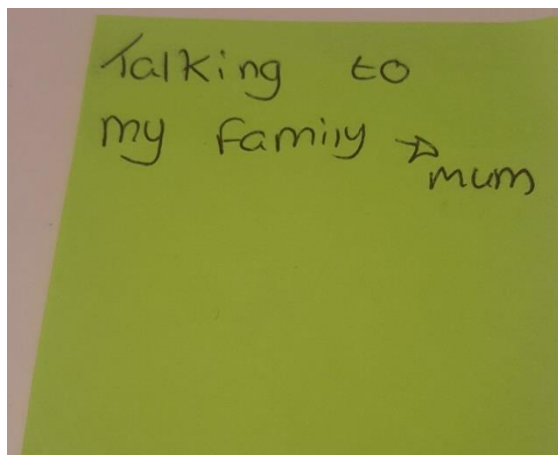
Figure 8: Poppy's Journal Entry: 'Advice'

Student Poppy also shared the above with regards to advice. Poppy commented about 'Talking to my family -> mum', this could show the value Poppy has for her mum's advice. As well as advice from her family, Poppy had discussed: 'youtube videos on peoples own experiences', this shows that in

order for Poppy to gain insight and advice, that she has used her initiatives to access experiences of people she might otherwise not have access to, through the use of Youtube videos. (Poppy, working class, Rural student)
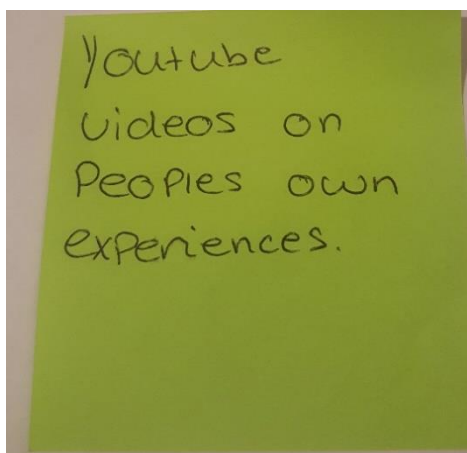
Figure 9: Poppy's Journal Entry: 'Youtube'

Working class students Dave shared a school organised trip to 'UCAS fair at Exeter to see most Universities' and work experience in an area of interest (Dave, working class, rural student). Mia X wrote that in order to prepare her for her future career and travel plans that she 'took Religious Studies – studied Islam as I would like to move to Dubai' (Mia X, working class, urban student).

Middle class students Jane, Ailayah and Jeffrey shared: 'research into courses' (Jeffrey West, middle class, rural student), trips to universities 'to see if I would like living away from home – I would not' (Jane, middle class, rural student), and open days and the 'Westpoint Exeter thing' (Ailayah, middle class, urban student).

5.3.4:   Research…

When forming a collection of different types of students journal work, 'research' seemed an important topic to consider and reflect on. This reflects specifically to the question, 'what access do young people have to information for decision-making post-18?' (RQ3).

Sub-themes	Definitions…
University Knowledge	University knowledge and whether it is from 'hot', 'warm' or 'cold' sources (Slack et al, 2014)
Advice	Entries about the people who have offered advice with decision-making

Table 25: Journal Work Sub-themes and Definitions for: 'Research'

5.3.4.1 University Knowledge

A key finding from these journal entries has also been a key finding by Slack et al (2014). This is the place 'cold knowledge' has within the accumulation of information about university, specifically for working class students. Working class students relied more on own research and university tools, such as websites, prospectus' etc. (cold knowledge). Students gave examples such as 'Reading prospectuses', 'University ranking websites' (Poppy, Journal entry: Research), 'UCAS and other websites' (Dave, Journal entry: Research). This is in comparison to middle class students, who tended to have more of a range of sources for advice and information about university at their disposal. Every single working class student relied on 'cold knowledge' in one way or another, whether it had been through websites or through information provided by universities. One working class student, however, did also seek teacher advice. But in comparison to middle class students who had more of a variety of university information, including one student who mentioned parental advice and support, this should be considered key when looking at what access young people have to information for post-18 decision-making (RQ3).

5.3.4.2 Advice

In terms of the sub-theme 'advice' this was a fairly small collection of entries, however still both argued to be useful and interesting. Working class student Rebekah wrote about 'Speaking to teachers or asking questions' (Rebekah, working class, urban student). This was in contrast to middle class student Jeffrey who shared in terms of advice 'speaking to parents'. These are the only two examples of research entries given within the sub-theme of advice. However, this could suggest a difference in terms of social class with regards to

who is sought after for advice. For Rebekah this was teacher support and for Jeffrey this was his parents. It may be worth noting that Jeffrey has parents who have attended university in comparison to Rebekah who does not. Both students were contemplating university as a post-18 choice, even if not their definite decision.

5.3.5: Conclusion to the section

Although the data on journal entries is a relatively small data set, it has provided an interesting insight in some thoughts and decision-making processes that have taken place outside of the arranged meetings during the project. This data gives access to some of the decision-making and knowledge that was accumulated by students during their time in sixth form, over their summer break and the research they conduct in their own time about their post-18 destinations that may go otherwise unnoticed.

6.0 Students' Decision-Making and Support for University Application: Interview Data

The student interviews were conducted at three time points in their post-16 studies, coinciding with the university application process, the first in July before the summer break, the second just before the application deadline, and the final interview after the application period had ended. The interviews explored the students' intentions regarding university application or alternative routes, and sought to elicit their thinking and decision-making processes. They address the three research questions, investigating what influences their post 18 choices, what social networks may shape their decision-making, and what access do they have to information for this decision-making.

The interview analysis followed an inductive process which resulted in a clustering of the data into five over-arching themes, as outlined in table 26 below.

Theme	Definition
Influences on Decision-Making	Comments which refer to things or people which have influenced their choices about post-18 options

Access to Information and Support	Comments which refer to availability and access to information to inform post-18 decision-making and support
Social Networks	Comments which refer to social networks to which they have access
Decision-Making Thoughts and Reflections	Comments which refer directly to decisions which the students have made or are planning to make, and any comments about those decisions.
Personal Characteristics	Comments which provide information about the students' background

Table 26: Interview Data: the top-level themes and their definitions.

The theme, *Personal Characteristics*, contained factual information about students' lives such as their subject choices post-16, or whether their parents went to university. This information was used to inform the student portraits in Chapter 4 and the interpretation of student comments in this chapter, where relevant. This chapter will present and discuss the first three themes: *Influences on Decision-Making; Access to Information and Support*; and *Social Networks*, exploring those things which seemed to be shaping their decision-making about going to university or not. The fourth theme, *Decision-Making Thoughts and Reflections*, will form the substantive analysis presented in Chapter 7.

6.1   Influences on Decision-Making

This theme captured the students' comments on both people and/or things which appear to have been influential in shaping their decisions about whether to attend university or not. There were eight sub-themes composing this code, of which, perhaps not surprisingly, family and school were significantly more important than any other influences. The sub-codes are outlined in Table 27: the table also presents an overview of how the codes were distributed to give a sense of both the representativeness of that sub-theme of the full set of students, and the frequency with which that sub-theme occurred. The column headed 'Interviews' shows in how many of the 36 interviews this sub-theme was present, and the column headed 'Occurrences' shows how often a student utterance was coded

to that theme. This pattern of presentation will be used consistently throughout this chapter.

Sub-theme	Definition	Interviews	Occurrences
Family	Comments discussing how family have influenced decision-making	34	111
School	Comments which suggest that school, or performance at school have influenced decision-making	36	124
Teachers	Comments discussing how teachers have influenced decision-making	9	13
Friends	Comments discussing how friends have influenced decision-making, positively or negatively.	20	39
Visiting Speakers	Comments which refer to the influence of visiting speakers from university	6	6
Open Days	Comments which reference how attendance at a University Open Day shaped their decisions	8	13
Financial Issues	Comments which express how financial issues may be influencing decisions made	27	47
Other	Comments which refer to other influences on their decisions.	23	35

Table 27: Interview Data: the sub-codes for Influences on Decision-Making

6.1.1 Family

Three quarters of middle-class students discussed parents 'pushing' them towards certain pathways or decisions, in comparison to under half of working-class students. For example, both Jane and Ailayah discussed being 'pushed' somewhat in a certain direction by their parents, either by going directly to university post-18 (Ailayah), or by being pushed towards a more elite university

(Jane). This is in contrast to both Kalen and Mia X, who were pushed towards a less elite university and social mobility (Kalen) and parents who were somewhat against the idea of university as a post-18 option all-together (Mia X), both of which were financially-driven.   In her first interview Jane, a middle-class student, discussed how her dad '*tries to push*' her towards going to the University of Oxford. She later went on to say that her mum similarly had pushed her towards a certain university, although she later retracted this stating '*my mum has been pushing me, not pushing me but she has been saying she prefers Nottingham to Bristol*' (Jane, interview 1). Similar to Jane, John also discussed his parents and their '*push…well not push*' towards an apprenticeship route post-18. Both Jane and John seemed to imply that these were influences on their post-18 decisions, but ultimately it seemed the final decision would be theirs and they appreciated the advice. However, Ailayah was firm during interview 2 that her parents' pushing her towards going straight to university post-18 and away from Ailayah's interest in pursuing a gap year was met with her stating '*you can't tell me what to do*' (Ailayah, Interview 2). In terms of working-class students, Kieran, Mia X and Kalen similarly discussed ways in which their parents 'pushed' them towards particular post-18 choices. Unlike Jane above, whose dad pushed her towards a more elite university, Kalen's parents had pushed him away from a Russell group university and towards a local non-Russell group. Kalen's parents had no previous experience of university and this may have contributed to a lack of knowledge about what parents such as Jane's parents find appealing about a more elite university. Kalen stated: '*my mum and dad were the ones telling me to go Marjon anyway… because … when I was saying Bristol they were like, it's going to be a waste of money*' (Interview 3). Kalen had mentioned in a previous interview about a desire to study away that had changed by the third interview, based on the expense of travelling and living away from home. The financial issues of moving away, coupled with less understanding of how universities differ from one another could potentially be seen as a barrier that working-class students are more prone to face than their middle-class classmates based on the above example. Mia X also discussed her parents' aversion to her chosen university pathway, explaining that her mother was concerned about the finances and was '*a pessimist about it sometimes'.* But she also adds that '*I think it's just due to the fact she doesn't want me to move away'* (Interview 1). Kieran shared that his mum '*always like pushes me to do stuff*', but this seemed to be positive

as she was to described to '*always tries to get me to do stuff*' and this example of a push was generally discussed as more of a much needed '*kick…up the ass sometimes*' (Kieran, Interview 1).

Interestingly, along with mention of either a gentle or firm push from parents with regards to students' next steps post-18, was also mention of a similar push from grandparents. Just under half of the working-class students, and only working-class students, mentioned their grandparents' role in pushing them towards a specific post-18 route. Kieran often mentioned during interviews his family's desire for him to be the first one in the family to go to university. The most keen for this to happen and people that Kieran really hoped to make proud were his Gran and Grandad. In his first interview Kieran stated that: '*my gran and grandad always, like, influence 'cos they want me to go university to be the first person in my family to go university - so they're always telling me*'. He also stated that they influenced his A-levels by which ones they wanted him to do or not do based on how 'good' they were. Finally, he stated that his Gran has '*always been on my back like about University cos she always loved me to go there*' (Kieran, interview 1). Approval and making his grandparents proud always seemed high in Kieran's influence for university. Like Kieran, Mia X discussed her grandad '*especially has always been like pushing me*': this seemed supportive for Mia X as she often discussed, as above, that her mum in particular had been more in favour of a different post-18 pathway, whereas Mia X seemed keen to pursue a university education. Mia's grandad similarly had great expectations for her with regards to pursuing a university education, stating '*make you a little professor Mia*'.

A quarter of working-class students discussed how they were influenced by their siblings' experiences of their own post-18 route. Dave and Rebekah talked about the significant role that their older brother and sister's university experience had on their own desire to pursue university. For Rebekah, the usefulness of her sister's experience provided her with useful insider knowledge about universities (Interview 3), including help with the application based on her experience (Interview 1). Rebekah also stated that university provided her sister with better prospects than the rest of her family based, in Rebekah's opinion, solely on her degree: '*just for having a degree…she got like such a well-paid job compared to everyone else*' (Interview 2). As was the case for Rebekah, a source of influence

towards pursuing university for Dave was based on his older brother's experiences of university. This experience influenced Dave not only in wanting to pursue university, but wanting to pursue a Russell Group as well as wanting to pursue the exact same university as his older brother, '*I'll probably go Cardiff if I get there cos my brothers there cos my brother's there*' (Interview 3). This demonstrates the strong impact Dave's brother's presence at the university has on his decision-making. Students seemed to value this relevant and recent experience from a network close to them, allowing them to hear first-hand from someone with experience and question the suitability of the choice for themselves.

As well as siblings influencing students towards a university education, there was also the case of John, a middle-class student, whose brother had an influence on him wanting to pursue an apprenticeship based on his brother's positive experience of the apprenticeship route. John discussed during his first interview the positives and perks that his brother had received due to his apprenticeship route and these seemed appealing to him and his decision-making process. He also shared during his final interview, when asked how he had narrowed down his final decision, that '*the fact my brother does an apprenticeship and he's on good money and really enjoys it and we're like really similar*' (Interview 3). For John it seemed that making the same choice as his brother who he is similar to would end up also being a good route for him, and perhaps a safe choice based on the happiness it brought his brother.

When it came to making an informed choice about post-18 routes, the experience of wider family members of post-18 options was often discussed. This was especially the case when it came to experience of university. With regards to working-class students, 3 out of 8 working class students discussed wider family with regards to their post-18 options of university or the process in comparison to half of middle-class students. A quarter of working-class students and a quarter of middle-class students actively turned to wider family for advice or guidance about university. Sometimes those family members would provide a nudge in the direction of university. This was the case for Mia who stated during her first interview:

'my uncle works at Cambridge university…so when I did get all my grades and everything at GCSE he said they were a really good set…he said it would

be good to come to sixth (form) cos he knows that I've always wanted to do stuff like that anyway cos he's um…he's one of the high up ones in the family like the one that's actually gone really far.' (Mia, Interview 1).

It seemed that Mia's uncle saw potential in Mia with regards to pursuing university based on her academic achievement in her GCSE grades. He also seemed in a position to know what makes good grades based on his insider university knowledge as an employee at a prestigious university. His input and position within a university seemed to act as validation for Mia that she might be capable of attending university, which she may not have felt prior to her GCSE grades.

As shown above, family and their experiences can play a pivotal role in the students' post-18 decision making. This can be either via positive experience or negative experience. For some students, it leads to them wanting to follow in their family's footsteps, as is the case with Mia above and her uncle's university experience. For others, a family member's experience can lead a student to appreciate that what may suit their family member in life or with their post-18 choice, may not necessarily be the choice they wish to make. This leads to students wanting to learn from family and what they consider to be their mistakes.

John and Kalen both shared a desire to follow in their families' footsteps when it came to future career plans or post-18 choices. The previous section explored John's interest in pursuing an apprenticeship based on his brother's experience and their similar shared interests. This is also the case when it comes to John discussing the influence his parents have on him and his desire to work hard in life like they have done. In his final interview John discusses following in his dad's footsteps in terms of the decisions he has made rather than his dad's job, *'I go to work with him so I know I wouldn't wanna do that…I think he works very hard…so it's more of like the decisions he's made rather than his actual job'* (John, Interview 3). He then goes to talk about his mum and dad's hard-working nature and work ethic and how they have provided him with good role models to inspire him to work hard be driven just like them. *'I'm quite driven…I've got good role models…my brothers the same…we're all really similar as a family'* (John, Interview 3). Kalen is influenced by a desire to follow in his mum's footsteps in terms of a possible career path of running a pub in the future. However, despite this desire to follow in his mum's footsteps, this actually became an example of

learning from his family via his mum's advice. Kalen shared that his mum advised against the idea by stating that '*it's a dying trade*' (Interview 2).

For some the positive learning from their own family members' experiences was a recognition that their parents' careers and choices were limited by not having attended university.   Poppy and Mia X were the most outspoken in terms of learning from family during their interviews. Poppy talked about being the first in her family to attend university and how this was crucial to her desire to have a career in life rather than going from '*job to job*'. When thinking about her post-18 options in comparison to her family's routes after school she stated:

> '*I've learnt from my family they left…they didn't go to sixth form or anything to do with A-levels but they left school at sixteen, like did GCSEs and then went straight into like a job because it was money like straight away. But now like my mum says she doesn't have a career cos she never got into a career…she just goes from like job to job…cos she's got a bit stuck into just working.*' (Interview 1)

It seems that Poppy's family's choices following their school experience, particularly her mum's, had caused her to explore and research post-18 routes that would give her more of a chance towards the career she wants.

Similarly, Mia X shared her own experience of learning from her parents' struggles which brought about a desire to better herself because of them:

> '*…obviously my mum didn't go to university and neither did my dad and stuff and obviously I've always known they've like struggled for money and I just thought I wanna like better myself for like when I'm older, I'll have more money more of like a stable sort of future and almost like a solid sort of job and career…*' (Mia X, Interview 2).

Mia X discusses the appeal of financial stability in comparison to the money struggles her parents have faced. For these students pursuing a university education may mean the difference between a career or a job, and perhaps more reassurance of financial security.

6.1.2 School

As with family influence, school influence was a significant factor on students'

decision-making, particularly in terms of the academic aspects of decision-making. Students' past experiences in school of particular subjects often shaped their post-18 options. One example was their perceptions of their attainment in their A-level or BTEC subjects. This was equally true for these students, regardless of social background. A perception of success in a subject, perhaps unsurprisingly, led students to consider that subject post-18. For example, Dave stated: "*What I'm good at in school is the science-y stuff so probably engineering would be a good fit I reckon*" (Interview 1). Grade predictions by teachers also had the potential to influence post-18 decision-making. During her first interview Jane mentioned that her previous grades had influenced her aspirations - "*if I got lower grades then maybe I wouldn't of put my ambitions quite so high as they are*". Like Jane, in her third interview, Poppy discussed how her target grades enabled her to push herself by applying for more aspirational university choices.

As well as the realities of having the right entry grades, there was also the practical encouragement to go to university that was provided by the school. All 12 students made reference to how information provided by the school had influenced their decision-making. During their first interview Jeffrey, Joe, Kieran, Mia, Dave and Kalen discussed how the school provided them with information on University specifically, that helped influence their decision. This was in the form of the school organising university students coming in, *'we've had talks from like uni students and things…talking about university life it's like actually yeah that does sound like something I think I would enjoy'* (Jeffrey, interview 1), organising seminars about university (Joe, interview 1), the school head of sixth form giving an insight into what university would be like, as to make it less daunting for the students (Kieran and Mia, interview 1). It also included learning about the next steps regarding university, *'we're doing a HE week in a few weeks a month I think where you'll learn all that like what to do, I'll learn that then'* (Kieran, interview 1), including the application, as well as being pointed in the right direction for websites and university course information, *'they've helped like showed me like uni frog and…they show different ways to like find out courses and stuff which is useful'* (Dave, interview 1). For students like Kalen, the school provided more help and information about university and applying than parents and family could (interview 1). The schools' influence extended further than just information about university; however, some students discussed how their school

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helped influence other decision-making and opened their eyes to other post-18 choices beyond university. Poppy discussed how the school helped her choose her post-18 pathway by providing information about different options (interview 1). Ailayah and Mia, similarly to Poppy, discussed how her school supported her and provided information about options (interview 1); Mia also talked specifically about feeling not just pushed towards university but having access to seminars and information of other options too (interview 1). Rebekah felt the school influenced her with information that reassured her of her own ideas post-18 (interview 1).

Dave felt the school did not have much of an influence; however, he felt the trips and tours of a local university changed his negative assumptions about the university to him thinking "*it looks pretty good*" (Dave, interview 2). Alternatively John seemed to feel school influence played a big part in the possibility of university. During interview 2 he mentioned that he was not contemplating university as a post-18 choice until his school influenced him to consider it by discussing it with him frequently and providing a good source of information. '*I wasn't thinking about uni until the school talked about it loads…and then you do start to think 'oh well it could be a good idea''* (John, interview 2). Joe discussed being helped with things to look for when choosing universities, which helped influence his choices. Rebekah received information on budgeting and university finance which helped reassure her and enable her to consider university as a possible choice.

Although schools tended towards influencing students towards university as a direct route following their sixth form education, this was not the case for all students. During his second interview Jeffrey again discussed his school's influence on his post-18 choices through the means of organising university students to come and speak at his school. He discussed that these students helped him to see there are other options, as one student offered a different perspective by sharing their gap year experience which appealed to Jeffrey. Jeffrey discussed this providing him with more of a breathing space and room to consider university more thoroughly, 'the space to clear my head is the main…is gonna be the main factor in helping me decide what I wanna do' (Jeffrey West, middle class student, interview 3). Although this could potentially still lead Jeffrey

to university, it could be argued to be a less linear pathway there.

Ailayah potentially received some of the most influential support during her second interview when making her post-18 decision. The school pointed Ailayah in the direction of a former student who pursued a similar path post-18 to the one Ailayah was contemplating. This coupled with the school's hands-on support when her head of sixth form discussed that he did not think the course she was applying for was for her and her interests, so helped her to make an informed decision on potential post-18 course choices. Like Ailayah and from the same school, Kieran discussed in his final interview that he had received valuable and hands-on support from his school. Similarly to Ailayah, Kieran felt he had chosen the wrong course for him when choosing a physiotherapy course over sports therapy. Due to his interest primarily being in sports and knowing he would want a career in this in the future, he wanted to ensure his subject area would reflect this and feared that physiotherapy could lead him in another direction. Unfortunately he only discovered this quite last minute but his school helped him to change his course and find a course more suitable to him. Kieran also felt he got support with practical course information, personal statement assistance and that he felt he did not know anything much about the process without that school support that he felt "*massively helped really*" (Kieran, interview 3). Other students during their third interview shared their experiences of school support that helped them with post-18 next steps. Working class students such as Mia and Poppy, discussed how they were influenced on their next steps with information they would not have had access to without the schools' support. Mia felt that she "*wouldn't have known what on earth I was doing*" without her school's information and practical support when applying to university, due to her parents having a lack of practical advice to offer her about university (Mia, Interview 3). Similarly in interview 3 Poppy discussed being made more aware of what to look for and support on finances and budgeting that she would not have known without the school's information. Kalen received practical support with his university interview preparation which helped him have a good interview with his university choice and influenced him in terms of confidence during the interview and application process as a result.

School influence was sometimes about motivating the student to pursue their

post-18 pathways. Influencing student self-belief was an important role of the school. Some students needed reassurance during their time at sixth form that they were pursuing the right path for them and some needed that little push through pastoral support and care that helped student confidence and motivation. This form of influence seemed particularly important to the working-class students. During his first interview, Kalen discussed the encouragement his school provided to persevere with his studies - "*every time I've sort of had a wobble and thought oh I don't want to do sixth form anymore…they always like pick you back up and well sort of help and they say like keep your eye on like the end goal not now*". During her second interview Mia also discussed how her school encouraged and motivated her to look at universities that were further away, she discussed wanting to stay but former students stating: "*you would be amazing to get away*" (Mia, interview 2), and if it was not for that encouragement and seeing former school students enjoying their university experiences she shared that she would not have looked at going away to university at all.

Poppy and Rebekah both discussed during their final interview that their schools also provided them with encouragement and support to influence them to believe in themselves to pursue university as an option. Poppy discussed the school helping her to believe in herself and realise that university was not an unreachable concept. She also discussed feeling as though her school wanted her to get there and to keep pushing and not lose motivation. Likewise Rebekah described feeling as though she received moral support from her school that she could do it when it came to her next steps.

However, there were some students who felt that school had not influenced their decisions, or had a negative view of the kind of influence exerted upon them. Jane, for example, argued that school for her was a place to learn but not to '*shape anything*'. She did also express a view that schools coerced students towards university, saying

> "*university's shoved down everyone's throats…there's no other option…I've got a couple of friends who don't wanna go university but their grades are really good and their teachers are like 'well why not?'…it's either university or nothing*" (Jane, interview 2).

Like Jane, John discussed during his second interview that the school '*pumps university at you*'. Poppy mentioned feeling pushed towards a Russell Group University because of her predicted ability to do well. Poppy discussed being drawn to a non-Russell Group University to which the school responded that it was '*not quite Cardiff is it*'. The push to university was mentioned also by Rebekah who stated that there was more talks on university and less on apprenticeships and that she felt mainly guided towards university. For Ailayah, the issue was being pointed in the direction of what she felt was an irrelevant future career for her. Ailayah had previously discussed her interest in criminology or forensic sciences at university, but despite this she felt as though her school was pushing her towards being a teacher. She reported that "*my other head of sixth form told me to go and be an English teacher…I was like I'd rather not sir*" (Ailiyah, interview 2).

It seemed that it was the middle class students who were more out-spoken or had had more experience of feeling negatively about the school's role in their decision-making. During the final interview, half of the middle class students discussed these negative influences, compared with only one working class student.   Jane and John had been vocal about this throughout all three interviews. In her final interview Jane discussed unwelcome advice that was not suited to each students' needs, as well as feeling pressured to make a certain university choice by her career advisor. Having opted for that choice, Jane expresses regret, feeling she had wasted her chance of a different university. Jane also reported that she knew some students had lied to the school to avoid making a university application by pretending to have thought-through gap year plans (Jane, interview 3). Mia X described feeling pushed aside and not given support she when needed to help influence her future plans, arguing that "*this school's as much good as a chocolate teapot*" (Mia X, interview 3). Generally Mia X had discussed her teachers and support in a positive way, the day of this interview she seemed a little agitated when she entered the interview this time. In his final interview, John reiterated that he felt university was pushed on him - "*school kind of showed me that I didn't wanna go uni…cos they just pump it down your throat all the time and in the end I was kinda just like…just stop talking about it like it's not the only option…I know like it looks good for the school if loads of*

people go but …they kinda just showed that it wasn't for me" (John, interview 3). John did, however, make it clear during his second interview that he felt this negative influencing was directly from the school in general and not from his own teachers who he felt '*do what's best for you but school pushes uni'* (John, interview 2).

6.1.3   Teachers

Although obviously teacher influence is strongly linked to school influence, there was a group of comments by students which referred to the influence of particular teachers. These comments were distinct from the School sub-theme, because they were not about generic school influence, often through Heads of Sixth Form or Heads of Careers, but were instead about a specific teacher who had in some way shaped the decision-making.

For John, it is the relationship he has with particular teachers which is significant: he says directly that '*teacher and pupil relationships are huge'* and that '*there's always teachers you trust'*. He explains that '*my form tutor is more of like a mate … I just talk to him about anything 'cos he's quite young and he likes football as well'* .The relationship with his biology teacher, who has taught him since year 8, seems very important to him – he mentions her three times in one interview – and again the nature of the relationship seems particularly key.   He says, '*I get on really well with her and it's just really relaxed … it makes the lessons less tense as well … she knows we can have a laugh she knows what I'm like as a person'*. John contrasts these constructive relationships with unspecified '*older teachers'*, who '*think they're there just to make, tell you this information … and it's a bit mind numbing'*.

For some, specific teachers have influenced their subject choices. John claims that '*I wouldn't have done biology A level if it wasn't for my teacher'*.   Jeffrey compares his experiences with two teachers and how it has altered how he feels about their respective university subjects. He was '*put off'* choosing engineering as a degree route because he found the teaching '*quite boring'*, but in contrast he has enjoyed chemistry because '*I've always really liked the teachers that I've had, which has probably made me more interested in the subject, so it might be*

why I'm looking at doing something chemical-related in the future'. Rebekah spoke of how she talked to a teacher who had done the same course she was considering, and Kieran explained that his consideration of sports therapy as a university route derived from his enjoyment of PE and his like of his PE teacher.

There was also evidence from some students who noted the direct support and influence of particular teachers on their choices of universities or courses. Jane commented on a friend who had spoken to one of her teachers who had been '*very very supportive and she gave her lots of ideas and stuff'*, and when Jane herself was looking at university choices, another teacher had reminded Jane that there were '*a lot more important things'* to consider other than whether a university was a top-fifteen university. John noted that his PE teacher had given him '*an insight on what kind of things'* would be asked at a university interview, and he also linked his '*good relationships'* with teachers to the likelihood of securing good references from them. Perhaps more significantly, he also comments on how '*some of my teachers believed in me*', when he didn't really believe in himself – again, he mentions his biology teacher who would hold him back after lessons and '*ask me like what my plans are, and try and encourage me to stay'.* Without this, John suggests he would have 'have just been working in a low paid apprenticeship, just dossing about really'. Kieran talks of how a particular teacher helped him with his personal statement, and also explains that his PE teacher had found out information about sports therapy courses at universities because he knew Kieran liked sport.

6.1.4 Friends

One further source of influence for students was their friends' or friends' social networks' experiences of post-18 choices. An example of these networks that influence is given by Jeffrey, a middle-class student, in his first interview where he reflected on his friends' brothers and sisters who had been to university and enjoyed it. During the second interview, like Jeffrey, Mia discussed how friends and their social networks had a positive experience of a post-18 choice and how this had influenced her own decision-making. Seeing people who were scared to go away, similar to herself, that were now enjoying themselves made her also consider going away to university like them. However, some students revealed

experiences that had deterred them from certain post-18 options. During her second interview, Jane discussed a friend's gap year experience and how this had discouraged her from pursuing this path herself: "*I know a couple of friends who took a year out and then went to university and they struggle with the content now because they're out of...the learning environment*" (Jane, middle-class student, interview 2). Kalen also shared: "*I've got a friend that I worked with...and she went to Falmouth University and she's already quit because she was... she hadn't been to uni... education for two years*" (Kalen, working-class student, interview 2). Both Kalen and Jane had spoken to friends with experiences of being out of education and the impact this had on their learning when they returned to education, which might have influenced their final decisions not to postpone Higher Education, rather than take a year out. During the final interview, Rebekah shared that she had heard people complain that their university courses were different from what they were expecting, due to not looking into their option enough, "*and that would not be nice if I have to study for three years*". This suggests Rebekah was thinking through her options more carefully because of her friends' experiences.

Approximately half of the students reflected on how they were choosing either the same or a similar pathway as their friends, and this was independent of social class. In her first interview, Ailayah explained that she discussed her choices with friend, and another student Kieran said, "*we did the exact same things*". A lot of students discussed the influence of former students, from the year above them, who they considered friends. Kieran mentioned within his second and final interview the influence of those students' post-18 choices and potential advice that they offered: "*the kinda year above...I still speak to some of them and they're telling me how uni is...and like what it's like so they recommended it cos they like it at the moment*". For Kieran, the influence of his friends in the year above and drawing on their experience seemed to make a significant impact on his preparation for the application process of university:

> "*I was in my first year and then they was all like applying like for uni…few of 'em went to uni and then told me what how hard it was in the second year for sixth form and like what I had to do so...it's kinda helped me like wake up a bit and see... like what I had to do... to like go uni and apply for*

it" (Kieran, working-class student, interview 3)

Mia also commented in her second interview on being close to the year above and going to them for advice and influences about post-18 choices. During the final interview, working-class students Dave, Poppy and Mia X discussed their decision to apply to university. Dave specifically mentioned how he was planning to attend Cardiff University as a few of his friends attended the university. Mia X mentioned her and her friends attending universities nearby and the plans they had made to meet up together when they arrive. Jeffrey discussed he and some of his friends' decision to take a gap year because they were *"not quite sure what they wanna do wanna take some time off...I think they're fairly happy with my decision"* (Jeffrey, middle-class student, interview 3).

As well as friends, students' partners were also mentioned as influences on decision-making. Three students, all female, Jane (a middle-class, rural student), Poppy (a working class, rural student) and Mia (a working-class, urban student) mentioned their partners within an interview. For Jane this was briefly mentioned, by stating how her partner was important person in her life (interview 1). During their third interviews, Mia and Poppy mentioned the roles of their partners in terms of post-18 decision-making and their experiences were opposites. Mia discussed how she was no longer with her partner and, when looking back over her Tree of Life during the final interview, she reflected on how her partner used to take up a lot of her time and now she had more time for herself. She discussed that her partner had not been supportive of the prospect of her moving away and how with his influence gone, she can now think for herself more:

> *"he was older so he's like...'oh going to uni?' and I'm like 'yeah'....'you gonna move away?' I was like 'yeah'...he was like 'why?' cos I want to....and it's just weird how...one person can influence everything that you think...cos they make you feel like...no don't leave me...okay"* (Mia, Interview 3).

Poppy, on the other hand, had a contrasting experience. She reflected that *"my boyfriend's really supportive he said … obviously he's like excited for me to go off...although I get a lot of people that are like 'ahhh how's your boyfriend going*

to cope when you go away'...I'm like uh huh I don't care...I'm going to anyway...he doesn't have to cope" (Poppy, interview 3). Poppy had found people assume that her partner would be against her leaving, but in fact he was supportive of her independent decision-making.

Some students, however, revealed that they were making their own independent decisions, regardless of what their friends said. In her second and final interview, Mia discussed how she had started her journey being influenced by friends:

> "*I went through a really big phase of being influenced by my friends and because that's what they wanted to do I was a bit like yeah I'm really interested in that and then...came to think about it when I started year 13 and I was like no I need to do my own thing and I don't wanna do that like I just can't*" (Mia, working-class student, interview 2)

However, it ended with her making a choice based on her own interests, which subsequently her friends questioned, "*they look at me like oh my God why are you doing child nursing...you're mad...I'm just like ah I love it...whereas they all wanna do forensics and I'm like ah cool*" (Working-class, urban student, interview 3). During her final interview, Rebekah says her friends were slightly critical of her post-18 choice but she was making her own decision:

> "*some think that...maybe psychology is not a good route to go down because obviously...it's not like a promised job at the end of it...like teaching or dentistry...so I think some of them are a bit like...you're not really too sure you're gonna come out with a useful degree at the end...but I still did it anyway*" (Rebekah, working-class, urban student).

Similarly, Kalen discussed the negative opinions his friends had on his local university choice, stating they thought it was not a good university and they would not choose it because "*I don't wanna tell people I went to that University*" (Kalen, working-class student, interview 3). Middle-class student, Ailayah, felt her friends tried to influence her to not move away to university, despite her wanting to go. She described an initial fear of moving away and her friends forgetting her, and being the only one of her friends to move away. However, as with Rebekah and

Kalen, Ailayah made her decisions post-18 independently from her friends' influence: "*they don't want me to move but I want to so...they can't really change my mind*" (Interview 3).

6.1.5 Talks from University Staff or Students

Talks from University staff or students were predominantly commented on by students from the Rural school, and one student from the Urban school. It was also most commented on by working class students (3/8) in comparison to middle class students (1/4). Middle class student, Jeffrey, discussed in both his first and final interviews, how the input from a visiting university student had influenced his decision making. The student had discussed her experience of a gap year, leading to Jeffrey also deciding on gap year, because "*she was quite helpful in deciding 'cos she was like, these are the good points, these are the bad points...like I could see, as opposed to trying to come up with the good points and bad points myself...you know someone who's actually gone and done it*" (Jeffrey, Interview 3). For working class students, talks from university representatives were influential. Poppy discussed how people came into her school for assemblies to provide advice on budgeting and accommodation and noted that "*I feel like that's better advice*" (Interview 3). Dave mentioned that university students had visited the school in assemblies and that Cardiff had visited "*so yeah Cardiff looked pretty good again*" (Interview 3). Mia X, like Dave and Poppy, commented on a visit from a local university and how this had helped with her decision-making. The Urban school students tended to comment on visits from local universities, whereas the Rural school had more of a mix and range of universities, including Russell Groups.

6.1.6 Open Days

Open days were an important influencing factor in shaping decisions about university choices. Middle class student, John, discussed how important it was to visit prospective universities: "*I think you you're stupid to put down a choice for uni and not go...if you're gonna go uni you have to go to an open day*" (John, Interview 3). Similarly, Jane visited her potential university choices in an attempt to narrow down her decision. She was fortunate enough to visit several universities on open days, and attributed her decision was because of open days. Her open day experience at Manchester University made her decide not to apply

there. However, Exeter University became her favourite choice after she visited: *"I was set on going Bristol and then I went to Exeter and I actually felt so comfortable...everything came together in that open day...and actually that was the open day that I wasn't going to go to...that one day completely shaped where I'm gonna go"* (Jane, interview 3). Working class students also shared their experience of open days. Many of the working class students discussed the opportunity of open days being arranged for them and afforded to them via their school. Rebekah, Dave and Joe, all specifically mentioned open days they had attended with their school. Rebekah, Mia X, Kieran and Dave also mentioned attending open days independently from the school. The middle class students did not mention school organised open days, despite attending the same school as some of the working class students who did. As with the middle class students, most working class students reflected on the usefulness of these open days in their decision-making. For example, Joe stated: *"it gives an insight into what it's like there...and what to expect from the course and just what's...the staff are like in general"* (Joe, Interview 3).

6.1.7 Financial Issues

For many students, post-18 decision-making was affected by financial issues, especially in relation to the university pathway. The main points arising within this sub-theme relate to student debt; the costs of moving away; and potential future financial gain. It is important to note that students were directly asked during some interviews about their thoughts on student debt, therefore, this was not always an issue raised independently by the student. Nonetheless, of all the financial issues raised by students, this was the most recurrent issue. In the first interview, Dave observed that '*the debt thing doesn't sound great'* and discussed how apprenticeships provide an opportunity to achieve your degree whilst also earning money. John, too saw benefits in a degree apprenticeship route because he could '*get paid to go to university rather than pay to go to university',* whilst Kieran admitted that the debt was '*kind of scary'*. Ailayah felt the pros outweighed the cons because although it was '*expensive'*, university would result in a '*better paying job'*. Mia X commented that '*the debt doesn't scare me'* and knew that '*obviously you don't have to pay it back until you're over a certain amount'*.

Overall, by interview 2, most students seemed more informed and as a result less worried about the debt side of university. Dave, Jane, Jeffrey and Ailayah all commented on not being too concerned by the prospect of university debt. Jeffrey commented that he accepted student debt as a part of studying and that it was '*future me's problem*'. Poppy, Joe, Kieran and John were all examples of how access to information had reassured them with regards to student debt and changed their opinions about it. Joe explained that reassurance and information about student debt gained from his tutor had made him feel '*it's a bit less daunting than how it's made out in the news*'. Poppy discussed how the prospect of student debt did influence her decision at first but then as time went on she gained more of an understanding: '*when I like very first started looking at unis it did because I didn't really understand the whole like, 'you don't pay it back until you earn so much' or like whatever*'. However, in interview 3 , Poppy says that the '*initial thought of nine grand a year .. thing scares a lot of people into thinking, ah, I won't bother.*' She also makes it clear that the financial issues have been something that her family have talked about: '*a family like you always think, ah, university's too expensive, you don't wanna go through that, but I don't think it's it is expensive but there's like ways around it*'.

It did seem, however, that these students had varying degrees of knowledge about university fees and student debt. Once students understood that the debt would not have to be paid back until a certain point of financial earning, most of the students felt that the debt would be worth it – as Kieran said '*it's a lot of money but … it's worth it at the end.*' John, however, describes university debt as '*a burden*' and also shares, '*that thought in the back of your mind of you're gonna be paying... pretty much…until you're in the ground*'. Mia also expresses the view that the debt was '*a lot of money*' but then reasons it may be worth it and '*you don't always have to pay that back*'. Their responses do suggest, however, that some students need more information about student debt. In his second interview, Dave seemed much more at ease about student debt because the repayment process had been explained at school, and yet was still not fully sure about it: '*if you don't even earn enough I think it just goes away, don't it*?' In the final interview, Rebekah revealed that she had '*thought it was free*', and Poppy recognises that

'without hearing information from school and like proper looking into it I don't think that I would have realised that it's not as scary like as scary an amount of money as people think…yeah and I think it'll scare a lot of people off especially like people that don't have people that have already gone to university'

The working-class students, like Poppy, were more reliant on information from tutors in school, underlining the role of the school in post 16 decision-making.

One factor that seemed to combat worries about student debt was the potential financial gain for them in the future. Many students felt, that even though the prospect of student debt was daunting, that if pursuing university led to them having a job they were more likely to enjoy and better financial earning potential they felt it was worth the risk. Ailayah argued that *'it probably is worth it 'cause you get, at the end of the day, what you pay fo*r'. There was a strong sense that university would lead to a '*good job'* (Dave) or '*a better job'* (Rebekah) that earned a higher salary and '*you'll be doing the job you enjoy'* (Kieran). Jane described university as a way for her to have '*the best chance afterwards'*. The phrase '*worth it'* recurred repeatedly, suggesting that for many of these students the chance of greater success following their degree is worth the impending debt. However, it seemed that middle class students had an understanding of this gain throughout all three interviews, whereas the working class students tended to add their positivity about financial gain as a follow up to a comment where they alluded to being somewhat concerned about university debt.

Another financial issue that several students raised was the expense that would come with moving away from home. Moving away to attend university can open doors to more choices of universities as well as access to more prestigious universities. The affordability of this seemed to be a significant factor, predominantly for the working class students. Poppy stated in her first interview that despite bursaries that would assist with her moving away that it was still expensive and harder to access for not only '*people that don't have the money but people that are like a bit...vulnerable, like it's the moving away and stuff…so I think it's a good opportunity it's just sometimes hard to access'*. Irrespective of

Poppy's worry of the costs of moving away, she was considering moving away and said she was '*already saving for uni'*.

Other working class students, Kieran, Joe and Kalen had decided to either live at home or not move too far away to save on costs. During their third interviews, Kieran and Joe both discussed their decision apply to a local university: '*it's like a lot like cheaper…financially and cos like you have to pay for accommodation if you move away'* (Kieran).   Joe explained that even though he would have to contribute financially to the household if he stayed with his dad, that this cost would be far less than if he moved away. In interview 3, Kalen said *'I do not have the money…to be moving…very far away anyway'*, even though in his previous interview, he had said that he was planning on moving away to university regardless of the cost.   The middle-class students seemed less financially constrained. John did observe that by staying at home he could '*do his own thing'* and '*save a lot of money'*, but the comment did not appear to influenced by any financial problems, simply a possible financial benefit. Ailayah is dismissive of the student debt – '*it don't matter, does it*?' and talks about how her mother paid for her university application fees. Jane discussed that her maintenance loan would only cover her living costs at university initially, however, she was reassured that her parents would be able to send money up to her if she was struggling financially. The contrast between Kalen and Jane is stark.   Kalen had previously been very keen to move away, as was Jane. However, Kalen did not have the same access to financial aid from his parents as Jane did, which meant that his decision on location was made for him.

6.1.8 Other Influences

As well as the influences on decision-making mentioned above, students described 'other' influences on their decision-making. These included inspirational figures: for example, middle-class student Jane mentioned the impact of "*women who've appeared very strong despite their field*" (interview 1), such as Margaret Thatcher and Emma Watson. The section also included people who had an influence on decision-making outside of the students' usual social networks. This was predominantly mentioned by middle-class students, with three quarters of middle-class students mentioning these other sources of influence, compared with just 1 out of 8 working-class students. Examples of this

included middle-class students Jane and Jeffrey discussing contacts made through work or work experience that had first-hand experience in an area of interest to them which had influenced their decision-making process. John also discussed the value for him of contact with people with first-hand experience, noting that "*you can read about it but when people actually tell you it's good...you believe it more*" (John, middle-class, interview 3). The only working-class student to mention sources of influence outside of the usual social networks was Poppy, who discussed the impact of online videos of university students' experiences of university and how this was a potential influence by seeing university from someone who had experienced it themselves.

There were also a cluster of comments where students expressed their desire to make their own decisions and not to be influenced by the views of others. Working-class students Mia, Mia X and Poppy discussed having their own interests in mind and therefore making decisions independently. This was also the case for middle-class students Jane and Jeffrey. John (middle-class student) and Rebekah (working-class student) were quite vocal about resisting outsider input. Rebekah stated in her first interview that she would not let anyone influence her as she wanted to go her own way. She later discussed in her final interview that she would ask for outsider opinion on her decision-making but was only interested in these opinions if they would tell her what she wanted to hear. Finally, Rebekah stated that: "*I'm not one to listen to people in the first place even though they're related to me...let alone a strang*er" (interview 3). Like Rebekah, John explained that he wanted to make his own decisions and that no-one would change his opinion. He had friends who had been influenced by their parents with subject choices for A-levels and that seeing them not enjoy what they do now had made him realise he was *"quite lucky to be able to choose my own stuff*" (Interview 2).

6.1.9   Concluding Reflections on Influences on Decision-Making

Contrary to a wide amount of literature around working-class aspirations and family impact, there was an apparent importance of family and the various examples where families were aspirational for their children. For example a reoccurring theme within the family sub-theme of this section was the idea

surrounding the helpful, or at times unhelpful, push of family with regards to post-18 options. When it came to working-class students this was usually a helpful and aspirational push to what may be considered perhaps bigger and better things. When looking at the findings around parents and this push, this tended to affect middle-class students (3/4) more than working-class students (under ½). However, parents aside, the impact of grandparents, siblings and wider family seemed to be particularly useful when it came to working-class students and their aspirations post-18. Grandparents provided a helpful push for just under half of working-class students, yet zero middle-class students. This was through examples such as working-class student Kieran who wished to make his grandparents proud due to them aspiring him towards being the first person in the family to go to university. Another working-class student who had discussed the role their grandparent had in their aspirations for specific post-18 choices was Mia X. She commented that her grandad pushed her towards a more academic post-18 route and was particularly in favour of her pursuing university education, even if other family members, such as parents, were not as focussed on this route for her. Working-class students Dave and Rebekah commented on the significant role their siblings played in their own desire for university and also helped with the application process. Interestingly wider family also played a role when it came to students' decision-making. Three out of eight working class students discussed wider family as well as half of middle-class students, and a quarter of both middle-class and working-class actively turned to wider family for advice. Working-class student Mia found aspiration through her uncle who worked at Cambridge University. Mia discussed how her uncle's very positive reaction to her grades had encouraged her to believe in herself more when it came to a more academic route after GCSEs, this led her to her Alevels and also considering university education, this helped her want to push herself and her own aspirations through the potential her uncle saw in her.

Finally, when thinking about student aspiration, a lot of students had shared comments around either following in the footsteps of family members or alternatively learning from family and what they considered to be their mistakes or failings. This shows that aspiration may come from either a positive place or even a potentially negative place. Some working class students such as Mia X and Poppy in particularly had commented on learning they wanted more of a

career than job due to parents struggles with their own job. This wanting more for themselves had led to their own aspirations when it came to post-18 options and in particular university education.

The financial issue was another sub-theme that provided some especially interesting findings. This showed somewhat of a need for better information about student loans much earlier, as well as eluding to the impact financial issues had on where students tended to study more and whether not they were considering university as a choice altogether. It seemed that the first interview showed through student responses that there was more uncertainty financially about what to expect and that by the second interview, which was during the students' final year of sixth form, there was a lot more clarity about this which reassured a lot of students. This is could be an example of the benefit of the methods used within the study of talking with students over time. Students shared feeling better about the idea of university once they had understood more about what student loans meant for them, how paying them back would go and what was expected of them. However, judging by the discussions during the first interview compared to the final interview, this reassurance seemed to come much later for a lot of students who had a lack of sources of information about university fees and finances.

6.2   Access to Information and Support

This theme comprised of students' comments which refer to availability and access to information to inform post-18 decision-making and support. There were four sub-themes within this code, which are shown within the table below (see table 28). Comments relating to the ease or difficulty of the application process, as well as the support with the university application process were most frequent within this theme, which may point up the importance placed upon access to this type of information and support. As with the previous theme, the table below not only shows the sub-codes within this code but also shows how the comments are represented within this code with regards to the frequency comments are mentioned within the three interviews.

Sub-theme	Definition	Interviews	Occurrences

Ease or Difficulty of Application Process	Comments which reflected on how easy or difficult the UCAS process was.	19	48
Support with University Application Process	Comments on how students found the application process and who, if anyone, offered support.	15	43
Critical of Information and Support	Comments where students expressed a view that they did not get the right information or support. Includes suggestions for how it could be improved.	6	19
Self-sourced information	Comments which showed that students sought information themselves, from websites or from other people.	6	7

Table 28: Interview Data: the Sub-codes for Access to information and support

6.2.1: Ease or Difficulty of Application Process

For students thinking of applying to University post-18, the ease or difficulty of the application process could be seen as a contributing factor to their decision-making process. This is especially important when considering the access to information and support for each student. When discussing the application students would discuss the ease and/or difficulty of this process. In terms of the ease of the UCAS or University application, this can be divided into two sections. Those students who found it easy and those students who found it easy with support from others. When discussing the difficulty of the application process, this could also be split into two main, but slightly different, groups: those who discussed the difficulty of the process and those that discussed the process overall being manageable, but who did struggle with the personal statement aspect of the application.

With regards to students who found they went through the application process

with ease, this was discussed within interviews 2 and 3. During interview 2, three quarters of middle-class students discussed the ease of the application process, in comparison to half of working class students. In terms of gender and school this was fairly evenly split. Students described the process as '*relatively easy*' (Jane, middle class student) and '*relatively simple*' (Joe, working class student). Within the final interview, 5 out of 8 working class students talked about the ease of the application process, whereas not one middle class student commented on this. The responses to the ease of the application were similar to interview 2, with regards to students commenting on the process being '*fairly easy*' (Mia, working class student) and that filling it out was fairly straightforward. Two middle-class students, John and Ailayah, reflected on receiving support with their personal statement from their teachers, with John observing '*no-one's like left me to just do it by myself*'.

The difficulty of the application process was reflected on, in particular, when students discussed the personal statement aspect of their application. In terms of social class, all but one middle class student and one working class student had discussed the difficulty surrounding the personal statement. Although there seemed to be no class differences with regards to this, there seemed to be a slight difference in terms of gender and school. All female students discussed the difficulty surrounding their personal statement and particularly tended to note the difficulty in writing about their achievements or the difficulty around saying '*nice things*' or having to '*big myself up*' (Ailayah, middle class student). Male students did also discuss the difficulty of the personal statement: two thirds of male students discussed this, one male student discussed similarly to above that: '*I wasn't really used to writing good things about myself*' (Kalen, working class student). However, male students tended to comment more the personal statement being '*tedious*' to write (Joe, working class student) or it being daunting to write. Female students also commented on these difficulties with their personal statements but half of female students commented specifically on their difficulty in writing about themselves in a positive light, whereas only one third of males mentioned this as a difficulty. The difference also was shown in terms of school. All Urban students discussed the difficulty surrounding the personal statement, in contrast to the 3 out of 5 Rural students discussed this, suggesting this may have been a school-level difference.

Students also commented on the difficulty around the application process in general. With regards to this, during the second interview, one quarter of middle class students, in comparison to over half of working class students, discussed this. Working class student Poppy had commented on confusion around questions she had to fill out: '*some of the questions were a bit confusing like…the stuff you have to fill out like I didn't really know…I had to go to my teacher*'. Poppy discusses the need to 'have' to go to her teacher for support when struggling. Another issue mentioned exclusively by working class students was struggling to narrow down university choices and how this made the overall process more difficult. Kieran and Mia X both discussed perhaps rushing their decision making and this lead to some choices being '*gap fillers*' (Mia X, working class student). There was also, as above, a fairly substantial difference in terms of gender. Within the second interview one out of six male students, compared with, five out of six female students discussed the difficulty of the application process overall. A reason for this could potentially be, similarly to the 'over summer' journal entries, that female students had took more time and consideration to think about solely university as a post-18 option and perhaps intended to ensure their applications were thorough. This can also be seen through various occasions where students discussed having their personal statements checked thoroughly, for example students Jane and Mia X. There was a similar difference during the final interview, as one male student out of six, compared to four female students out of six, discussed the difficulty of the application process. Many female students, such as Ailayah and Poppy, felt some confusion over what the Universities were asking for. Ailayah commented on an ongoing correspondence with a potential university choice with regards to her qualifications, which resulted in her calling upon support from her teacher to assist her with this.

6.2.2: Support with University Application Process

A number of students' responses were categorised as reflecting on support with the University application process. These main sources of support can be separated into four categories: careers lessons and career staff support, the support from teachers and heads of sixth form, University contacts, and finally parental support.

Firstly, in terms of career lesson and career staff support, this tended to be a purely Rural school phenomenon. None of the students from the Urban school mentioned career lessons or staff, whereas all but one of the Rural students mentioned this source of support. This was also discussed by half of middle class students, in comparison to 1 quarter of working class students. There was no difference in terms of gender. Working class students seemed to reflect on the usefulness of this support. Poppy and Dave discussed the role careers teachers and lessons had with regards to talking them through the application process. This seemed particularly helpful for Poppy who found this support useful as her other point of contact was her mum who she commented that '*she doesn't really understand*' (Poppy, interview 2). Whereas middle class student Jane was quite critical of the careers lessons and stated: '*ermm my teacher for careers put a PowerPoint on the wall and said 'look go through this…and that's about it…yeah…I think I rang my mum up*' (Jane, middle class student). Jane, unlike Poppy, then went on to discuss how she then went to her mum for support that she felt was more helpful than the support via careers.

This leads onto parents as a form of support for the application process. As mentioned above this varied as a source of support from student to student, and one aspect, in certain cases, that helped somewhat to identify the relevance of parental help was parents' experience of higher education. Both middle class students who mentioned their mum as a source of support with the application process, commented on their mothers' own experience of University. One quarter of working class students discussed their parents with regards to support with the application process and half of middle class students discussed their parents, specifically with a focus on their mothers. This was evenly split in terms of gender, however, in terms of school three out of five Rural students in comparison to one out of seven Urban students mentioned parents.

Some students discussed the role of their head of sixth form and other teachers as a source of support with their application process. All but one of both working class and middle class students discussed support received from either teachers or their head of sixth form. There was no difference between the schools or between the gender of students and their access to support for the application process. This support with regards to teaching specifically seemed useful when

it came to the students drafting their personal statements, as mentioned in the previous sub-theme.

Lastly, University contacts were mentioned in terms of application support by half of the working class students within the study but none of the middle class students. They were also only mentioned by Urban students and not Rural students. There was no difference in terms of gender. Many students discussed the influence of those coming in to talk to them about University and the relevance that had to supporting them somewhat with the application. The University support was predominantly from '*local universities'*. This seemed valuable to many students, Kalen reflected on his experience with someone from the admissions team within a local university, '*he came in and gave me a sheet and was like 'write down everything that you'd done and then…it'll just come naturally'…and then there was another lady from that uni…she was giving us all tips*' (Kalen, working class student).

6.2.3   Critical of Information and Support

When it came to being critical of information provided about post-18 options, many students from both the Rural and Urban school discussed their schools' lack of information about other post-18 options that were not University. Half of middle class students discussed this lack of information about 'other' options, in comparison to a quarter of working class students. Middle class students John and Jeffrey discussed a desire for more information for the options they were considering post-18. John was critical of the information provided about University, as he felt that school prioritised this over information on other options based on his opinion that university seems like an extension of schooling. He also stated that this may affect students' decision-making based on students being unaware of their options, '*I've got some friends that have never thought of an apprenticeship just because they've always been told university*' (John, Interview 3). Similarly to John, Jeffrey also discussed a lack of information about other options. However Jeffrey's criticism stemmed from the lack of information not only about apprenticeships but about gap years as a post-18 choice as well. Jeffrey discussed the school's focus on university and stated, '*they didn't really talk about…the other options they kinda just mentioned them in passing*'. As with John, Jeffrey then went on to state that he too may have considered other options

with the right information: '*like I wouldn't be opposed to doing an apprenticeship if I found the right one…but cos I don't know enough about them*' (Jeffrey, Interview 3). Working class students Mia and Kalen also mentioned a school bias towards university over other options and felt other options were talked about, in contrast to university, much less - "*Let's spend one seminar on higher apprenticeships and apprenticeships…but let's spend six weeks on unis*" (Kalen, interview 3).

In contrast to less information on University and more information of other options, both Poppy and Rebekah discussed a want for more information about University that they felt they did not have and may need. For Poppy, a working class Rural student, this was based mainly on wanting more information about University and the financial aspects earlier on in her decision-making process. Poppy stated that important information about University such as fees and GCSE grades that would be necessary to work towards for University would have been useful to know earlier. She also stated that although some people had access to this information she did not have access to this information until the previous year and that this may disadvantage her by not knowing what to work towards. Poppy also mentioned that she mainly was given information by people who had already gone to University, however, that she did not know these people '*personally*', so that they could not give, in her opinion, "*a real insight into what it's like*" (Poppy, Interview 3). Rebekah, a working class Urban student, wanted more information about University that was more specific to certain courses of interest.

6.2.4   Self-sourced Information

The lack of information about certain post-18 options as mentioned above, may have contributed to some students' pursuing 'self-sourced information'. Perhaps in an attempt to combat a lack of information about gap years from his school, as mentioned in the sub-theme above, Jeffrey discussed during his second interview that information about gap years came from "*talking to people…just websites as well*" (Jeffrey, middle class student). Websites seemed to be a useful source of information that students themselves sourced. This was also the case when finding information about University choices. Particularly for working class students: Kalen, Dave, Rebekah and Mia X, who all mentioned using websites for information about University. Within the sub-theme of self-sourced

information, the only middle class student was Jeffrey with regards to his independent research on gap years. The rest of the students were working class students who discussed the importance of this independent research about university during their decision-making process. This comprised half of the working-class students within the study.

6.2.5   Concluding Reflections on Access to information and Support

From the findings and comments in this section there should be a focus on the central importance of the provision of information and support from school. It became clear through responses from certain students that school was an important source of information about university for a lot of students who were to be prospective first-generation university students. While ease of the application process overall was purported by three quarters of middle-class students and a half of working class students within the second interview and a further 5/8 working class students within the final interview, it can be argued that this still leaves a proportion of students who may have struggled with this. Personal statement difficulty, which will be discussed further below, was discussed by the majority of students. Access to information with regards to helping students make university choices also seemed lacking. Consequently in terms of narrowing down university choices this seemed to be exclusively a working-class concern. Working-class student Poppy commented on the need for teachers support with regards to this.

How the Rural and Urban school differ in terms of support shows the different cultures of support in different schools. When discussing the difficulty students faced with writing their personal statements, as this particularly seemed to be discussed often by many students, this was an overwhelming issue for Urban students. As the findings show, all Urban students discussed the difficulty of writing their personal statements in comparison to 3/5 Rural school students. Further to this female students were particularly vocal about their difficulties in finding strengths about themselves to strengthen their personal statements and the difficulty this caused in the overall writing up. This could indicate further support for all students, but primarily female students, with regards to this may be beneficial.

Parental support with regards to the application process was mentioned by 1/7 Urban students and 3/5 Rural students. This could indicate further the support needed by, in particular, Urban schools as there could be argued to be more of a need for support where parental support maybe more absent. Another difference in support between the two schools was access to careers advice or lessons. This careers support was discussed in the Rural school but was not mentioned within the Urban school.

A positive source of information and support for a lot of the Urban school students was accessing information and advice from people who came into the school to discuss university. There was a focus here on the relevance of local universities and their part in supporting students. It was also interesting that these university contacts were mentioned by half of working-class students but zero middle-class students. This seemed an unlikely source of support with the university application process and may be a useful source of information that could be expanded upon in the future, especially as this seemed useful for a lot of working-class students. This idea of taking on support and advice from those who know and have hands-on experience, seemed helpful possibly for students who have a lack of access to others who have the same first-hand experience of the application process.

6.3   Social Networks

This theme contained students' comments which referred to a variety of current social networks, potential prospective social networks, as well as comments which related to how these provide social and cultural capital. There were eight sub-themes within this code, shown in the table below (table 29). The sub-themes which comprised the most comments were 'family networks' and 'social and cultural capital'. Some sub-themes are fairly short in terms of student comments or responses but these are useful to reflect on nonetheless. The table below not only shows the sub-codes included within this theme but also shows how the comments are represented within this code, again with previous themes, with regards to the frequency of these comments are mentioned within the interviews.

Sub-theme	Definition	Interviews	Occurrences
Social and Cultural Capital	Comments which referred to issues related to how networks provide social and cultural capital	17	28
Family Networks	Comments which discussed family networks	12	19
Friendship Networks	Comments which related to friendship networks	3	7
School Clubs or Mentoring	Participation in after-school clubs or school organised activities such as mentoring or school football teams.	7	11
Out-Of-School Special Interest Networks	Comments which refer to participation in special interest groups out of school, such as sports groups, music groups etc.	5	5
Work Experience Networks	Comments which illustrated how work undertaken alongside post-16 study has created a network	2	4
Career Networks at University	Comments which showed an awareness of how university builds contacts and networks linked to career route choices	7	11
Intention to Join University Clubs	An expressed intention to join university clubs and societies, leading to building new networks	9	9

Table 29: Interview Data: the sub-codes for 'Social Networks'

6.3.1   Social and Cultural Capital

One important aspect of students' comments on their social networks is how those networks represent social and cultural capital: in other words, how social connections, for example, through employment or clubs; and cultural capital, such as cultural knowledge and academic qualifications, might affect students'

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decision-making. It was apparent through this theme was that there were a number of comments from students showing different social or cultural capital from that of other students, which may have affected their post-18 choices or a reduced ease of access.

Half of middle class students within this theme mentioned social contacts such as family members that offered a source of useful social capital about post-18 options, in comparison to no working class students. Information about the application process for university is one example of where social capital, and possibly its usefulness, was present for some and not others within this theme. Parents' university experience are one example of social capital. A quarter of middle class students discussed the information and support that came from having a parent with previous university experience, compared with no working class students. In fact, three quarters of working-class students specifically commented on the lack of advice their parents could provide with regards to the application process, this was usually down to a lack of knowledge or experience of university. During his final interview working class student Kieran stated,

> '*if you have one on one with teachers you could have one on one with your parents about it…cos they've been through the same thing so they could have like more in-depth like detail of what it's like and what you have to do…whereas people like…like my mum and dad have nothing…no like knowledge of what I had to do at uni*'.

As mentioned by Kieran, a close family member with a first-hand experience of university may give students more information and support with their application than those without that social network. Most students have access to teachers with experience, however, not all students have the added benefit of access to both teacher and family; as Kieran mentions it may feel more comfortable for students to have a more in-depth and honest conversation with a family member. Poppy similarly discussed a potential advantage when applying to university based on background and class, *'I think it comes into like background and class might…get into university a bit easier…or like find the experience more smooth like more easier'*. Poppy also mentioned that:

'*if you come from a family that like everyone's…already been to uni…you already know what it's like and you've got the money to like not worry…you're more inclined to just go uni and like know what you're doing'* (Poppy, working class female student, interview 2).

However, a quarter of middle-class students also stated that their family had a lack of information about the application process.

Another key example of social capital within this theme was knowing the importance of contacts or having contacts. Middle class students Jeffrey mentioned knowing the importance of contacts, '*contacts are quite important in whatever…path you go down I suppose…always helpful to have a few people you know'* (Interview 2). Jane also discussed an awareness of the importance of and access to beneficial social contacts,:

'*I've got a couple of friends who they're parents are lawyers and stuff so…and actually…one of my acquaintances…she's actually working in a law firm now because her mum has a lot of social connections within that'* (Jane, middle class female student, interview 3).

Middle class student John, as mentioned briefly above, also had access to contacts within an area of interest to him career-wise. Within this theme, three quarters of middle class students discussed the importance of contacts and this in turn could show an awareness of the importance of social capital. This is in comparison to no working class students.

6.3.2   Family Networks

Family networks was the most commented on sub-theme, after comments which relate to social and cultural capital. Three quarters of middle class students mentioned their family networks over the course of the interviews, which is broadly comparable to the just under three quarters (5/8) of working class students. Over the course of the interviews, however, it's worth noting that during interview 1 that three quarters of middle class students mentioned family networks in comparison to one working class student, which makes up one eighth

of the working class populace in the study. During interview 2, two working class students (two eighths) compared with zero middle class students discussed family networks. Finally within interview 3, it was exactly half of middle class students and half of working class students who mentioned family networks. This shows that overall there is no huge difference between classes in terms of the discussion of family networks over the three interviews. The main differences can be seen in interview 1 and interview 2.

Some interesting comments that came out of this sub-theme showed how the use of family networks varied between the classes, however. All but one of the middle class students within this sub-theme such as Jeffrey and John mentioned their family contacts and the relevance these contacts have had to their decision-making or their influence of their future choices or career. Jeffrey discussed *'the people I've met my dad's friends that he met obviously in the marines through the marines…the people I've met have influenced me wanting to do that'* (Interview 1). John directly mentioned the impact his family network had on his prospects, '*cos my brother was in there doing naval architecture…so it's a good route to go cos it's easier to get in if you've already got family in there'* (Interview 1). But many working class students' comments were about either more general contacts or contacts for opportunities prior to their post-18 choices such as part-time jobs, as was the case with Kalen during his second interview. Kalen attributes his getting the job directly to his mum's contacts, '*I only got the job because my mum is friends with the manager*' - however, Kalen also mentioned that the landlord was against hiring him to begin with based on his mum being a customer at the pub in question. It was only Mia X who was a working class student who mentioned a direct link to a possible career or route, '*I've got um aunties and uncles who've been to university who are like doctors and nurses and like teachers'* (interview 2). Most working class students did mention useful advice from family members, however, particularly with regards to University advice. Another key difference when discussing family networks was that each middle class student mentioned immediate family, in terms of parents or siblings, whereas many of the working class students referred to uncles or cousins. Only one quarter of working class students mentioned parents or siblings in terms of family networks, compared with three quarters of middle class students.

6.3.3 Friendship Networks

As with family, friends are a common social network available to sixth form students. Three out of eight working class students commented on friendship networks, in comparison to no middle class students. It is also worth noting that all that commented within this theme were female students, which shows that half of female students had commented and no male students. There was an element of how friendship networks helped to support with post-18 choices, an example of this is from Mia during her final interview: '*cause we both go into nursing we always talk about it but in different parts of nursing so it's like…she's got her interview at a local university today…so we're both like…ah let me know what your questions are*' (Mia, working class student, interview 3). Later on Mia also commented that some of the year above who went onto University were not enjoying the experience, this caused her worry because: '*some of them are a lot like me*' (Mia, interview 3).

6.3.4 School Clubs or Mentoring

When considering networks featuring 'someone like me' another could be the networks formed from activities or time spent with likeminded individuals. Extra-curricular activities such as school clubs or mentoring formed another social network sub-theme. Within this sub-theme of students' comments, this seemed to be fairly equal in terms of gender. However, class and school showed much bigger differences. In terms of school, every rural school student mentioned either school clubs or mentoring, in comparison with only two out of seven urban school students. In terms of social class this difference was shown with three quarters of middle class students making comments within the sub-theme, compared with only half of working class students. Poppy, a working class student, discussed volunteering opportunities that she accessed through school, which shows how accessed to social networks can provide opportunities, '*I volunteer with things at the school…like opportunities I can get through school*' (Poppy, interview 1).

6.3.5 Out-of-school special interest Networks

Linked to the above sub-theme is 'out-of-school special interest networks', this includes similarly to above some volunteering and other out-of-school activities. The above theme encompassed things relating more specifically to their school network in comparison to this sub-theme which is more focused on the students'

out-of-school activities that tend to have no direct link to school. This sub-theme was discussed by three quarters of middle class students and one eighth of working class students. These responses were also predominantly from male students rather than female students, with two third of male students commenting within this theme, in comparison to one sixth of female students. Middle class student Jane commented within her first interview about being involved with volunteering at Beavers, a Boy Scout group, for her Duke of Edinburgh award. All of the male students except for Joe, commented on various sports clubs they took part in. Joe discussed Musical activities he took part in with a music club. In terms of direct influence from these networks, Jeffrey was the only student who discussed the advice he received through this club from his rugby coaches.

6.3.6 Work experience Networks

Advice was also present within the sub-theme of Work Experience Networks. During his final interview Kalen reflected on his work experience placement and then how this subsequently led to him being to access advice when needed from teachers at these placements. Only two students reflected on work experience networks with regards to their comments in this sub-theme. Kalen during his final interview as mentioned above, and Jane during her first interview. Jane reflected on during her work she had spoken to a lot of people who had given their own experiences of law, the area of interest for her post-18, and that this had helped *'shape…what branch of law I want to go into'* (Jane, middle class student, interview 1). Jane also reflected on one man during a shift who discussed a contact of potential use to her: 'he's going to talk to someone he knows who's got a law firm to see if he can do anything for me', this can be seen as a direct example of the power of social networks and social capital at work.

6.3.7 Career networks at university

The importance of contacts with people at university was represented within the 'Career Networks at University' sub-theme, and this linked to potential career benefits gained through university networks. Half of middle class students and just under half of working class students reflected on the importance of contacts within the comments of this sub-theme. Jane discussed within her second interview the potential contacts and career networks to be made during University, she reflected that this possibly affected decision making of university

choice based on the potential for networks: '*there was so many network opportunities which in law that's very very important…all the second years and third years I spoke to had training contracts already…and the people in their first years said that networking was going brilliantly*' (Jane, middle class student, interview 2). She then went onto say '*without contacts you're not going to get a…training contract…you won't get support…you won't get experience…it'll massively impact your career*'. When asked about the importance of contacts when thinking about his career, middle class student John discussed similarly to Jane about the positive contacts that could arise from going to university: '*if I go to uni…you meet people over there that potentially go 'awh we can offer you a job once you finish*' (John, middle class student, interview 2). Working class students Poppy, Kalen and Rebekah also commented on the importance of contacts when thinking about their career progression or careers in general. However, Rebekah discussed that she felt although contacts would be important they were not necessarily '*essential*' (Rebekah, working class student, interview 2).

6.3.8   Intention to join University Clubs

Another way that university can provide contacts or networks can be through university clubs. In terms of an intention to join university clubs, there was no difference in terms of gender. With regards to social class half of middle class students discussed the possibility of joining university clubs and societies, compared with just over half of working class students. Working class students Dave, Mia X, Rebekah, Kalen, Kieran and middle class student John mentioned sport as a club interest. Mia X also discussed the possibility of book clubs. Middle class student Jane mentioned music clubs or learning a new instrument as well as running. Interestingly working class students Kieran and Rebekah during their second interviews mentioned either a lack of information or lack of time for university clubs or societies. When asked about university clubs in his second interview, Kieran stated '*I haven't really looked at any of them so I dunno probably*'. This is in comparison to his third interview where he seemed to have more information from his university and mentioned joining a football club being of interest to him. Rebekah shared that her ability to take part in university clubs would be dependent on time between studying and working, '*I think it depends on what times are like at university…cos obviously I would like to have a part-*

time job on the side to support myself as well' (interview 2, working class student). This could indicate that financial factors have to be considered by some students when thinking about feasibility of engaging in extracurricular clubs and societies.

There were also a portion of working class students who may not have discussed university clubs and societies specifically, however, they did show an interest in extracurricular university activities such as becoming a student ambassador, which could broaden their career prospects and networks. Working class students Poppy and Mia X both discussed becoming a student ambassador, *'I like the sound of being like a student ambassador… because I'd like to tell people…so they'll probably be things that I didn't realise when…I go to uni…I'd like to tell people what they might not know'* (Poppy, working class student, interview 2). Here it seems Poppy describes a want to provide students like her with information that she may feel she lacks herself.

6.3.9   Concluding Reflections on Social Networks

This section, unsurprisingly, provided findings that were especially relevant to the research question *'How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?'*. A particularly interesting area which would be useful to explore further was around the sub-theme of 'social and cultural capital'. As mentioned above, half of middle-class students and yet zero working-class students, which is a significant difference, discussed a family member who had proven to be a useful source, which displayed their useful and relevant social capital in response to post-18 options and the support received. Further to this and when thinking about the access to information for decision-making post-18 as well as the relevance of particular social networks. As mentioned within the chapter, a quarter of middle-class students discussed information and support they accumulated from parents in comparison to zero working-class students. Furthermore and in conjunction to this is three quarters of working-class students specifically commented on a lack of advice and support from parents, commenting that there was a lack of knowledge or lack of parents' experience of university to draw on. When considering the research questions around the importance of social networks and access to information for post-18 decision-making, it could be argued from these findings that an area to explore further is the idea that working-class students in particular may be disadvantaged by the lack of relevant and useful social capital

when it comes to applying to university specifically.

This lack of relevant social capital from within family networks led to working class students such as Kieran reporting that he relied on school and teacher support for certain information. A quarter of middle-class students also discussed a lack of information accessed through family but this is a stark contrast to three quarters of working-class students discussing the same. Alongside this family networks proved to be the most commented on sub-theme, with three quarters of middle-class students and 5/8 working-class students commenting on this. This helps to show the importance of family networks and how a lack of useful or relevant support via family networks when thinking about post-18 options, and specifically university, can be a disadvantaged to students.

Alongside family networks and their importance, another commonly commented upon sub-theme was friendship networks, this seemed to be important to working-class students rather than middle-class students. With 3/8 working-class students discussed friends as a social network of importance, compared to zero middle-class students. It is also worth again noting the significance gender played on this with the students who mentioned friends as a valuable social network being all female. Zero male students commented on friends with regards to this in comparison to half of all female students involved in the study. This was in relation to post-18 advice. This was also discussed alongside the importance of information from 'someone like me'. Working-class student Mia commented on how former students in the year above had gone onto university and were not enjoying it and how this had impacted on her thoughts going forward due to them being 'like her' and perhaps thinking she may have a similar experience. As mentioned already within this chapter, when discussing the positive impact students', that had first-hand experience of university, who came to talk to the sixth form students in the study had with regards to application advice. It is worth reflecting on how this idea of 'students like me' may offer a social network that is especially useful to students who feel they are walking into an unknown field of Higher Education.

6.4   Summary: Students' Decision-Making and Support for University

Application

This chapter discussed influences on decision making, this is important to discuss when considering the research question of 'what influences the post 18 choices of working class young people?'. Family impact and the idea around family being aspirational for many of the working class students within this study is an interesting finding from the interview data. The aspirations working class students' families, including grandparents and siblings, had for them had really helped encourage some of the students within this project to pursue their post-18 choices. Family was rarely an obstacle for these students in terms of post-18 pathways. The ideas surrounding walking in the footsteps or 'grooves' left behind by family members was an interesting topic of discussion. Where students had no 'grooves' to follow they would make their own, and family were encouraging of that. The pathway is easier for students to follow when the path has been laid by family members before them, many middle class students within this study were fortunate to have the remnants of a path left behind from their parent's journey into HE. For working class students this pathway may not have been so easy to follow, yet family continued to encourage and support these students' aspirations.

The second section within this chapter around students' reflections on access to information and support is relevant when considering the following research question: 'what access do young people have to information for decision-making post-18?'. Information and support from schools was significant within this chapter. For students who may not have a wide range of support networks with information about their post-18 choice of preference, the role of the school and the teachers were essential in providing students with the information they sought after.

The final section within this chapter around students' reflections on social networks is relevant to the research question: 'how do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?'. As above, there was an apparent reliance by some students within this study, predominantly working class students, on school and teacher support. As discussed a quarter of middle class students compared with zero working class students had other social networks such as parents to draw information and support from. For many working class

students in this study an important social network was this school and teacher support. Friendship was also raised as an important social network to working class students, whereas this did not tend to be the case for middle class students.

7.0   Students' Thoughts and Reflections on their Decision-Making: Interview Data

As noted in the introduction to Chapter 6, the coding of the student interviews resulted in the creation of five over-arching themes, four of which have been reported on.   This chapter will report on the fifth theme, *Decision-making Thoughts and Reflections,* which comprises student comments which refer directly to decisions which the students have made or are planning to make, and their comments about those decisions.   In a nutshell, chapter 6 reports on the influences and networks which shaped their decision-making, whereas this chapter reports on the decisions themselves and the students' explanations and reflections on them.   Thirteen sub-themes were created to categorise what the students said in relation to their decisions (see Table 30).   Of these themes, several were simply capturing a decision, for example, a decision to go to university, or to take a gap year.   Where appropriate, therefore, tables are used to summarise this data.

Sub-theme	Definition	Interviews	Occurrences
Intention not to go to university	Comments which express an intention NOT to go to university	3	13
Intention to go to university	Comments which express an intention to go to university	17	20
University intentions undecided	Comments which express no decision yet made about going to university	6	19

Decision to take a gap year	Decision to take a gap year, and reasons for that choice, including general views on gap years	21	34
Reasons for Intention to Apply to University	Comments which explain or discuss the reasons behind making a choice to apply to university.	18	43
University Application Submitted	Confirmation that an application has been submitted	14	14
Choice of University	Comments on choice, and reasons for that choice	27	172
University Subject Choice	Statement of which subject or subjects the student has applied for	15	24
Appeal of going to university	Comments which reveal the attractions are of going to university	13	23
Downside of going to university	Comments which reveal the negatives of going to university	12	17
Fairness of Application Process	Comments which refer to perceived fairness of university application process and chances of getting a place	20	49
Views on 18+ routes	Comments which express views about various routes such as university	15	41
Career Intentions	Comments which reflect thoughts or intentions about	30	71

Table 30: Interview Data: the sub-themes and definitions for Decision-making Thoughts and Reflections

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7.1 Intentions regarding going to University

Table 31 below summarises the decisions made by each student at the three timepoints in the study, showing what their intention regarding a decision to go to university was at that point. This represents the data captured in the sub-themes of *Intention to go to University; Intention not to go to University* and *University Intentions Undecided*. The final column tabulates the subtheme of *University Application Submitted* to show whether the decision to apply or not converted into an actual application.

Student Name	Class	Interview 1			Interview 2			Interview 3			Application Submitted
		Yes	No	Undecided	Yes	No	Undecided	Yes	No	Undecided	
Dave	WC			■			■	■			Yes
Jane	MC	■			■			■			Yes
Jeffry West	MC			■			■		■		No
John	MC		■				■		■		No
Poppy	WC	■			■			■			Yes
Ailayah	MC	■					■	■			Yes
Joe	WC	■			■			■			Yes
Kieran	WC	■			■			■			Yes
Mia	WC	■					■	■			Yes
Mia X	WC	■			■			■			Yes
Rebekah	WC			■	■			■			Yes
Kalen Garse	WC	■			■			■			Yes

Table 31: Intentions Regarding going to University

The pattern of decisions represented by this table points to some relevant observations. Firstly, the two students who did not apply to university, John and Jeffrey West, were consistently leaning towards not going to university through the three interviews, being either a definite No or Undecided. They were both middle-class students. Jeffrey decided to pursue a gap year, as he described needing more time to think through his options, and John decided to pursue an apprenticeship. All other students had submitted their applications for their chosen universities. Whilst the general pattern for the set of decisions is that their position in the first interview is broadly matched by their final decision, it is noticeable that there was greater uncertainty in Interview 2, perhaps suggesting this is a critical period for decision-making. Therefore, it is worth noting that interview 2 was conducted just before the applications were submitted, around November time. Through the period, there is an increase in the number of students making a decision to go to university.

7.2 Reasons for Intentions to Apply to University

Alongside sharing their current intentions regarding whether to go to university or not, the students frequently offered further explanatory comment on these decisions. One of the most commonly discussed reasons was the desire to gain a long-term benefit from a university education, and that a degree would lead to a certain career or a better career. Half of middle class students and half of working class students discussed this. However, three quarters of female students mentioned this, whereas only one quarter of male students had discussed this as reasoning behind their intentions for university. Some students specifically mentioned the ease of going into a certain career via the route of getting a degree (Jane and Joe), or discussed the necessity of a degree for the career pathway (Ailayah, Kalen and Mia X). Middle class student Ailayah mentioned the increased earning potential through having a degree, *'I can get a better career when I'm older…and get more money'* (Interview 2). Alongside this, working class student, Poppy discussed that a degree was more likely to result in a profession rather than merely a job and that this was important to her, from watching her mother not have a career, '*I'd want a profession like rather than just a job…my mum has had like many jobs but they're not professional jobs they're just jobs to keep her going…and I think she'd want more for me to have a career than just a job'* (interview 2).

With regards to the necessity of a degree came an opinion within this subsection which was shared by both middle class student Jane and working class student Poppy, in two of their interviews. This was the idea that it was important to them that they do something with their degree and that it was necessary rather than for the sake of going to university. Poppy discussed a family member who did not use their degree for their career upon completion, and how she would want to use hers for her career progression and not earn a '*pointless degree'* (Interview 3). Jane shared an opinion that she would not go to university for a degree unless she needed the degree, as she felt this was a '*waste*' of years and money (Interview 3).

Being the '*first in the family'* to attend university was another reason for working class students' Poppy and Kieran's intentions to apply to university. No middle

class students reflected on this. Some arguments for this were to make themselves or their families proud and that this could be seen as *'an achievement'* (Poppy, Interview 3). Following this interest in making their family proud were comments around parents and their encouragement, both intended and unintended. A quarter of working class students commented on this, however, no middle class students shared comments around this. The majority of these examples of encouragement seemed to be experienced as positive pressure, however, this is inferred from the interview responses. During his final interview, Kieran reflected that his dad '*always says oh just go uni and be the first person to go uni*' (Interview 3). This may explain, at least partly, Kieran's desire to make his family proud by being the first one to attend university. In contrast to this is Mia X's example of her mum's influence to apply to university, not through direct, vocal encouragement as with Kieran but rather through wanting something different and therefore perhaps doing something different. During her final interview Mia X reflected that '*I saw obviously my mum struggles and that and I just wanted obviously when I have children the best for my children…them to have like a solid upbringing I want to have money….I think that's what drove me to do well and just sort of do something decent with my life*' (Interview 3).

Lastly, another commonly commented upon reason was surrounding learning and an interest to carry on learning. Over half of working class students discussed this, yet no middle class students. Interestingly three quarters of female students commented on this whereas only one male student, commented around this interest. This included an interest to go further in education (Mia X), not being in a hurry to get out of education and not feeling ready for the world of work (Rebekah and Dave), and enjoying learning so therefore carry this on (Poppy). Some other reasons mentioned but only by one or two students were: '*an interest in the subject choice'* (working class students Kalen and Kieran), 'Socialising' (Mia, working class student), and '*Going straight to university before being financially tied down*' (Kalen, working class student Kalen).

7.3   Appeal of going to university

A popular and frequently discussed appeal of university life was freedom and independence. Just over half (5/8) of working class students discussed

independence and freedom within their interviews. In contrast a quarter of middle class students mentioned freedom or independence as an appealing aspect of university. In her second interview, Jane stated that university would be '*another step away from home and another step into independence*' (Jane, Middle class, Rural student). Working class students Dave, Joe and Mia specifically mentioned the word 'freedom', when describing the appeal of going to university. Other students discussed the independence that accompanied the prospect of university and the appeal of this. Kieran and Mia specifically mentioned how university would provide a certain independence and freedom that school had not offered them. It became apparent that this change appealed to them when thinking about post-18 choices.

Another appeal of university life for many students was the 'social' aspect. Half of middle class students and just under half (3/8) of working class students discussed an interest in university social life. However, of the five students who mentioned this, four were female and only one student was male. This could indicate that this is, in the case of this study, a predominantly female interest in comparison to male. During her second interview, middle class student Ailayah discussed that her perception of university was that the partying and social element would dominate her first and second year of university and that this was an appeal - she reflected that she felt the third year was less appealing. A big appeal for Mia X was the socialising, during her second interview she discussed that '*I can't wait to meet new people…I'm so excited I'm a proper people person*' (working class student).

7.4   Downside of university

Students also discussed the downside of university. This sub-theme included comments from students which revealed some of the perceived potential negatives of going to university.   Many of the downsides of university revolved around particular worries about the university experience. Working class student Mia discussed her worries in the form of nervousness and pressure around not knowing what to expect at University, due to her being the first in her family and wider family to attend university, *'when you don't know anything it sounds scary'*

(Mia, interview 1). Middle class student Jane and working class student Poppy both discussed worries around the social aspect of university, either being not what they expected (Poppy) or not an interest to them in the first place (Jane). They also both discussed a worry around not enjoying their subject choice once they had begun it. Middle class student Jane and working class student Rebekah shared a worry around the potential for university to end up being a waste of money and effort for them '*I'm really worried that I'm gonna hate the subject and that I'll get to the end of the three years and be like okay well that was a waste because I didn't enjoy any of it and I don't want my career to be in this field...I'm really scared about that...cos it's a waste of time, money and effort' (Jane, interview 2)*. Although Jane did end this worry with a '*although I don't think that will happen' (Jane, interview 2)*.

Other worries that plagued the students when thinking about the downside of university was a worry around the workload and stress of university life. Half of working class students and one quarter of middle class students reflected on this as a primary concern. Within their second interview Mia X and Ailayah both discussed a worry around the 'stress' university may involve - '*I can't do deadlines - they like proper stress me out so I leave everything last minute'* (Ailayah, middle class student, interview 2). Finally, working class students Dave and Mia X discussed their worries of missing family and being homesick when at university, '*I'm gonna miss my parents and my cat'* (Mia X, working class student, interview 2).

Within this sub-theme, all but one of working class students (7/8) and three quarters of middle class students discussed worries about the university experience, which shows no real social class difference. However, three quarters of female students in comparison to half of male students discussed worries around university, which could indicate that female students worry more about the pros and cons to their decision making about university than male students.

7.5   Decision to take a gap year

As part of their decision-making about whether to go to university or not, some of the students reflected on the merits or otherwise of taking a gap year. Middle class student Jeffrey is the only student who discussed wanting to do a gap year

in his first, second and finally reflected on his decision to take a gap year within his final interview, where he discussed this being his post-18 decision. '*One of the main reasons*' that Jeffrey discussed choosing to take a gap year was to have more time '*to figure out…more what I wanna do*' (Jeffrey, Interview 2). In his second interview, working class student Kieran also discussed potentially pursuing a gap year but that this would not be until after university. Mia X, a working class student, and Ailayah, a middle class student, also discussed potentially pursuing gap years in their first interview. However, they both stated they would rather pursue a gap year after University.

Ailayah's decision regarding a gap year was influenced by her mother. She reflected in her first interview that she would, if she could, pursue a gap year sooner, '*but my mum was like don't do it, because knowing you you'll go travelling, and be like 'I really like it here like I don't wanna go anymore''* (Ailayah, middle class student, interview 1). In terms of decision to not take a gap year, during the first interview half of working class students and half of middle class students shared their decision to not pursue a gap year as a post-18 option. During the second interview three quarters of middle class students and half of working class students discussed their decisions to not pursue a gap year. Middle class student John reflected that: '*I think I'm the only one out of my mates not doing a gap year*' (John, interview 2), but that the concept did not appeal to him, especially the idea that they had not seemed to plan anything useful with their time off. He reflected on some of his brother's friends who had done similar and that they were now a year behind his brother. Working class student Kieran discussed similarly to John in the sense that a huge part to play in his decision to not pursue a gap year was that he did not want to be a year behind all of his friends.

Interestingly, a regular reason for not pursuing a gap year was the idea described here by working class, rural student Poppy: '*I feel like if I got out of the momentum of like learning and school, I don't think I'd ever go back to it*' (Interview 1). Many students discussed the idea of a gap year potentially stopping them from pursuing a university education: when talking about her post-18 options and pursing a university education Mia, a working class, urban student, stated: '*I'd rather just get right into it rather than have that time away in case I change my mind*'

(Interview 1). Many students seemed to feel this way, especially when considering university. This was more commonly discussed by female students than male students. Every female student mentioned this in regards to either reasons for not taking a gap year, or as a downside to taking a gap year, whereas only a third of male student shared this as a concern.

Other concerns, comments or appealing qualities of gap years were discussed within this theme by the students. A few students discussed how a plus to having a gap year might be the extra time to think through your plans for the future and next steps, almost like a bit of breathing space for decision-making. Working class student, Dave and middle class student, Jeffrey, discussed this need for time before making a decision as a possible attraction to having a gap year. This seemed to be a purely male phenomenon as one third of male students, but no female students discussed this. Similarly to this, however, were discussions from a lot more students about time to relax or rest being a positive reason for a gap year. John discussed '*if you're quite a stressed individual, it's like I've got mates that have gone right through sixth form stressed out, they want that bit of a release*' (interview 1). Three quarters of middle class students and a quarter of working class students discussed this. A gap year was also discussed as a way to potentially save up some money for some, half of female students discussed this and no male students. There was no class difference here. Working class student Rebekah discussed that '*I would have just done it to save money, and I wouldn't have actually saved a lot of money cos then I would have been living at home paying rent'* (Interview 2). From this we can see that this was more of a realistic positive for some more than others. Saving up for travel or merely having a gap year for travelling was a positive opinion of gap years by three quarters of middle class students and half of working class students. Middle class student Jane shared that having a gap year could mean '*you've seen lots and you can you know cherish those memories but, personally I couldn't do it'* (Interview 1). Travelling that led to working or volunteering was also discussed here. Middle class student Jeffrey discussed the potential of using a gap year to volunteer while travelling and working class student Mia X discussed taking a gap year, but after university, to work and teach English abroad for good earning potential and experience. Finally, working class students Kalen and Joe discussed potential cons to a gap year. Kalen discussed the appeal of a gap year to build up his

application and gain experience, but reflected that he worried this would lead to him getting tied down with money and '*staying on a gap year forever*' (Interview 1). Joe discussed that he felt a negative to a gap year was that it may leave him feeling as though he had not made the most of his year off.

7.6   Views on 18+ routes

Within their interviews, students were asked their opinions on post-18 routes, specifically their opinions on university, apprenticeships and going straight from sixth form into work or a job. Although there were positive and negative views on each route from the students, many of the opinions seemed indifferent. This sub-theme will involve discussion on these post-18 routes.

Many of the students interviewed discussed their decision-making regarding their post-18 choices. This often involved thoughts around pursuing a gap year, university education, or an apprenticeship. When asked their thoughts and opinions on apprenticeships in general many students shared their views. Half of working class and middle class students shared positive views on apprenticeships. Working class students' Mia, Rebekah and Kalen commented on apprenticeships being a really good option for '*practical*' (Mia, Interview 1) and '*hands-on experience*' (Kalen, interview 1).   During her first interview, middle class student Jane commented on the usefulness of apprenticeships based on the potential to be paid while following a vocational route into a career or job. John also commented, during his first interview, on how being paid was appealing with regards to an apprenticeship. John noted that '*for me that's the best way to go cos I'm quite a hands on person…so I think that the fact that I can go and get paid but still learn…I think it's the best route for most young people… like me*' (interview 1). In terms of the negatives of apprenticeships, one quarter of middle class students and one eighth of working class students commented on the less appealing qualities of apprenticeships. In his first interview, working class student Kieran commented on the limited earning potential following an apprenticeship in comparison to university for him. Similarly middle class student Jeffrey commented on apprenticeships not being '*as beneficial as going to university…in my own head*' (interview 1). Lastly half of middle class students and three quarters of working class students commented on apprenticeships within their interviews, but discussed indifferent views about this as a post-18 route.

However, middle class student Ailayah did share that she felt apprenticeships overall were more male dominated and also commented that '*boys are like…obviously taught to be more manual*' (Interview 3).

University was another popular post-18 route for a lot of students within the study. Half of middle class students and just over half (5/8) of working class students shared positive views when asked their general opinions on university, as opposed to their personal decisions. During the first interview, middle class student Jeffrey commented on the appeal of university due to the independence and chance to make new friends. Ailayah also commented on the appeal of the university social life but also stated that university is '*expensive but I do…reckon it's worth it because overall you'll get a better…paying job…it'll just help you more financially in the future*' (Ailayah, middle class student, interview 1). Working class student Poppy shared that she felt university was '*a good way to move up in your life*' (interview 1). Kieran discussed how despite negative opinions he had heard from other people saying university is '*a waste of time*' (interview 1), he felt that it would be worth it in the end for the earning potential. In terms of negative opinions of university, the only comments that resembled this were from middle class student Jane. Jane discussed a friend who had received an unconditional offer from university due to his C grades at AS level, however, ended up achieving two D grades and an E grade at A-level, '*and he still went to university, whereas 50 maybe 40 years ago, the people who went to university were the top people*'. Jane also commented that '*like if you say yeah I've got a degree, people suddenly think 'oh okay they're smart', doesn't matter what it's in could be anything*' (Interview 1). Jane seemed to imply from her comments that university felt to her as less exclusive than it once was. Lastly, three quarters of middle class students and three eighths of working class students shared indifferent opinions and views on university. Interestingly, middle class student Ailayah commented that she felt '*the academic route it's not more girly…but girls are pushed into it a little more*' (interview 3). This was mentioned alongside her views that apprenticeships seemed to be more dominated by males.

The final post-18 route discussed within this sub-theme was comments on going straight into a job or work from sixth form. Half of middle class students and one eighth of working class students commented on positives around this route. In

her first interview, middle class student Jane commented that success surrounding this route depended quite a lot on the industry, '*I know there's quite a few good management schemes around…so I've heard that Ginsters is really good for management so is McDonalds so if you wanted to go in that route and start from the bottom and work your way up…then I think that's a good way of doing it'* (Interview 1). A quarter of middle class students and half of working class students shared somewhat negative views when discussing this route. Poppy shared her views about this that were influenced by learning from her family and their past choices. She discussed many of her family leaving school at sixteen and going straight into a job in order to earn money sooner, '*but now like my mum says she doesn't have a career cos she never got into a career she just goes from job to job, cos she's got a bit stuck into just working…I'd want a career like behind me first'* (Poppy, working class student, interview 1).

7.7   Decisions regarding Choice of University and Subject

Table 32 shows each students subject choice and university choice, if any, at the time of each interview. This table is also organised by student name and their assigned social class, as based on the classification data used at the beginning of the study for the purpose of this research project.

Student Name	Class designation	Interview	Subject Choice	University Choice
Dave	Working class	1	-	-
		2	Engineering/Mechanical engineering	Cardiff, Bournemouth, Plymouth
		3	Engineering	Cardiff (first choice), Plymouth, Bournemouth, Exeter
Jane	Middle class	1	Law	Bristol
		2	Law	Exeter
		3	Law	Exeter (first choice)

Jeffrey West	Middle class	1	-	-
		2	-	-
		3	-	-
John	Middle class	1	-	-
		2	Sport related	Marjon
		3	-	-
Poppy	Working class	1	Media Journalism/Media culture and journalism	South Wales
		2	Media and Journalism	South Wales, Cardiff, Falmouth
		3	Journalism	Falmouth (first choice), Cardiff
Ailayah	Middle class	1	Forensic Psychology/Forensic Studies/Criminology	-
		2	Forensic Science	Plymouth, Marjon, Portsmouth,Bournemouth, Bristol UWE
		3	Forensic Science	Portsmouth (first choice), Bristol, Bournemouth, Marjon
Joe	Working class	1	Games Development	Plymouth
		2	Games Development	Plymouth
		3	Games Development	Plymouth (first choice) and Falmouth
Kieran		1	-	Marjon

	Working class	2	Physio Therapy	Marjon, Plymouth
		3	Sports Therapy	Marjon (first choice), Bournemouth and Exeter
Mia	Working class	1	Criminology with forensics or psychology	Bournemouth
		2	-	-
		3	Child nursing	Plymouth
Mia X	Working class	1	English Literature and Language	Brighton
		2	English	Bristol, Plymouth
		3	English	Bristol UWE (first choice)
Rebekah	Working class	1	Psychology	-
		2	-	Plymouth, Marjon
		3	Psychology	Plymouth (first choice), Marjon, Bournemouth, Cardiff and Bristol
Kalen Garse	Working class	1	Primary Education with QTS	Marjon
		2	Primary Education with QTS	Chichester, Bristol UWE, Gloucester, Marjon, Plymouth
		3	Primary Education with QTS	Marjon (firm choice)

Table 32: Students' University and Subject Choice at each interview

Through this table it was interesting to see which students had made their decisions on university choice and subject choice fairly early on and then carried this through to their final interview. Some students such as working class students Joe and Kieran, had decided on their university choice early on with a local university. Further to this Joe had his subject choice and university choice from interview 1 which he followed through to his application. Others such as middle class student Jane, knew which subject choice they were interested in, but would change their choice in university throughout the interview process through various university visits, open days and university ranking tables for subject choice. This is really interesting when plotting student decision-making and how this changes throughout a considerable portion of their sixth form journey.

7.8   Choice of University

Within her first interview Jane discussed her interest in Bristol University, however, she noted that her dad had try to push her towards Oxford, *'my dad tries to push me to go for Oxford…I went and visited cos my grades…I've got the entry requirement grades but I don't like the atmosphere…I tried to explain that to him' (Jane, Middle-class student, interview 1).* Another interesting reflection was by student Kieran, who during his first interview had not chosen a subject choice but had discussed his interest in attending a local University. Working class student Dave and middle class students Jeffrey West and John had not discussed university choice or subject choice within their first interviews. However, interestingly by his final interview working class student Dave had decided on the University of Cardiff as his firm choice, and attributed a key factor in this decision being due to his brother attending the University. His other choices included a local non Russell-group University, for if he did not get the grades for his first choice Russell-group University, as well as two further university choices.

7.9   Choice of Subject

Middle class student Ailayah and working class students Rebekah and Kalen from the Urban school had each discussed being unsure when it came to university choice, either through being unsure of location (Ailayah) or unsure if university was for them (Rebekah, interview 1). However, they all nonetheless

had discussed potential choices of subject as shown in the table above. This could show that for these students their interest in a potential subject area may have been the first decision they faced and that potentially finding the appropriate university choice may have come following this.

A key component of choice of subject that was discussed as appealing was enjoying what they were studying at university, as well as career progression and opportunities. A quarter of middle class students and an eighth of working class students discussed the enjoyment of their subject or degree. Middle class student John shared that '*the courses I'm gonna do are very sport based…so I spend all my time doing sport…that's what I like doing*' (Rural student, Interview 2). Working class student Mia X stated '*obviously getting to study something, like just one thing like specialise, that I really love cos I love reading books*' (Urban student, Interview 2). This showed somewhat of an eagerness to pursue a post-18 option in an area they enjoyed. Career progression and opportunities through university were also appealing to some students. As with the above, a quarter of middle class students and an eighth of working class students discussed career progression or the opportunities that came with pursuing university. Middle class student Jane stated '*the way the degree looks and after the degree…that's the bit that…basically that's what drawn me to the unis I wanna go to*', she then went on to state '*there's no good doing a degree and then not having anywhere to go afterwards*' (Jane, Rural student, interview 2). Career progression seems to be essential for students like Jane when thinking about their post-18 decision making.

7.10   Fairness of Application Process

A topic that came up in discussion both organically and through certain questions asked was the idea around fairness with thinking about the application process for university. This section will explore students' perceptions of the fairness of the application process.

Students were asked in their second interview whether or not felt they had received more or less support than other young people applying to university. None of the students responded to this question by saying they had received less

support than other young people applying to university. Half of middle class students and half of working class students responded that they felt they had received more support than other schools and this was for a variety of reasons including: when compared to some other schools or college (Jane and Ailayah); or due to the size of their school or sixth form and therefore the access to more one-to-one time (Urban students Ailayah and Mia). Some students critiqued this, such as working class student Mia X, who stated that she felt as though they had been '*in a way spoon-fed it just to be like, this is what you're doing… get it right sort of thing'*. Mia X also gave examples such as that she felt as though her personal statement was not her own in the end *'and I know other people felt like it because so many people edited it'*. She then went onto say '*but…I got my universities so obviously it was the right thing to do*' (Mia X, Urban school, interview 2). Kalen, also from the urban school, stated that he felt he had received good support from his school and criticised other schools for their lack of support. He commented that a student from a differing school that he met at a BEd interview was underprepared and that he felt this could have been avoided if her school were more supportive of her with her application, like his was. There were also other students who commented that they had received '*about the same'* level of support (Dave, interview 2). Kieran commented that '*I've just kinda like done it all on my own haven't I…I just…had normal support I dunno*' (Kieran, working class student, interview 2).

Another question students were asked in their second interview was 'do you think you've have a higher or lower chance of getting into university compared to other people'. This was slightly ambiguously worded in order to see how this question may be perceived by students and to see what this may mean from each students' perspective and voice. A quarter of middle class students and just over a quarter of working class students felt they had a higher or, at least, a good chance of getting into university. One of six female students felt this way whereas three of six, or half, of male students felt this. For each of these students, except one, this was predominantly based on their high predicted or achieved A-level grades. One student, working class student Joe, did not elaborate on why he had a higher chance but shared that he wanted to hope his chances were higher or at the very least '*a good chance*' (Joe, Interview 2). Other students discussed factors such as doing extra-curricular activities to boost their CV (Dave, working

class, Rural student), or having experience in a similar or same area as the chosen course content. One working class student and no middle class students discussed feeling as though they had a lower chance of getting into university compared to other people. Mia stated that she felt as though your chances of getting into certain universities were dependent on your postcode and the university of choice and that this was an unfair practice, '*it depends what university it is, it depends where we come from… cos I know a lot of the universities depend on where you come from so like the top end ones…and very much like "oh don't like your postcode".*' (Mia, working class, urban student, interview 2). Mia then went onto give an example of a girl from her school who '*3 years ago…applied to Cambridge from here and she didn't get in, because of the postcode…even though she had like three A stars at Alevel*' (interview 2). It is interesting here to note that although this took place three years ago it is still discussed by students within the school, it is difficult to know the reasons for the university's decision to not accept the student in question at the time. One working class student Rebekah, from the same school as Mia, answered that she felt that her chances were *'about the same'* but agreed with Mia that it depended on the school you attended. However, she felt that in her area her chances were still about the same. Half of middle class students and one eighth of working class students discussed being unsure of whether their chances of getting into university were higher or lower. Middle class student John stated that '*if I put my mind to it I could get like above average grades…but… it's getting to that time of sixth form now where it's just like, I don't really wanna be here anymore*' (Interview 2). Working class student Poppy stated that she felt '*my grades are alright in that sense….like I'm not struggling like lagging behind but, I'm not like over-achieving or anything I think I'm quite solid so I think I'll be alright*'. She also stated that '*I've applied to…universities that are, like at my capability I've not like over-estimated myself and gone for the best of the best, so I think yeah I've got a good chance of getting in I think*' (Interview 2). This showed a recognition of the different demands of different universities and her perceptions of what these universities require for entry, which added to her uncertainty of access to university dependent on individual capabilities.

The final question around fairness at university asked during interview 2 was 'do you think the process of applying to university is equally fair for all young people'.

In response to this question only one student, working class student Joe, responded that he felt it was equally fair for all young people. He discussed that the process primarily came down to students being organised and that as long as they were organised that 'they're treated fairly' by the time it got to when the applications 'are actually read and everything so I'd say it's quite fair' (Interview 2). In terms of students who felt the process of applying for university was not equally fair for all, this was comprised of half of working class students and zero middle class students. Working class student Dave discussed that having to pay for the UCAS application to confirm and choose universities was unfair for students who may not have the money to fund this. Poppy stated that students applying for university who come from a family with previous experience of university would have more of an advantage, as they would have more knowledge on what university would be like. She also stated that having the money not to worry about 'student debt…and like money to live on...you're more inclined to just go to uni…but for someone who's from like a lower background…it might be quite daunting' (Working class student, Interview 2). Kalen similarly commented on a students' background in the form of their upbringing and what they are brought up around and how this may affect them consequently going down the same path or a different path. Kalen also mentioned that if the school did not help him he would have struggled because Alevels and other commitments can get on top of you and 'if you haven't got a good support system, you are gonna end up going under and dropping out' (Working class student, Interview 2). Half of middle class students and just under half, three eighths, of working class students were unsure in their responses about the whether the process of applying for university was equally fair for all or not. Middle class student Jeffrey discussed the probability of it being fair but perhaps slightly easier for some people to get more support for the application, he felt that once the application was in then this would be 'quite fair' (interview 2). Middle class student John shared that his school makes the process fair but that background and upbringing can make a difference with regards to this and that he has had a good upbringing. He discussed the impact parents and parental support can have and that if parents were not very supportive of it all and their school work that this could mean 'it just puts them down the same path as their parents' (Interview 2). The majority of the working class students seemed to reflect that the fairness of the process was dependent on the support you receive and especially with

regards to support from teachers and schools and the importance of this being a good support network.

Aside from questions around the fairness of the application process, there were also separate comments and discussions around this during interviews. This included half of middle class students and a quarter of working class students discussing the difference between sixth form and college when it came to fairness regarding applying to university. Interestingly the concept surrounding college verses sixth form was mentioned exclusively by female students. As three quarters of female students and zero male students discussed this within their interviews. This included discussions of colleges preparing students better by pushing students to improve their CVs through work experiences (Rebekah, Interview 2) and also discussions of college students not being as suited to university and academic life as sixth form students (Mia X, Interview 2). A quarter of middle class and working class students mentioned the impact of private schools and/or richer areas, including issues of inequality with regards to private schools receiving better quality teaching and resources (Jane, middle class student, Interview 2). The matter of private schools was also exclusively discussed by female students, half of female students and zero male students.

During the final interview certain students expanded further on issues surrounding fairness of the application process. Middle class student Jane discussed that she felt university and the process of applying for university was fair financially because of loans and bursaries available to those who needed them. She also shared cultural difference and that she felt 'it's often that the working class group in society don't want to ummm… they don't want to do things where they have to plan the future, they want the benefits now rather than later…so how do you change that cultural point of view? ...I wouldn't even know how to address that' (Jane, Middle class, Rural student, Interview 3). Within his final interview, working class student Kieran, shared that from his experience having parents with no knowledge on university meant that applying was harder for him: 'like if you speak one on one with your parents about uni it's kinda hard 'cause…they have no idea what's going on, so you always have to like… you have to do it on your own' (Kieran, working class, urban student, Interview 3). Working class student Poppy discussed that: 'as a family like you always think ah

university's too expensive…but there's was around it, you can always like afford to go uni with like loans and like student loans and finance and stuff', however, she discussed how the initial thought of the £9000 can be daunting and can scare a lot of people into 'thinking ah I won't bother…especially people that…don't have people that have already gone to university….or aren't in like a financially great position'. Poppy also discussed the financial barriers of students accessing open days or visiting universities and how these visits sometimes had an impact on how 'informed' their decisions would be as a result of visiting or not visiting a university (Poppy, working class, Rural student, Interview 3). Kalen discussed that impact his financial situation had had on his ability to move away to university or elsewhere, 'like I would never have said oh yeah being not a rich family….affected me in any slight but that bit has a little bit, only a tiny bit, cause then I would be in a position where I could just move' (Kalen, working class, Urban student, Interview 3). Lastly, working class student Rebekah discussed how private school could affect university choice and that social class would also affect this, especially with regards to Russell Group universities, 'cause I didn't have the chance to go to like a Russell Group University because I wasn't like…I don't…a lead learner I think they call it here…I wasn't that in secondary school and I didn't really know what it was, I wasn't really bothered, I didn't really care cause I didn't really think I was going to go to university and that it would affect anything'. Rebekah also discussed the idea of your chances being 'obviously…limited' and depending on what school you go to…you have as much of a chance as anyone else it's just going to be harder' (Rebekah, working class, Urban student, Interview 3).

7.11   Concluding Reflections

This chapter's focus on students' reflections on decision-making is useful when considering all three research questions:

- What influences the post 18 choices of working class young people?

With regards to students' intentions of going to university, it became apparent through the data that interview 2 seemed to represent the time point which presented the most uncertainty when it came to university choices. In quite a few cases, students would have a similar outcome in their final decision making to their thought process within their first interview, however, the period between these time points shows there is room for thought and reflections when it comes

to making decisions and perhaps informing themselves through advice and independent research. Further to this two working class students reflected on how being the 'first in the family' to attend university impacted on their decision-making when considering university as a post-18 option. This is important when considering potential influences of the post-18 choices of working class young people.

Another potential influence of post-18 choices is discussions around keeping up the momentum of schooling. This idea followed discussions around not pursuing a gap year, as certain students discussed concerns of not getting back into education or university education, which was their aim, if they pursued travelling or time away. Middle class student Ailayah's mother also shared this concern for her daughter not pursuing university if she took time to travel, due to a fear she would enjoy her time out too much. Working class student Joe for example discussed that he viewed a potential gap year as a waste of a year if he had not made the most of the time off. This can be argued to be an example of what the researcher's supervisor's described as an 'education escalator', that is seemingly hard to get back on if you get off.

- How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?
An interesting and reoccurring theme that seemed to arise in the data was importance of independence for students. This could be in the form of the independence that comes with university life, that some students reflected on as an appeal of university. Independence was also important when it came to decision-making as a lot of students commented on how, regardless of their good support networks, they used independent decision-making to help them at certain points make decisions.

The role of the school or teachers was important to a lot of students with many commenting on the level of support they had felt they had received. However, this was also discussed in the form of some students discussing being 'spoon-fed' (Mia X, interview 2). This led to other students such as middle class students John and Jane discussing how they felt sometimes certain students were pushed towards university that perhaps were not interested in this as a post-18 option. It is worth noting the positive support from schools with regard to

university also. Support from the school was discussed as especially useful for students who perhaps did not have parents or wider family to advise them on their post-18 decision making. This gave certain students access to information who may not have had such information without this support.

- What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?

Discussions around the access young people have to information for decision-making post 18 was also prominent in this chapter and this seemed to be divisive when it came to social class. As working class student Poppy discussed with regards to the fairness of the application process, she raised the issue of how she believed students with family with experience of university would have more knowledge about university and what to expect than those without. Working class student Kieran stated similarly that he felt he found it harder when applying to university based on the limited knowledge his parents had. This knowledge did not just seem to limit students based on general information about university life but also on important financial information about university that some students commented they may have benefitted from earlier as it helped them with considering how to manage university financially. Working class student Poppy shared her initial worry of how she would afford university until she learned of loans and bursaries that she was not aware of at the start of her decision-making journey in sixth form. Not having this knowledge at the start of their post-18 decision making could be detrimental, especially when considering students who potentially declined further education or sixth form perhaps due to a lack of information to make informed decisions. This could suggest more thorough and further information is needed on university and the financial side before sixth form education begins.

Another example of financial barriers were discussed through the expense of the application process to university, when considering the initial cost to apply via UCAS. As well as the financial barrier of students being able to access open days or to visit universities. This is especially important as most comments on open days were exceptionally positive and some students even attributed their decision making of university choice to their visit to the university. Therefore,

financial aid to support travel to and from universities may be something to consider going forward in terms of widening participation to Higher Education.

8.0 Discussion of Findings

This discussion chapter is made up of four thematic principles, these include:

- Student Aspiration
- The Role of Schools, with a specific focus on post-18 university progression.
- Knowledge about Higher Education
- Open Days and University Visits

These demonstrate the key areas arising from the research project which lend themselves to be key discussion points to consider going forward alongside the literature.

8.1 Student Aspiration

The first theme to consider is Student Aspiration. Contrary to some perceptions portrayed in literature about raising working class aspiration regarding HE (DfES, 2004; Grant 2017) and realising aspirations (David, 2010). As well news articles such as one about Ofsted Chief Amanda Spielman who claimed that white working-class communities can lack 'aspiration and drive' (BBC, 2018), the data within this research project showed that student aspiration, and family support to encourage said aspiration, for working class students was often shared by students. It should then be argued that aspiration is often a scapegoat solution to a problematic, complicated and, potentially, societal issue. Similarly Stahl argues that many equate 'aspiration as a simple antidote to complex problems' (2016: 664). Harrison and Waller share similar findings, stating that often issues of 'people from disadvantaged backgrounds progressing to higher education has been a key policy objective for successive governments in the UK' and that often this has been 'conceptualised as a problem with their 'aspirations''. However Harrison and Waller argue that: 'Recent large-case studies cast strong doubt on this hypothesis by demonstrating that aspirations are not generally low' (2018: 914).

8.1.1 The Perceived Problem

As mentioned the perceived problem with working class students' aspirations is still currently argued by many and the importance placed on this is reinforced by governments and their attempts and solutions of ''aspiration-raising' activities to promote higher education to those thought to have the potential to progress' (Harrison and Waller, 2018:914). A number of reports such as the 'School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation' (Department for Education, 2014), would argue that aspirations are a source of concern and problem for universities in terms of working class students' participation in HE.

8.1.2 Family Support

When considering the perceived problem of working class aspirations, it seems it would be fitting to consider family and home factors as 'Factors that may contribute to white working class underachievement' according to certain reports by the House of Commons Education Committee (2014:1). However, the data presented within this thesis 'family support' became a key principal theme when considering student aspiration. Family support may take on many meanings and interpretations. Support can be financial, practical, emotional or in the form of knowledge perhaps. Where parental support may lack in some areas, there can be an influx in others. Many students within the project commented on an aspiration 'to be the first person in my family to go to university' (Kieran, Interview 1), and it became apparent that this was, for some, part of their drive to achieve this and apply. Working class student Kieran mentioned this in each of his interviews, it was a key comment when considering university as a post-18 choice. Alongside Kieran was working class student Poppy who, like Kieran, had taken, it could be argued, a sense of satisfaction in being the first in her family to go to university 'it's not a pressure…but it's kinda like…kind of an achievement for me to say that I'm the first in my family ' (Poppy, Interview 1). Mia commented upon her grandfather and his influence and own aspiration for her, 'make you a little professor Mia' (Mia, Interview 3). Only one middle class student involved in this study commented on being the first in their family to attend university, Ailayah commented briefly on encouragement from her family to be the first one to go, 'cos obviously I said I wanted to go university…my mum and dad are sort of

stuck on the idea of me going now…they're like you have to go like you will be the first one to go' (Ailayah, Interview 1).

8.1.3 Family influence

Aside from family support there was also the sub-theme of family influence on student aspiration. For example within the 'roots' of her Tree of Life drawing, Poppy wrote that her 'family is hard-working' (Tree of Life, Poppy, Working-class student). This shows that Poppy recognises herself as coming from a hard-working family, as a part of her roots, and this in turn may inspire her to be hard working herself. It shows her seeing her family in a positive light and as a source of potential pride. Another source of influence, which may be less positive than the former, was students who aspired to be better based on what may perhaps be described as their parents 'shortcomings'. During their interviews working class students Mia X and Poppy discussed financial struggles and a lack of parental career which had given them an extra source of motivation towards their HE and first in the family goal. Poppy had discussed her mother having job opportunities but not a career, which she aspired to insure for herself. Mia X stated, 'I don't wanna be one of those people whose just like 20 years down the line struggling to pull money together at the end of the week and I want to be able to live and just be like stable and not having to worry about stuff that like my parents have had to worry about' (Mia X, Interview 1). According to findings by Crawford et al. 'Having a parent with a low level of education reduces the chances of being in Higher Education in each and every country…the odds for the UK are high by the standards of many other countries' (2017:18).

8.1.4 Russell Group Aspiration

As has been argued at various points throughout this project and within the literature review findings, although more working class young people are finding university as a post-18 destination, there is still a lack of working class students in Russell Group Universities and middle class students are who tends to be found within a Russell Group Institution (Boliver, 2016; Sanders et al, 2013). A lot of working class students interviewed in this study were considered, by teachers or family members, or considered themselves, high-achieving students and yet a large proportion of these working class students did not seem to

consider Russell Group Institutions. It can be argued by a number of responses that this may have been due to location reasons or not wanting to move but after asking the question of whether they had applied for a top or prestigious university and if university reputation was important to them during the second interview, I would argue that this may show a lack of knowledge about Russell Group Universities and the sometimes advantageous route to a career they provide. A lot of students such as Kieran who was eager to be the first in his family to go, and there seemed to be no difference between types of universities, just that it was university as a destination. Similarly Joe commented when asked if he would be applying top or reputable university that 'not sure I've applied to a top university or not cos I don't know what the top universities are' (Joe, working class student, interview 2). Jane, alternatively, discussed that 'the grades I'm gonna get I'm just gonna go to the best uni I can…I uh did wanna go to a Russell Group though, or good uni because that's gonna matter, like it's better getting a degree from Oxford than it would be from Plymouth or you know somewhere that aren't known for being very good' (Jane, middle class student, Interview2). I would argue this showed what Reay describes within her own work, that 'They did not even bother to articulate the divide between old and new universities because going to a new university not what someone like them does.' (2017:132) In terms of Russell Group universities, Boliver summarises in her 2016 paper that 'those from high social class completely monopolise Russell Group universities to the utter exclusion of those from less advantaged class origins' (2016:10). By looking at the data gathered within this section from literature and findings about aspiration there may be a more pressing problem to address.

An argument between Russell Group aspiration and schools can be made when considering various findings from the data. As mentioned within chapter 7 of these thesis, a quarter of middle class and working class students mentioned private or better funded schools. Middle class student Jane commented on private schools providing better teaching and resources to students (Jane, middle class, rural student, interview 2). Working class student Rebekah also commented on the positives of private schools with regards Russell Group access in comparison to her school experience, 'obviously…limited depending on what school you go to' (Rebekah, working class, urban student, interview 3).

With statistics such as '60 per cent of private school students who go to university attend a high status institution', this is in comparison to 'just 3 per cent of the 20 per cent poorest state school students attend a high status university' (Crawford et al. 2017:79).

8.2 The Role of Schools

With a specific focus on post-18 university progression.

> 'In the UK a market-driven privatised educational system that operates with…attributing value has resulted in the devaluation and pathologisation of many working-class students…It has also resulted in the devaluing and demonisation of the schools, mostly comprehensives, that these working-class students attend.' (Reay, 2017:88)

Within this study twelve students from two schools were worked with over the course of the 10 month period. These two schools had been labelled during this study as the 'urban' school and the 'rural' school, due to their locations. However, these schools also differed with regards to their Ofsted ratings, the Rural school was rated as 'good', whilst the Urban school was given a 'requires improvement' status. Although both middle class and working class students were interviewed during this project, the majority of the middle class students attended the Rural school and the Urban school sample was made up predominantly of working class students. Crawford et al. discusses within their book that 'pupils from poorer backgrounds attend worse-quality schools than pupils from richer backgrounds' (2017:101). Which shows that this ratio of working class and middle class students within the two schools of different Ofsted ratings reflects this. The Rural school's sixth form was significantly larger than the Urban school by a different of around 80 students (Rural school) to 20 students (Urban school). The type of support and the role of each of these schools unsurprisingly differed. The role of schools was an interesting theme that arose from the findings as this 'role' had many guises ranging from school support, knowledge and practical support. This was particularly useful when considering the role of schools with regards to university as a post-18 choice, other post-18 choices and the knowledge and support the school provided, which is what this theme will discuss. The theme will also discuss potential

criticisms that arose from the student data alongside each of the following sub-themes.

8.2.1 The Tale of Two schools

Each of the two schools supported their students during their time at sixth form. Some perhaps reflected on this more than others and some students shared during interviews, criticisms of their school's support or sometimes the lack of. However, the schools and teachers did prove to be valuable to many students. Both the Rural and Urban school and the role they played within the decision-making process when thinking about future careers and post-18 choices, as well as general support given were worth reflecting on.

8.2.1.1 Rural School

Within the Rural school teacher support and influence was discussed frequently by middle class student John in particular. John discussed how he would not have even attended sixth form if it had not been for his biology teachers encouraging him to do this, 'some of my teachers believed in me and I didn't really so definitely I would have just been working in a low paid apprenticeship just dossing about really…my biology teacher…she'll hold me back after lessons and just ask me like what my plans are and try and encourage me to stay' (John, middle class student, interview 1). Alongside positive comments like John's above, were a few comments about how the school and/or teachers were not useful or helpful. Middle class student Jane for example discussed how she felt university was pushed onto all students, despite some being un-interested in it as a post-18 option. 'University's shoved down everyone's throats…there's no other option…and careers you have to give them a plan of what you're gonna do next year else you can't get out of careers…so it's either university or nothing…not that I'm bitter or anything, this is anonymous right?' (Jane, middle class student, Interview 2). With regards to the career support, a lot of schools seem to offer career advice through their teachers, however, many teachers are not equipped to deal with or offer advice for the many different career options out there for all of their students.

8.2.1.2 Urban School

When it came to the Urban school on their discussion of teacher support and influence the majority of the students discussed their head of sixth form and the help he provided. This help was especially useful and needed with student Kieran who after a discussion with his head of sixth form realised he had chosen the wrong course for him due to a lack of own knowledge about his subject choice, he subsequently with the help of his head of sixth form changed from physiotherapy to sports therapy, as the sport side of his future career plans was the most important aspect. This resulted in a last minute subject change after his UCAS deadline which may have proven extremely difficult without his teachers help.

Something discussed exclusively by students from the Urban School was idea that type of school or postcode may affect your opportunities for certain universities, particularly elite or prestigious universities. Both Mia and Rebekah discussed within their interviews the idea that they felt they may be, or previous school students from their school may have been, disadvantaged in terms of university choice, based on the school or postcode. When asked whether Mia thought she had a higher or lower chance of getting into university than other people she replied, 'I don't know I think depending on the area…it depends what university it is, it depends where we come from', she then went onto say that 'a lot of the universities depend on where you come from so like the top end ones and very much like 'oh don't like your postcode' (Mia, working class student, interview 2). Mia shared an experience a former student had when applying to Cambridge, and how she did not get a place and how this was solely down to her postcode because her grades were all A*s at A-level. Similarly, Rebekah commented in response to the same question that as long as she got the grades needed she would have an equal chance, however, she then hesitated and stated 'well it depends obviously, it depends on what school you've gone to as well…I think, but I think around this area, probably about the same' (Rebekah, working class student, interview 2). Although Rebekah later discusses that her own area as nothing to worry about, she still recognised that there may be a bias or difference of university access based on postcode or area. This links back to as mentioned within the literature review by Reay, the idea and privilege that comes with private education and this selective and exclusive good education prior to higher education, and the impact those

schools may have or not have. Mia discussed not only in her second interview but also her final interview this idea of postcodes and university selection,

> 'I know a girl from here applied for Cambridge, and because she was from…like a rough area didn't get accepted because of her postcode…she got all the grades but they just wouldn't accept her because she didn't live up to their standards…I think that's quite damaging for her…us at our age be like oh just cause I live here don't mean…I'm any less smart than anyone else who lives up in London…I think that damages people so much now that you don't feel good enough because of like getting rejected 'cause of things that stupid' (Mia, working class student, Interview 3).

The students from the Urban school within the study do not reflect on positives of their postcode. Mia and Rebekah reflect on the downside of their postcode, they elude to an understanding or awareness of potential contextual offers. I am unaware if any contextual offers were made to students.

In contrast to the worry of their school postcode, Urban school students reflected on the many positives associated with their school. The positive influence from teachers on keeping students motivated and productive (Ailayah, middle class, urban student). Teacher inspiration to work hard and turn failure to success (Mia X, working class, urban student, interview 1).

Both schools within the study were reflected in positively by a number of students, however, it was particularly working class students that spoke so highly of schools. Each and every working class student had something positive to say about their schools.

8.2.2 School knowledge

For many students within the project the knowledge for their post-18 options was provided by their respective schools. Teachers within school can provide university support in particular due to their own university experience to enable them to become a practising teacher. This was especially important for some working class students, in particular, who perhaps felt knowledge on post-18 options such as university was lacking from other social networks around them. Working class student Kieran commented on the usefulness of teacher support

with regards to his university application and about university life in general. When asked if he felt if students who have family or parents that have been to university have a slight advantage when applying to university, he commented:

> 'yeah cos…they like experience what it's like and what they have to do to go there…like I said if you have one on one with teachers you could have one on one with your parents about it, cost they've been through the same thing so they could have like more in-depth like detail of what it's like and what you have to do…whereas people like, like my mum and dad have nothing, had no like knowledge of what I had to do at uni… like I had to independently do it with like the teachers' (Kieran, urban school, interview 3).

This advantage can also be seen with regards to students with university educated parents having unlimited access and time to discuss through their options and information. Whereas students, relying on teachers having that one-on-one time to discuss options, may find themselves perhaps faced with a social contact who has a busy timetable splitting their time between many students. Within his third and final interview, Kieran discussed how one on one time with teachers was valuable to him and in reply to the question 'thinking about other students coming through, is there anything that you would change to make the process easier for them?', he replied that it would be helpful for teachers to do 'little one on ones with students, cos it's usually a collective class, whereas…like I found it so much easier and done it in one day with my head of sixth form' (Kieran, working class student, interview 3). As mentioned above, providing a day of one on one time may be a struggle for teachers and a school with limited funding and time to facilitate this, however useful it may prove to be. Offering some other help toolbox or support staff-like feature via a university website or booklet may prove an effective resource in response to this. As mentioned previously by Kieran, students of parents with university experience already have that on-hand 'toolbox' of knowledge to help with the UCAS application. Many students within the study discussed needing support from teachers with the personal statement aspect of their application. Every single Urban school student and three of the five rural school student discussed difficulty surrounding this. Therefore, personal statement support could be

useful for all students regardless of class or gender when applying to university through UCAS.

8.2.3 Post-18 school support

Schools provide a, it could be argued from the data accumulated, valuable source of post-18 support. The literature states that the role of the school with regards to post-18 decision making could be described as 'an important role to play in encouraging pupils from lower SES families to apply to high status universities' (Chowdry et al. 2013:451). Similarly Taylor et al. shared their own findings that contrary to what is already known about schools impact such as, 'how schools can differentially support young people in their HE aspirations and choices, including the way they help "frame" the kinds of messages about HE the young people receive and reproduce'. Their analysis within their paper has shown that school influence is particularly noteworthy when considering young people's progression to elite universities, they suggest that 'the kind of knowledge and support required to access elite universities is even more unevenly distributed between schools'. Most noteworthy is the conclusion to the paper that 'There is a compelling case that schools play an important role in determining whether a young person will enter HE or not' (2018:20). Within this section I will discuss the role of 'university support' and then 'other post-18 support'. University support was important when thinking about post-18 decision making as this seemed to be the more natural transition of post-18 choice from sixth form. This also ended up being the decision 10 of the 12 students chose. 'Other post-18 support' encompasses all other post-18 routes that were discussed or relevant to students' decision-making. This includes the student data of the two students who chose a post-18 choice alternative to university.

8.2.3.1 University support

Within the literature review the impact of schooling on widening participation was discussed (see page 13, section: 2.2.1: The impact of schooling on widening participation). Within their paper, Boliver discusses, 'that there are significant social class, parental education, school type and housing tenure differences in the relative chances of attending a university of some kind rather than not being in higher education at all' (2016:7).

From the data it seemed both schools provided a good amount of support with regards to university preparation which included help with students' UCAS applications, as well as CVs and personal statements. The Urban school provided its students with a HE week where they offered in-depth UCAS support as well as the opportunity to fill in their applications together alongside teachers, 'we've had…time in tutor and everything to learn about all that and how it works and everything, so it's a bit less daunting than how it's made out on the news' (Joe, working class student, interview 2). However, a criticism of this came from student Mia X who shared that she felt that due to so many teachers and staff members within the school reading and editing her personal statement, she felt by the end that it no longer felt like hers:

> 'us as a sixth form have probably had more support than other schools…we've sort of been in a way spoon-fed it…I remember writing my personal statement and I know some other people felt like it didn't feel like it was my own in the end because so many people came and edited it…I remember I was like I don't even feel like I've wrote it' (Mia X, working class student, interview 2).

The Rural school commented on the usefulness of introductions to useful websites such as Unifrog, as well as personal statement and CV support as the Urban school commented. Another valuable provision from the Rural school was providing their students with access to a variety of universities through organised university visits and open days. This seemed especially useful due to the overall impact open days and university visits seemed to make on post-18 decision making, which will be discussed further later on in the chapter. This is something the Urban school did not have as much access to, although the Urban school provided it's students with access to universities through visits, they seemed to visit local universities rather than travel to other university options, including Russell Group universities. Many Urban students ended up picking local universities as their post-18 choice, a lot more in comparison to the Rural school, where local universities were only chosen as reserve choices in comparison to the Urban school's total of 5 of the 7 students who chose a local non-Russell group university as their firm choice, two of these students did not visit any other universities other than local universities, and a further two students visited the same local universities as well as one further university

which was not a local university. This shows a lack of variety of universities visited and particularly with the Urban school, a want to remain close to home. Both schools provided different sources of university support. This shows a great deal of support is provided to students as a result of the school and its role in post-18 decision making.

8.2.3.2 Other post-18 option support

It seemed that the assumed natural progression from sixth form was to HE, and therefore a big part of the schools' role seemed to be preparing and helping students with university applications and other university support. However, not all the students in this study were interested to or ended up applying to university for their after sixth form destination. Middle class Rural students John and Jeffrey both decided against applying to university and instead contemplated apprenticeships (John) and a gap year (Jeffrey). This leads into a potential critical question about: why is getting students into university of higher importance than apprenticeships? This question is important when thinking about my research project also, as the thesis explores widening participation when considering university as a post-18 option as a key area explored in this project. Despite Jeffrey and John being the only two students to pursue an alternative route to university post-18, many other students discussed a lack of information provided about other post-18 routes by their respective schools. As noted by Jane above with regards to feeling as though all students were 'pushed' towards university. This further links to the question posed above about how a fixation on university as an 'ideal type' of post-18 option for a successful future can be a problematic stance to take.

It seemed from various student comments that there was not as much information provided for other options such as apprenticeships and therefore students may find themselves having to go looking for the information for themselves elsewhere. As an example middle-class student John had decided to go down the route of apprenticeship, it could be argued that due to the lack of support provided for this option that he had to rely a lot on his own research. John ended up deciding his post-18 choice quite late in comparison to others, as did Jeffrey who chose to pursue a gap year to give him some time off before

a possible university pathway. Luckily student John had a brother within the same area of apprenticeship who had a link for him, he himself recognised as important by stating: 'my brother was in there doing naval architecture, so it's a good route to go cos it's easier to get in if you've already got family in there' (John, middle class student, Interview 1). Which had he not had, he may have found himself a bit stuck for his decision and perhaps push towards university instead of the choice he recognised as suiting him best. This leads to an important point around the additional cultural and social capital required to do a post-18 choice such as an apprenticeship over university, due to the limited school support. This is displayed in the point above as John uses the social capital he has accumulated from his brother's prior experience and links to the apprenticeship location of interest to John.

Jeffrey also discussed a lack of information provided by the school with regards to his gap year. He shared within all three of his interviews that an unexpected and useful source of support for his post-18 choice came from the school organised guest university speaker who shared their own experience of a gap year and which inspired Jeffrey to think this may be the choice for him. Arguably as this university guest speaker was organised by the school, the school did technically provide some support for this, but in comparison to the support for university it is a very limited and small scale source of support. It is also very likely the school did not have much of a say on who visited to share their experience and that this person was likely brought in as an example of someone to share their experience of university life but fortunately also had a relevant gap year experience to share as well.

8.2.4 Conclusion

When it came to students opinions on the schools' role in their post-18 decision making most students shared high opinions of the support they received from teachers and the school. This shows a lot of good and encouragement that comes from the school role and this was shown from both of the schools within this study. However, when it came to criticisms of the school support and the role of the school, this was overwhelmingly more of a middle-class complaint than a working-class one. Within chapter 6 of this thesis the interviews explored

that each of the students, every single one, commented on school and its impact. The quotes and comments from working class students in particular seemed to be more positive and showed more of a need for this support. This shows that schools are doing something that is really important, alongside family, and while some feel that school focusses too much on university, nevertheless there is information, connections with universities and students, and support that is crucial in how students have narrated making their next steps. Whether through providing personal statement or application support or arranging university speakers, the schools in this project provided necessary support towards students' post-18 decision-making processes.

8.3 Open days and University visits

As mentioned a little more briefly in the above theme, open days and university visits proved to be a very useful tool when it came to decision making for university as a potential post-18 option, whether that was as a tool to discount university as a choice altogether or as a way of helping to narrow down or change university choices. Open days and better access to open days whether through a bursary for potential travel expenses or encouragement from universities to visit a wider selection of schools, particularly in more disadvantaged areas, is something that as a result of this project I would like to look into more and encourage universities to also do so.

8.3.1 Belonging

The concept of 'belonging' may seem less significant to an overall decision than financial factors, however, students within the study who had attended universities via open days and had decided against or for those universities, usually attributed this to if they felt the universities suited them or if they felt they 'belonged'. Both middle-class and working-class students discussed how/if the universities suited them. Middle-class student Jane discussed how her father had encouraged and wished for her to attend Oxford, but after visiting the university she described how it was not for her, 'so I went to Oxford and I felt really really displaced and just don't feel very comfortable there…and then going to the other universities I could sort of see myself in the campus if you know what I mean' (Jane, middle class student, interview 3). This was also the case for working-class student Mia X, who when she visited Brighton University,

'I went up to Brighton and I just thought the people are just not for me, it was like a completely whole different area and I thought not used to it, not gonna like it', Brighton was Mia X's first and main university choice before she visited, which shows the importance that can come with visiting a university. She also discussed how she visited Russell group Cardiff University and felt 'you're not clever enough to get in here, it's ridiculously hard' and then went to a local university 'and I really liked it' but felt it was too small and close to her family and she wanted a change of scenery, so finally she visited 'Bristol and just fell in love with it and I thought it's perfect' (Mia X, working class student, interview 3). Like Mia X, Poppy also changed her mind from her top choice in university upon visiting the campus. Poppy had changed from a Russell group choice, that she commented would look more impressive and teachers had heavily encouraged her to pursue despite leaning towards South Wales university and Falmouth, 'that's good but it's not quite Cardiff is it?'. She commented that despite this 'it sounds more better if I like got into Cardiff but I prefer South Wales' (Poppy, working class student, interview 2) Poppy also had received an unconditional for South Wales university. Consequently, her final firm choice of university was Falmouth and second was Cardiff, so her decision-making had changed towards the end of the interview journey. The importance of belonging or fitting in can be seen in the examples above, 'those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be more likely to drop out of university is social and cultural 'fit'' (Crawford et al, 2017:117). These leads onto readings discussed within the literature review about the concept of 'people like me' and if an institution felt comfortable or appropriate for those students (Roberts, 2010).

8.3.2 Accessibility/Access

Feeling comfortable and checking an institution to see if they 'belong' could be considered by many as not achievable without access to the university through these open days and university visits. Accessibility and the fairness of this access is therefore an important sub-theme of open days and university visits. Many students, as mentioned previously, discussed the impact open days had on their post-18 choices, especially when considering different university choices. However, during their interviews some students discussed the finances associated with travelling and attending open days. Accessing local universities did not seem to be an issue for most students but in terms of Russell Group

institutions, which are further away, this meant them being discounted as a potential choice before the decision-making had even really began. Although not all students discussed finances in regard to this, with schools such as the Urban school organising trips to local universities but not universities that required more of a travel time, Russell group universities may have been overlooked or not considered due to a lack of time outside of school or part-time work, or a lack of knowledge of how universities may differ. Many students such as Kieran, Rebekah and Joe commented on going to university and this being a goal but did not specify or seem to consider which type or location, it was merely 'attending university' that became the main goal.

Another aspect to consider when thinking about accessibility is who is attending the open days. A few of the students interviewed discussed attending open days with their parents. However, for some students parents getting the necessary time off work may not be as simple. Travelling for students alongside part-time work and school studies is a difficult field to navigate, with travel expenses also to consider it may become less likely that students are able to access a university campus prior to choosing it on a UCAS form.

8.3.3 Conclusion to section

Throughout the data collection process open days and university visits became a huge contributor to not only decision-making but with influencing final decisions. Students regularly commented on their dream universities, only to visit the institution and find it was not what they had imagined or had visited elsewhere and decided to change university choices. It is therefore crucial that access to open days and university visits is a priority going forward from this research. A student being fortunate enough to afford and have time to visit all of their universities is a privilege all should be afforded. It is also worth noting that many working class students did not visit any universities that were not either within a short distance or organised by their respective schools. Schools, especially in more disadvantaged areas, do not have unlimited funds available to organise university visits to each sixth form student's choice of university. Therefore, many students will not be afforded with the opportunity to walk the halls, speak to the lecturers and informally discuss student life with the students of their potential post-18 university choice. This then leaves students with no choice but to rely on 'cold' and impersonal knowledge in the form of bias

university websites and prospectuses (Slack et al. 2014). Which although helpful, do not give the full picture of university to someone who may have few or even no social networks in which to fill in the blanks about university life.

8.4 Knowledge about HE

As already discussed within this chapter a great deal of knowledge about HE, for many students, is gained from their school as well as open days and university visits. Parental knowledge about university can also be valuable but the data has shown this is more of a middle class student experience in comparison to the working class sample used in this study. Therefore, a theme and point for discussion is 'Knowledge about HE'. This seemed particularly important to consider as how knowledge about university was gathered was commented on by many students. A lot of knowledge about what university life would be like and important financial information seemed to be learned much later for certain students and having this information earlier may have helped with the earlier stages of their decision-making process. Discussions of Slack et al. 2014 paper on 'hot, warm and cold knowledge' will be shared within the sections of this theme.

8.4.1 University life

University life may be hard to visualise when there is few with hands on experience of attending university within the surrounding social circle. For students like Poppy online videos of university life became a reassuring source of, arguably, 'warm knowledge' (Slack et al. 2014). The downside of this, however, is the accuracy of the source 'I have a picture of what it'll be like but I know that's wrong, I just don't know what bits of it are wrong yet' (Poppy, working class, rural student, interview 2). For Poppy it was the reassurance of seeing 'people like her' in a university setting that meant videos were her most comforting source of knowledge about university life. Other students may rely on parents or family experiences of university life, which arguably is more trusted, easily and frequently accessible and a form of 'hot knowledge'. Another social contact with experience of higher education and university life is a student's teacher. However, as mentioned previously teachers have to divide their time between much more students usually than parents, family or friends.

8.4.2 Finances

When knowledge about HE is scarce students may find information via other sources. An important topic, especially when taking social class into account, is knowledge about university finances. Working class student Joe discussed feeling reassured by his teachers that the financial side of university was 'not like it's made out on the news' (Joe, working class, urban student, interview 2). Similarly to this many other students discussed university debt being 'kind of scary' (Kieran, working class, urban student, interview 1). During the first interview when less knowledge had been accumulated by students about higher education working class students in particular commented that 'the debt thing doesn't sound great' (Dave, working class, rural student, interview 1). Working class student Poppy discussed within the second interview that she had felt uneasy about the prospect of university debt and financial worries at the beginning of her post-18 decision-making journey, but had since gained a better insight and felt better about how loans and student finance worked. This was discussed in detail within the chapter 6.1.7. Middle class students seemed less concerned about the financial side of university from the beginning of the project. This creates a dialogue around the important of knowledge about HE and how this may be accessed much later for working class students in comparison to middle class students. Clark et al. (2015) shows similar examples of young people discussing the worry surrounding debt and how once information was received about student finance and debt that 'higher fees and the accumulation of debt did not seem to act as a deterrent', this was after 'a focus of both school and university outreach 'information and guidance' sessions aimed at encouraging young people to attend university by stressing the feasibility of financing their educations' (Clark et al, 2015:no page). This reinforces that even now, years on that this information is essential for making working class students feel more at ease with the ideas surrounding finances. It is important to note that both in this study and Clark et al. (2015) study above show that the information gave the students reassurance and did not negatively influence their decision to pursue HE. Not having access to this knowledge on finance, however, can cause unease around the prospects of university and what the debt may involve.

8.4.3 Conclusion to the section

In order to make informed decisions, students must be informed. Therefore, access to knowledge about HE was a key area of discussion from the findings of this project. 'While many middle-class students were relatively familiar with the field of higher education, the working-class students are dealing with a very unfamiliar field' (Reay, 2009:1110). Therefore, a vast amount of knowledge is assumed to be held by prospective students, particularly when considering Russell Group or 'elite' universities that have high numbers of middle class students. Many students in this project went looking for their own answers, whereas they should be easy to find and access. This will not be a quick fix of an added section in a university prospectus or a 'working class student guide' on a university website. These forms of knowledge are not as trustworthy or as valued as the knowledge from 'people like me' or family may be (Slack et al. 2014). Access to information about HE should be made available earlier. Potentially many students could have already decided against university before making their post-16 choices due to an unawareness of key information. Many students may already have access to the information they need but it is important that regardless, knowledge of HE is readily available at a student's earliest need. There is a vast amount of knowledge out there for students to access about HE, however, schools may have an important part to play in assisting students by offering clear instruction on where to access that information earlier.

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 Summary of the research project

This research aimed to explore sixth form students' decision-making regarding their post-18 choices. Although the main focus of this study was working class students' voices and the widening participation problem within Russell Group institutions with regards to a lack of working class presence, the study used a mixture of middle class and working class students. The reasons for including both middle class and working class students was to explore a variety of students' voices and any potential similarities and differences these students may face. As middle class students are much more present in Russell Group institutions by contrast, it seemed appropriate to see if any differences or

similarities may have presented themselves in the lead up to submitting the final application to UCAS. An evenly spread ratio of male to female students participated within this study, to also explore any potential gender data of note. Two schools are used within this study, a rural and an urban school. Data was collected from the 12 students included within the study over the course of 10 months. This gave appropriate time to meet them during the end of their first year of sixth form, through until they submitted their UCAS applications in their final year before they would go onto said post-18 choices.

Of the 12 students included in this study, 10 had applied to University with an intention to go that following September, 1 student decided to have time away in the form of a gap year, with an intention to attend university in the future, and 1 student had decided to pursue an apprenticeship. Over the course of three interviews their post-18 choices were tracked (see table 32) and they were given opportunities in the form of narrative tasks, journal entries and interviews to share their thoughts and feelings towards the decision-making process, their post-18 options and other related matters.

An important aim of this study, as mentioned, was to observe and look into potential barriers students may face, and particularly working class students, which may affect them applying to university and/or Russell Group institutions in particular.

9.2 Implications

In relation to the findings from the research are the following considerations and implications for further research, policy and practice.

9.2.1 Implications for Further Research

It is hoped that the findings from this research will show and encourage that further and ongoing research will be necessary when considering the widening participation problem facing Russell Group universities like Exeter. Many research studies have contributed to the vast field of widening participation research and literature, yet the figures still stand that working class students are under-represented in what are considered the 'top' universities. This study focused on the importance of using the voices of those whom know best. Through advocacy ethnography a variety of methods were used in an attempt to

gather wisdom and knowledge from the voices of those who could be affected by the core of the research problem. Much of the research on working class students and widening participation initiatives and literature has been conducted with university students, but by this point it could be argued it is too late. Therefore, it was important that this study be conducted with students prior to university, to gain insight from voices who may choose a different post-18 road.

Going forward, research with students over a longer period of time, with perhaps an earlier starting point may prove valuable. As mentioned within the discussion chapter of this thesis, knowledge about higher education was lacking for many students until their last year of sixth form. This was particularly an issue for working class students in comparison to middle class students. Crucial information that may influence decision-making regarding university may be missed for students making their post-16 choices. Therefore, further research tracking students through post-16 and through to university may provide some interesting insights into the whole decision-making process, as this thesis has only provided a short look at the overall timeline of a student's decision to apply and attend university.

The data from the 12 students included within this study gave insight into some of the key decisions students face when considering local or distant universities. Further research could explore in greater detail the decisions surrounding movement and location of universities. If the nearest 'top' university is quite a distance from a prospective student who may not wish to travel far then there would have to be other factors to encourage attendance of such a university.

Intersectionality is another important area to explore with further research. Interesting findings around not only social class, but gender came out of this research project. Some examples of gender data were: twice as many female students wrote about academic skills within their tree activities than male students. With regards to the difficulty of the application process for university, one out of six male students and five out of six female students discussed the difficulty of the application process during the second interview. Similarly all female students discussed the difficulty of writing their personal statements, particularly with regards to writing their achievements within them. Two thirds of male students also commented on the difficulty of the personal statement, however, the most noteworthy difference was how female students struggled

more to write about themselves in a positive light. Therefore, gender is an area that could be explored further in relation to the trends outlined above. It would also be useful to consider other groups disadvantaged by and excluded from HE.

9.2.2 Implications for Policy

I believe findings within this research highlight some considerable implications for policy. One topic of discussion for each of the students was around student finance, loans or financial considerations in general. The worry around this did seem to be disproportionally affecting working class students in comparison to middle class students within the initial interviews. Towards the end of the interview process students seemed more comfortable and knowledgeable around student finance and what to expect. Providing more in-depth and accessible information about the student loan process earlier to students may be worth considering but this may be more of an implication for practice (see below, 9.2.3). However, in terms of policy further consideration may be given to the idea of a 'student tax' in lieu of an intimidating, and for many unpayable, student loan.

Although, graduate tax has been argued against and the effectiveness disputed a similar 'graduate contribution' return on university education may prove a useful alternative. 'Graduate contribution' is an idea put forward by Barr (2010) which although similar includes taking into consideration types of university courses and duration of payments. Loans can cause fear and worry among students and parents of students who hold a set image on what loan repayments or outstanding fees may look like. This is especially the case when information about these loans are coming from sources of 'cold' and distant sources such as universities with much to gain, rather than trusted social contacts (Slack et al. 2014). The result could be a less daunting method of 'repaying' for the accumulation of HE knowledge and better returns and/or a graduate career. Less daunting for family members and the students applying, without changing the overall outcome of paying towards a 'goods or service'. Issues such as drop-outs are a factor to consider but graduate tax or contribution may be worth researching further going forward.

9.2.3 Implications for Practice

As discussed within the discussion chapter of this thesis, a key area discussed and an important part of students' decision-making can be linked to Open Days and University Visits. The findings showed a great number of students' decision-making was influenced following an open day or university visit. Many students reflected on a change of university choice due to how they felt when seeing the campus in person and meeting key staff members. Therefore, the fact that many, particularly working class, students were only able to visit a handful, or only local, non-Russell Group universities is an important consideration to consider with improving future practice.

Working class students within the Rural school were more likely than the Urban school working class students to apply to Russell Group universities and I would argue this was due to the school organising trips to these universities. The Urban school primarily organised trips or visits to local universities and the outcome seems to show this affected the university choices the students considered, as five of the seven urban students chose a local university as their first or firm university choice. This could be down to the local universities suiting them more or due to universities further away not seeming like an option or consideration. It is also worth noting that the Rural school had a much higher ratio of middle class students than the Urban school, as shown in the student sample. There was a far higher percentage of working class and pupil premium students within the Urban school and subsequently the sixth form. Therefore, another potential reason for the lack of trips organised to universities in comparison to the Rural school could be an example of the Urban school holding lower aspirations for their students.

Many students also seemed to have little information on how universities may differ and what distinguished universities in order to make an informed decision. This is of course inferred from the data collected, however, the data does show that working class students will consider universities further away and/or Russell Group universities if they have access to the campus. The Rural school students are an example of this and many had reflected on changing or deciding on universities based on visiting their choices. Therefore, more proactive efforts are needed to bring working class students to open days, including covering travel costs. Another consideration will be creating more

opportunities for working class students to be on campus and meet other students, as well as university students going to schools. Although there is examples of this in place, the extent that they are carefully targeted towards disadvantaged groups and their needs and interests may need consideration.

A sense of belonging and feeling as though a university was for 'people like me' was another reoccurring consideration within the literature review for working class students and presented itself within the data. Some students visited the campus of a firm university choice only to instead choose a non-Russell Group university somewhere else despite teachers' objections of how a Russell Group university may 'sound… better' (Poppy, working class student, interview 2).

Despite school arranged trips to universities or organised visits from current university students to these schools, there is only so much funding and time available to schools. Therefore, a consideration may be to provide a travel bursary to students and/or schools, to encourage students from working class backgrounds or schools in key areas of interest to attend and visit universities that may seem too far away or unsuitable for 'people like them'.

9.3 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations to this study was being unable to gain access to the Alevel results and destinations of the 12 students involved in this study. Unfortunately due to deciding this information would be useful after the students had finished their final year meant that the school could not release their information or grades to me, due to data protection and as it was not arranged when the study began I of course had to accept this fair response. The Rural school, however, did agree to give my email, and the optional request, to the students and give them the option to contact me with the relevant information if they chose to. Unfortunately only one student had got back to me about her grades, working class student Poppy. Only having one students' information regarding this meant that it seemed that including this within the study would be less useful.

A larger sample from more schools would have enriched this data set further if time and funding had permitted it. Including colleges as well as schools to offer

more contrasts between data could be interesting going forward, especially as a few of the students within the study mentioned college in comparison to sixth form and the differences surrounding support post-18 compared to their college friends.

I would have also liked to include the voices of the teachers of the students as well as potentially their parents, to compare their perspectives with those of the students. I feel this would have provided another dimension to the collected data.

9.4 Contribution to Knowledge

In terms of contribution to knowledge, this thesis aims to present a rich understanding of the perspectives of a small cohort of students and highlight the importance of voice. The focus of this research is on the decision-making processes of students before they attend university, or have even decided on university as their post-18 pathway. Tools such as the narrative elicitation tasks presented in this thesis as data collection methods, I hope, will contribute to future projects on student voice and will provide new methodological approaches to qualitative research projects. I also hope the information and thoughts shared by the students within this study will go onto encourage other researchers and research participants to realise the usefulness and power of voice.

This project also highlights the importance of school and the need for quality advice. As elicited from the discussion chapter, the school can be an essential source of practical support for working class students considering university post-18. Parents were shown to provide encouragement, and emotional, financial and practical support where necessary, however, there were instances and examples given by students about how useful teachers and the schools were in providing information they otherwise would not have easy access to.

It also highlights the importance of considering the role social and cultural capital plays in university access and participation, and that working class students and their families do not lack capital but rather have not the same capital as middle class candidates for higher education. Perhaps exploring how

to embrace and utilise what each student brings with them into the field of higher education may be more useful going forward, than altering students to fit an idealised mould. This may offer an enriching experience to all entering the field.

9.5 Final Reflection on own learning journey as a researcher

Keeping with the nature of advocacy ethnography research it seemed fitting as a first generation working class university student to share a final reflection on my own learning journey as a newer researcher. Conducting a study of this size in comparison to previous experiences of undergraduate or postgraduate dissertations, which were both much more small-scale studies over short periods of time, has been an eye-opening experience. I have learned to find the thrill and enjoyment from data I have collected when trends and themes have emerged, planning data collection methods for the project and finding which methods suit particular research aims. I have learned how long transcribing takes for a much larger set of data than I have experienced before. In terms of personal growth, I feel I have gained more experience when communicating at conferences, or now while reflecting on my experiences of researching a PhD project for other students in a lecture or seminar setting.

The study provided me with the opportunity to take an area that once affected me as the student on an undergraduate programme receiving a Widening Participation scholarship bursary, to now as a researcher observing the data and literature to hopefully contribute in some way to potential solutions or further knowledge in an important field.

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Appendices:

1 Consent form

Understanding students' decision-making regarding University choices

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Dear student,

Thank you for being willing to help me with my project. Your voice is very important to this project and I hope that you will enjoy being involved.

In this form, I ask you to confirm that you are happy to be involved, and that you have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project, by reading the statement below and signing to confirm your agreement.

I have read and understand the Project Information Sheet   Yes/No

I understand that:

❑ I do not have to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw my participation until February 2019;

❑ any information which I give will be used only for the purposes of this research project: this includes publications and presentations;

❑ samples of my writing may be used in publications, unless I withdraw my consent prior to the completion of the study;

❑ all information I give will be treated as confidential, unless I disclose any issue which needs to be reported to the Responsible Person for safeguarding;

❑ the researcher will make every effort to preserve mine and my school/college's anonymity.

I agree that I am happy to participate in this project.

Signed: ………………………………………………………

Date: …………………………………………………………….

Abigail O'Brien

ao340@exeter.ac.uk

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

2 Information Sheets

2.1 Student Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF
E X ETER   **INFORMATION SHEET**

Title of Research Project

Understanding students' decision-making regarding University choices.

Details of Project

This project will look at secondary school and college students' decision-making about university: we are interested in what decisions young people make about going to university or not, and why they make them.   We will use what you tell us to understand better students' decision-making about what to do after leaving sixth form/college and this may help other students like you who come to make similar decisions. It may also be used to inform universities about students' decision-making regarding university choices so that everyone has a fair chance in having a university education.

Your voice as a young person is critical to this project!

What will this involve for you:

We would like to meet with you several times this year (approximately 7 times) and at those meetings we would like to:

☐ Interview you about your decision-making at three points in the year;
☐ Invite you to think about and reflect on your decision-making about university by:
  - A personal 'story' written about your learning journey so far (in the form of journal entries): what you choose to share from your journals and what you do not will be up to you.
  - An activity/activities which captures your decision-making in visual ways.

These sessions are expected to run for roughly 30 minutes- 1 hour, and will be done at your convenience to minimise the risk of any interference with your schedules.

Confidentiality

All information you give will be treated as confidential, unless you disclose any issue which needs to be reported to the school or college Responsible Person for safeguarding.

Interview voice recordings, transcripts, and any other written documentation will be held in confidence and will be destroyed three years after the end of the project. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed to access them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of any of the data collected about you and will have access to any of the work you participate in so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit. Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity

All data will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used for all reporting.   Particular care will be taken when reporting to ensure that anonymity is not breached by the use of any contextual information which might be revealing.

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Professor Debra Myhill, d.a.myhill@exeter.ac.uk

2.2 School Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT
Form FOR RESEARCH

Title of Research Project

Understanding students' decision-making regarding University choices.

Details of Project

My research, funded by the University of Exeter, is looking at widening participation and how best to support disadvantaged students in considering and accessing a university education.   Specifically, this project will look at secondary school and college students' decision-making about university, and I am focusing on white working-class boys, as in the South West this is a group who seem less likely to achieve and to access university.   These students' voices are at the heart of my research project.

This data will be used to understand students' decision-making about what to do after leaving sixth form/college and may help other students like themselves who come to make similar decisions. It may also be used to inform universities about students' decision-making regarding university choices.

I am hoping that your school would be willing to participate in this project and I outline the project in a little more detail below.

How I will collect the data:

The data collection methods for this project will include:

- ☐ A short Questionnaire to all of the year 12s within the school/setting.
- ☐ More focused data collection from a group of 6 students of white working class and middle class, girls and boys which will involve the following:
   - Three Semi structured interviews throughout the year.

   - Narrative work, which may take the form of:

- A personal story written about the student's learning journey so far (in the form of journal entries), what the students share from their journals and what they do not will be up to them.
- This will also include the use of narrative activities such as a 'Tree of life' task where students will plot their decision-making processes and factors that affect their decision-making within a drawing of a tree.
- Profile data will be collected from each student to paint a picture of who the narrative comes from and to ensure the right sample of student's voices are being explored. This profile will be built up by the students when they are worked with, they will be able to include and exclude whatever information they wish.

These sessions are expected to run monthly for roughly 30minutes- 1 hour with each student, and will be done at the student's convenience to minimise the risk of any interference with the student's schedules.

All data will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality (see further details at the end of this document).

The school/college's role:

I would need your support in getting access to year 12 students to administer the questionnaire (either on paper or electronically); and your support in identifying the six students for the more focused student voice data collection.

Other than this, I do not anticipate it taking up much of your time and I would of course share the findings with you at the end of the study.

Contact Details

For further information about the research, please contact:

Name: Abigail O'Brien

Email: ao340@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Professor Debra Myhill, d.a.myhill@exeter.ac.uk

Confidentiality

All data will be anonymised. Interview voice recordings will be held in confidence and will be deleted once transcribed. Transcripts will be help in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed to access them (except as may be required by the law). However, if requested, students will be supplied with a copy of any of the data collected and will have access to any of the work they participate in so that they can comment on and edit it as they see fit. Their data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

The information they provide will be used for research purposes and student's personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Any personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

The data will be used for the purpose of this dissertation and possibly future publications or conference presentations that may occur as a result of this project.

Students may withdraw themselves or any data at any time during the data collection process.

The students and the school or college will not be identified throughout the project; these will remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms throughout.

All information that may make students identifiable will be anonymised and kept secure at all times.

All data will be kept secured under a password protected laptop. Data will be retained after the study for 7 years. After this time it will be destroyed.

Voice recordings will be destroyed once transcribed and will not be published or shared outside the research team at any point.

Anonymity
Data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of the student or school/college name; pseudonyms will be used for the students and the school/college.

3 Interview Schedules

3.1 Interview Schedule 1

<u>Interview Schedule 1</u>

The main research question for this project is:

1. *'What influences the post 18 choices of working class young people?'*

Along with two Research sub-questions:

2. *'How do young people's social networks shape their decision-making?'*

3. *'What access do young people have to information for decision-making post 18?'*

Comments like 'I remember that happening to me' are fine. [Listen - But don't influence]

Interview Beginning:

Answer the questions the best you can, if you don't want to answer a question just say and if you need me to explain the question a bit better just let me know.

<u>Getting to know you question:</u>

Before we get started on questions specifically relating to decision-making, I'd just like to get to know you as a person,

> **so firstly How would you describe yourself?**

(Prompt?: Also, how have you described/sold yourself to universities/jobs on your personal statement/application forms? Might lead to all positive responses…)

> **if we brought some of your friends in, how would your friends describe you?** *(RQ 2?)*

(Prompt: this could just be words that you think they'd use – for example: my friends would probably say I'm Organised, but a bit messy)

> **Whose an important person in your life?**

(Prompt: Family member, Friend, etc)

(prompt: someone you turn to in a time of need, when you need advice? Etc.)

<u>Hobbies? (Social Cultural Capital Theory)</u>

So thinking a bit about your hobbies and what you enjoy doing…

- **What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?**

(Prompt: musical instrument? 'In my spare time I do dance lessons and love to read)

- **Do you attend any after school clubs or activities?**

- **Do you volunteer or work in your spare time? If so, what do you do? How many hours do you work or volunteer?**
- **What subjects did you take when you started sixth form?**

School influence

- **What are your plans after you leave sixth form?**

(Prompt: some people struggle with deciding what to do after school and some people don't)

(Prompt: It's okay to not know what you're doing after school)

- **DO you think anyone or anything has influenced your plans in anyway? (RQ2?)**
- **Has your school or information you've received from your school influenced your plans in anyway? If so how?**
- **(If applicable) Do you feel your teachers or tutors have helped you with deciding what to do after school?**

These next few questions may seem a bit repetitive but when thinking about some of the options after sixth form,

- **What is your opinion on university?**

(prompts for all the following questions about opinions:

Is this something you'd consider?

How much information have you received about this? If applicable, who have you received information about this from?

- **" " Apprenticeships?**
- **" " Working after school?**
- **" " Taking a gap year?**

(Prompt: taking some time out to go travelling, work, or do nothing?)

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Parental Impact/Parental education

- **Have either of your parents/guardians been to university?**
- **Has anyone in your wider family gone to university?**

(Prompts: Cousins, uncles, grandparents etc.)

- **have your parents or any of your wider family given you any advice about university or the application process?** (RQ 2 and 3)

(Prompt: Do you think this has affected your decision about university after sixth form?)

- **Are your parents working? Both? What job?**
- **Are you looking to pursue a career in the same area as your parent or in a completely different area?** (RQ 2?)

Aspirations/achievement

- **Do you know what job you'd want to do in the future? (If applicable – Do you know what steps you will need to take to get your dream job?)**

(Prompts: Will you need a degree, certain grades, certain experience?)

Social network

- **Who did you speak to (if anyone) when you made your GCSE and or A-level choices?** (RQ 2?)

(Prompt: did you speak to the same people when making your GCSE or A-level choices?)

(Prompt: did they give you any helpful advice that helped you make your decisions?)

(Prompt: If applicable, who would you/have you spoken to about university choices, or apprenticeships, or work?)

Lastly, Is there anything you would like to add or wish I'd asked?

3.2 Interview Schedule 2

So it's now nearly December: have you applied to university or have you made a different decision.

Applying for university schedule:

The Decision-Making:

- ❑ **T**ell me more about your decision to apply to university:
  - ➢ Why university not another choice?
  - ➢ Changed decision since last time?
  - ➢ Anything particular influenced your decision?
- ❑ How did you choose your universities; your first choice?
  - ➢ Did your school influence your decision-making at all?
  - ➢ Did you apply for a top/prestigious university? Is the Uni reputation important to you?
- ❑ There's a lot in the news about student fees and student debt. Did that influence your decision-making at all?
- ❑ What was the admissions process like? How did you find applying through UCAS etc?
- ❑ Are you planning to go straight to university next September, or are you planning something like a gap year?
- ❑ Do you have a set plan of what you will be doing in 5 years' time or are you just taking things one step at a time?

Support (social capital)

- ❑ What kind of support did you get in preparing your application?
  - ➢ Any help with CV? From whom?
  - ➢ Any help with the personal statement? From whom?
- ❑ How did you find out about applying to the different universities?
  - ➢ Parents? Teachers? School? Universities? Friends? Websites? Uni prospectuses?
- ❑ Do you know anyone who has been to university or have contacts that have helped you with your uni application or given advice?
- ❑ Do you think anyone in particular has helped you with how to apply to your chosen path after sixth form?
- ❑ How important do you think contacts are when looking at you future career?

Expectations of life at university

- ❑ What do you think it will be like to be at university? What makes you think that? Probe for from friends, parents, school, TV etc
- ❑ What do you think you will like about university?
- ❑ Is there anything that you are worrying about regarding university?
- ❑ Do you think you will join any university clubs or societies?

Fairness?

- ❑ Did you find applying to university an easy process or a difficult process?
- ❑ Do you think you had more or less support than other young people applying to university?

❑ Do you think you have a higher or lower chance of getting into university than other people?

❑ Do you think the process of applying to university is equally fair for all young people?

Not applying to university Schedule:

So it's now nearly December: have you applied to university or have you made a different decision.

The Decision-Making:

❑ **T**ell me more about your decision:
  ➢ Why did you decide on this choice and not university?
  ➢ Changed decision since last time?
  ➢ Anything particular influenced your decision?

❑ How did you choose this path after sixth form?
  ➢ Did your school influence your decision-making at all?

❑ There's a lot in the news about student fees and student debt. Did that influence your decision-making at all?

❑ What was the application process like? Have you applied? Did you have an interview?

❑ Are you planning on going to university later on in life?

❑ Do you have a set plan of what you will be doing in 5 years' time or are you just taking things one step at a time?

Support (social capital)

❑ What kind of support did you get in preparing your application?
  ➢ Any help with CV? From whom?
  ➢ Any help with the personal statement? From whom?

❑ How did you find out about applying to your choice?
  ➢ Parents? Teachers? School? Friends? Websites?

❑ Do you know anyone who has gone down the same route as you or do you have contacts that have helped you with your application or given advice?

❑ Do you think anyone in particular has helped you with how to apply to your chosen path after sixth form?

❑ How important do you think contacts are when looking at you future career?

Expectations of life at choice

❑ What do you think it will be like at your choice after sixth form? What makes you think that? Probe for from friends, parents, school, TV etc

❑ What do you think you will like about your choice?

❑ Is there anything that you are worrying about regarding the choice you've made?

Fairness?

- ~~Did you find applying to university an easy process or a difficult process?~~
- ~~Do you think you had more or less support than other young people applying to university?~~
- ~~Do you think you have a higher or lower chance of getting into university than other people?~~
- Do you think the process of applying to university is equally fair for all young people?

3.3 Interview Schedule 3

<u>Three stages to the interview:</u>

- ➢ Ask questions (within this schedule)
- ➢ Revisit tree of life task and do new annotations
- ➢ Section specific to each student

Theme: Decision-Making/Reflections:

So it's now the New Year: This has been an important time for you let's reflect on it…

Q1: I'm really interested in how you made that final decision.

Prompts: Did you apply to university or another choice, who has helped you make the decision, have you heard back?

Q2: How did you narrow down your decision?

Prompts: Did you speak to anyone about it? Visit the choices?

Q3: What were the reasons for you to pick that choice?

Location? Uni Choices?

- - Did distance affect your choice? Would you rather be nearer to home or does it not matter? If applicable was uni status important to your decision in the end?

Q4: Take me through what you choose and why?

Prompts: did you attend open days?

Narrate me through it, storytelling. What was the process of coming to this choice.

Q5: What were the most important things that influenced your final decision?

Theme: Teachers assumptions/school support (social capital):

Q6: Did advice or support you received from your school or teachers play a big role in your final decision-making (looking back over the year)?

Q7: Can you give any examples of advice you received from your teachers or school that really affected your final decision?

Theme: Social Networks (social capital):

If you have spoken to them about it...

Q8: What are your friend's thoughts on your final decision?

For after sixth form.

Q9: What are your family's thoughts on your final decision?

Q10: What are your teacher's thoughts on your final decision?

Prompts: were they surprised? Think you made the right decision? Wrong decision? Etc.

Theme: Fairness:

Q11: Could anything have made this process easier for you?

Q12: Is there anything you would change? (policy)

Prompt: about how you made your final choice? The application process? The process as a whole? Universities part? Schools part? Any extra help? Anything you found difficult to do?

Q13: Now similarly but when thinking about… other students coming through…is there anything you would change to make the process easier for them?

Prompts: What would you change? What would have helped you or would help other students?

PART 3: Personalised questions

Final thoughts:

Is there any final thoughts you'd wish to share or want to be heard?

4 Interview Transcript: Mia (Interview 1)

Me: so I was just going to ask you a few questions today about yourself and then decisions

after sixth form and things

Mia: mmhmm *nodding*

Me: so first just to sort of get to know you (.) how would you describe yourself?

Mia: oo (.)

Me: it can be a hard question

Mia: quite loud (.) bubbly (.) yeah don't really know (.) sir could probably describe me better

than I could describe myself

Both: *laughs*

Me: if we bought your friends in here how do you think they'd describe you?

Mia: always gotta be the one to (.) make everyone laugh all the time (.)

Me: uh who's an important person in your life?

Mia: my mum

Me: mmhmm

Mia: mmm

Me: you go to her for like advice on things and (-)

Mia: yeah she's more like my best friend than my mum

Me: that's nice

Mia: yeah (.)

Me: cool (.) um thinking about your hobbies and what you enjoy what do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Mia: (.) I spend money *laughs*

Me: *laughs*

Mia: honestly I just like going out just being with everyone meeting everyone just going out (.) shopping or just sitting with eachother having a laugh and everything (.) its just (.) nothing I really do its just going out

Me: yeah making memories

Mia: yeah

Me: do you attend any afterschool clubs or activities?

Mia: no

Me: well you're pretty busy during sixth form

Mia: and I work during the weekends

Me: oh cool yeah I was going to ask do you work in your spare time

Mia: oh yeah

Me: how many hours do you (-)

Mia: well it depends cos I'm on a zero hour contact so it's how many shifts I pick up (.) so this weekend I'm not doing any but next weekend I'm doing all weekend so (.)

Me: oh yeah

Mia: so Saturday's ten hours (.) Sunday's 6 hours so

Me: oh cool yeah (.) what kind of thing do you do (.) like what do you work as?

Mia: um work at a trampoline park

Me: oh cool(!)

Mia: so yeah it's alright it's fun

Me: yeah exactly

Both: *laughs*

Me: trampolining can keep you really fit (.) I didn't realise and then I went and I was exhausted *laughs*

Mia: yeah it makes me tired watching everyone running around all the time I'm like 'phew'

Me: yeah *laughs* (.) um what subjects did you take when you started sixth form?

Mia: um psychology (.) sociology and applied science

Me: mmm cool (.) what are your plans after you leave sixth form? If you know

Mia: go uni (.)

Me: mmhmm yeah (.) do you know what uni you'd go to or?

Mia: I haven't (.) we're going up to look at Cardiff next month or at the end of this month so I haven't decided properly yet I'm going to have a look at a few (.) I want to look at Bournemouth cos I don't when we went to um Dodchester for like the tour around all the different uni stations (.) Bournemouth had a really good (.) sort of option for what I wanted to do at uni (.) so that's one I want to look at (..)

Me: yeah cool (.) it can take a long time to decide where your (.) going (-)

Mia: yeah when you haven't looked at any of them yet it's sort of a bit init (.)

Me: yeah and it's finding the time to look at them as well

Mia: *nods* mmm (..)

Me: cool (.) do you think anyone or anything has influenced your plans in anyway?

Mia: (..) no I just think it's something I've always wanted to do and no one in my family's ever been to uni (.) but I didn't know about that until I said 'oh I wanna go uni' and mum was like 'oh noone's been uni in our family before' so I was like 'oh' (.) no pressure then

Me: yeah

Both: *laughs*

Me: um has your school or information you've received from your school influenced your plans in anyway?

Mia: yeah I think (.) a little bit like when we have seminars and everything it's made me like (.) cos when you hear uni you just think about (.) it's gonna be really hard work

Me: mmm

Mia: and then we sort of get to like (.) when we've been in school the teachers have been like 'oh there's different parts to uni as well like you will have a (.) you'll meet loads of new people and you'll (.) develop more in yourself rather than just going and do your course

Me: yeah

Mia: so it's a bit (.) makes you feel a bit more calm about it rather than being like 'oh my god'

Me: yeah its not that scary don't worry *laughs*

Mia: when you don't know anything it sounds scary

Me: yeah I was terrified cos I didn't know anything and I was like 'what do I do' but it was fine

Both: *laughs*

Me: do you feel your teachers or tutors have helped you with deciding what to do after school?

Mia: yeah cos I think um (.) you get offered (.) they don't make you feel like you have to go to uni you get the other options like we've had seminars on apprenticeships after school (.) and

different degrees different pathways to take so it's a bit like no matter what you pick there's always something that they'll try and help you with (.)

Me: yeah (.)

Mia: if you've ever got any questions or anything they're like 'well you could do this but you could do this as well if that's not the route you want to take' or (..)

Me: mmm so loads of options and things

Mia: yeah

Me: that's good (.) uh what is your opinion on university?

Mia: (..) oh (.) not really sure I think it's (..) it'll be it's a good opportunity to (.) just have those few years where you do extra you get that good degree (.) come out more like as a person you learn more stuff (.) you get to go and (.) have a laugh (.) but then work at the same time *laughs*

Me: *laughs*

Mia: meet new people it's just a different experience (.) good opportunity (.)

Me: yeah (.) these next few questions are a bit repetitive so I'm sorry about that (.)

Both: *laughs*

Me: um what are your opinions on apprenticeships?

Mia: I'm not really sure about apprenticeships like I know cos I (.) I've never really wanted to go into an apprenticeship but if I was looking at one I would think they would be (..) a good opportunity to have because it's more (.) they seem more practical (.) but then it's not something I'm really into (.) it's not like if I think about what I wanna do when I leave here it's always gonna be uni it's just something that I've always wanted to do since I've been (.) like year 11 doing GCSEs I wanted to come up here to go to uni (.) so (..)

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Me: yeah (.) oh cool (.) uh what's your opinion on like going straight into a job after school sixth form?

Mia: mm (.) I dunno cos I've had a job while I've been at sixth form so it's a bit like like it can be quite difficult now when you're at school all week and then you go (.) work all weekend or if your like working late hours on a Sunday you come in on a Monday and you're like oh I'm so tired

Me: yeah of course

Mia: I think (.) it sort of depends on the person (.) if you wanna go straight into education again after or you just wanna go out and get a job (.) cos it's all about having the income coming (.)

Me: yeah course (.) so what are your opinions on taking a gap year after sixth form?

Mia: personally I don't think I would because (.) I'd rather just get right into it rather than have that time away in case I change my mind like I don't want to go to uni now I'd rather not I'd rather just have my own time (.) to do something else (.) I'd rather get straight into that (.)

Me: I was exactly the same (.) I thought if I take a gap year I won't do it

Mia: yeah I'd rather just prevent myself from changing my mind (.) rather than have the option

Me: yeah definitely (.) um so you said I was going to say have either of your parents or guardians been to university but you'll be the first one in your family

Mia: yeah

Me: has anyone in your wider wider family so like uncles aunties cousins gone to university?

Mia: no

Me: so you will be the very first

Mia: yeah

Me: that is nerve wracking

Mia: I know

Both: *laughs*

Mia: I'm like oh god no pressure

Me: yeah

Both: *laughs*

Me: um have your parents or any of your wider family given you any advice on university or the application process?

Mia: well um my uncle works at Cambridge university (.)

Me: oh cool

Mia: so (.) when I did get all my grades and everything (.) at GCSE he said they were a really good set (.) he said it would be good to come to sixth cos he knows that I've always wanted to do stuff like that anyway cos he's um (.) he's one of the high up ones in the family like the one that's actually gone really far *smiles*

Me: *smiles* yeah

Mia: so um I speak to him a lot about (.) doing stuff about uni and he just says it's such a good opportunity to take (.) he wish he did cos when he was um at school he didn't really know much about it so he didn't go (.) so now he's a bit like it's such a good opportunity to take 'now I work at one and I see everyone coming up every year and the way they leave and they graduate it would be such a good path for you and what you wanna do' so I'm just like oh (.) 'thanks'*laughs*

Me: yeah that must be an amazing like source to have as well like you could ask him anything

Mia: yeah (.) he's really smart

Me: yeah

Both: *laughs*

Me: well yeah that uni that's like (-)

Mia: yeah(.)

Me: um are your parents working?

Mia: yeah

Me: like both of them?

Mia: yeah

Me: yeah cool (.) what sort of jobs do they do?

Mia: um (.) dad is (.) a chef and mums a dinner lady while my sisters still quite young

Me: mmm

Mia: so when my sister gets a bit older she wants to look at something a bit more longer hours rather than just (.) a couple of hours during the day (.)

Me: yeah course (.) um so are you looking to pursue a career in the same area as your parents or a completely different area?

Mia: completely different (.) I cannot cook

Both: *laughs*

Mia: and not be a dinner lady either

Me: yeah I'm not that great at cooking (.) do you know what job you'd want to do in the future like your dream job and what steps you'd take to get it?

Mia: I'm a bit torn between two things at the moment

Me: ok

Mia: they're both sort of around the same (.) so it's like I either wanna go straight into criminology with forensics or criminology with psychology

Me: oh wow

Mia: so really anything (.) like I'm really interested in like the police force behind the scenes of like crimes and everything so that's what I wanna do but I'm not sure if I want to go into the practical side or like the (..) parts where it's all behind like why people do it why have they done that like what's made them (.) I'm not really sure that's something I have to *muffled* suss when I come to it

Me: yeah that sounds really interesting though

Mia: mm I like something that will keep me interested cos I like being busy

Me: yeah definitely (.) I love all the programmes on stuff like that *laughs*

Mia: yeah so do I (.) I watch them all the time

Both: *laughs*

Me: um who did you speak to if anyone when you made your GCSE or Alevel choices?

Mia: (.) um (.) the head of sixth form and deputy head of sixth form really (.) cos not a lot of the teachers when I was doing GCSEs really knew (.) like we had the time to sit with both sirs and be like this is what I'm looking to do (.) what options do you think would be best (.) and they'd suggest ones and then you'd have time to think and then you'd come back and speak to them (.) and they'd be like 'oh yeah these ones are really good that's quite hard though' so you'd be a bit like 'oooh' like sir told me psychology was quite hard but he reckons I would be able to do it if I got the grades I needed and I did so (.)

Me: mm (.) oh cool (.) ok so last thing is there anything you'd like to add or wish I'd asked today?

Mia: nope

Me: ok

Mia: the right questions *laughs*

Me: yeah cool great thank you (.) that's really helpful

Mia: thank you

[ended 10:40]

5 Tree of Life

5.1 Tree of Life – Kalen Garse

5.2 Tree of Life: Ailayah

The tree drawing contains the following handwritten text:

Branches (leaves/apples):
- friendly dog
- Big house
- Be rich
- having a job I enjoy
- property
- friends
- mum
- dad
- Going to uni

Trunk:
- work for money.
- making friends.
- Going out with friends

Ground line:
- going to school.
- Going gym
- Going work

Roots:
- my mum is a chef at a school
- my dads a senior contracts manager
- my GCSE's were in Spanish, english, Maths, Science, RE, Catering, Health + social care.
- A levels are psychology, sociology & applied science

5.3 Tree of Life: Mia X

Leaf labels (top of tree):
My stepdad, My sister, My Grandad, My Grandads Dog, Mynan, Auntres & uncle, My Dad, My Mum, My Cat

Speech bubble:
Be kind to everyone because they could be going through things. Take care of yourself & fill your life with positivity and good energy. Be opptimistic, and polite and respectful. Kindness goes a long way!

Left branch (red text):
I hope to go to university to study English lit & then do a Masters
I hope to move to Dubai and teach English in an International school
In Buisness & marketing. Go into Publishing.

Centre trunk (green text):
I have learned how to challenge myself & persevere even when I am struggling.
I can knit, I learnt this through my mum.
I can also play Hockey. However, I have not played for a few years.

Right branch (red text):
I would like a German Sheapard and a white Audi A1
doberman named Roco

Right trunk (green text):
I have to do revision every single day to make sure I stay on top of things. I also read a book every day for 20 minutes.

Roots (green text):
I come from the North of England. Most of my family are Scottish.
My dad is from
I have one sister from
I study Religion, Sociology & English

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5.4 Tree of Life: Rebekah

Choice of education...
What root to take.
To have a job in life I enjoy
To do the things that make me happy
that care so much
Friends
Family
Boyfriend

To not make my job my whole life
I a job enjoy and that I don't struggle with financially.

To die of a natural cause preferebly old age

communicating with people
reading
understanding
sailing
writing
empathetic
swimming
drawing
painting

Filing my work!

1 of 4 sisters

Born in

School in age till 12

- GCSE:
  · PE
  · Psychology
  · Health and social
  · Music

- A level:
  · Psychology
  · Sociology
  · Core Maths
  · EPQ

5.5 Tree of Life: Jane

5.6 Tree of Life: Poppy

5.7 Tree of Life: Kieran

Gran: influenced me to do A Levels and wants me to go university.

Auntie: wants me to be the first person in the family to go university

Mum and Dad: Motivate me to go university, saying to do what you'd enjoy.

Mr [ ]: Have given advice on anything with universities.

Mr [ ] and Mr [ ] helped hugely with Personal Statement. And what courses to do.

Mum and Dad Influenced to do something that'll enjoy instead of going for something which is higher paid but I won't enjoy.

Physiotherapist

Footballer

Work for a football club

Communication

Collaboration

Team work

Hard working

Committed

Independence

GCSE

A Levels
Psychology
Applied Science
Maths

White British

looking to go university for sports rehabilitation therapy.

meeting mates

football

gym

work at a Nepalese takeaway

5.8 Tree of Life: Mia

"Don't stress"

"Have faith in yourself"

"you can do anything you put your mind to"

"everything will work out"

"The world is your oyster."

"Always look after number 1"

"Do what you love"

I hope to be a nurse

To be happy

To be successful

SKILLS

Communication - both at home + school

Interaction - school.

Patience - Mainly from work

Listening - home + School

I HAVE to do the dishes and clean up the house to help my parents out.

Daily activities - Go out after sixth form with friends / boyfriend or go to work

My mum and dad are both caterers at schools.

My A level choices were:
- psychology
- sociology
- Applied science.

My education so far -
10 GCSE's A* - C including:
- maths   - chemistry   - PE
- english lang - Biology   - Health + social care
- english lit   - Psychology
- physics   - philosophy + ethics

- I live in a city in a house in a really long busy street.
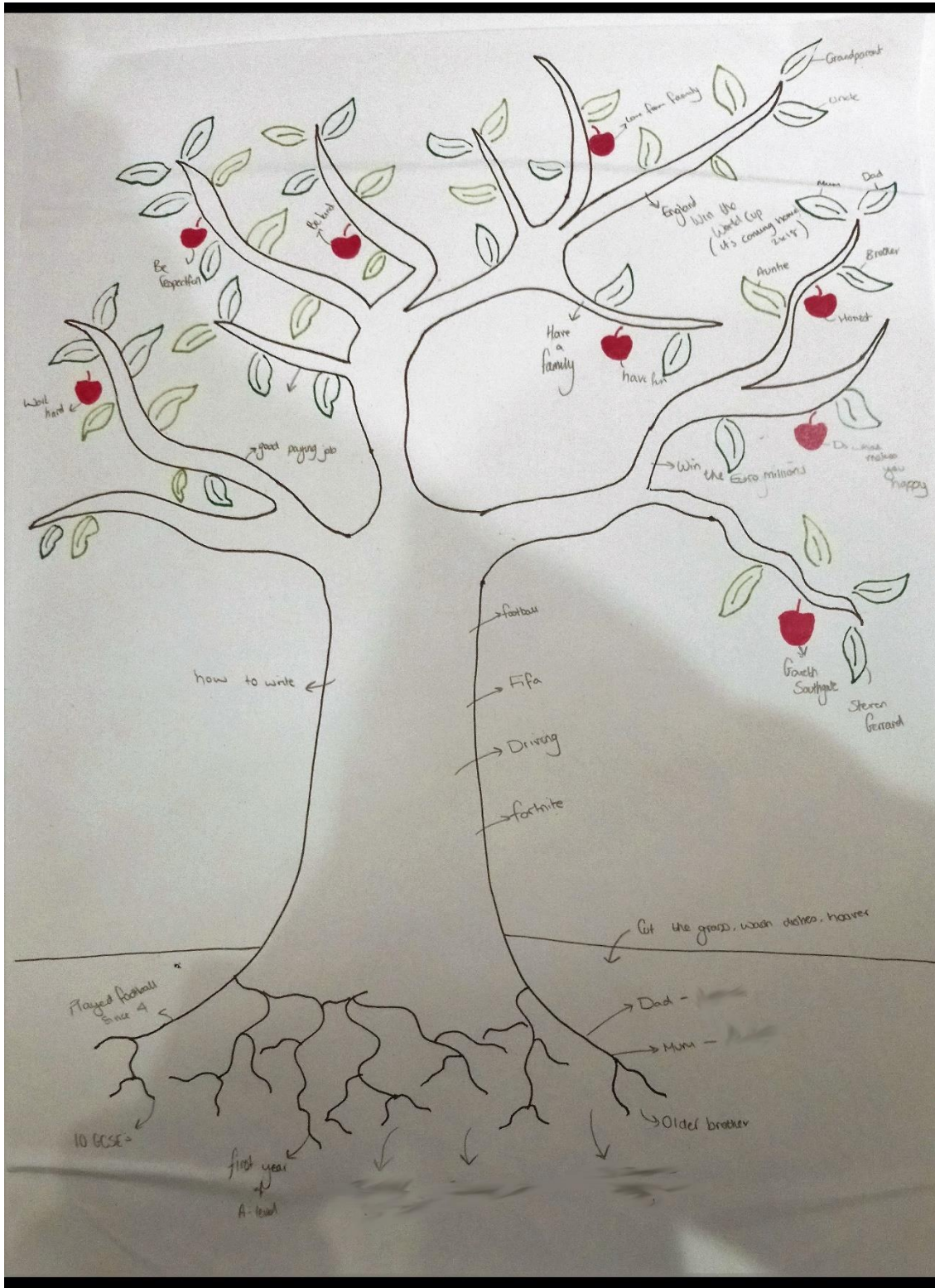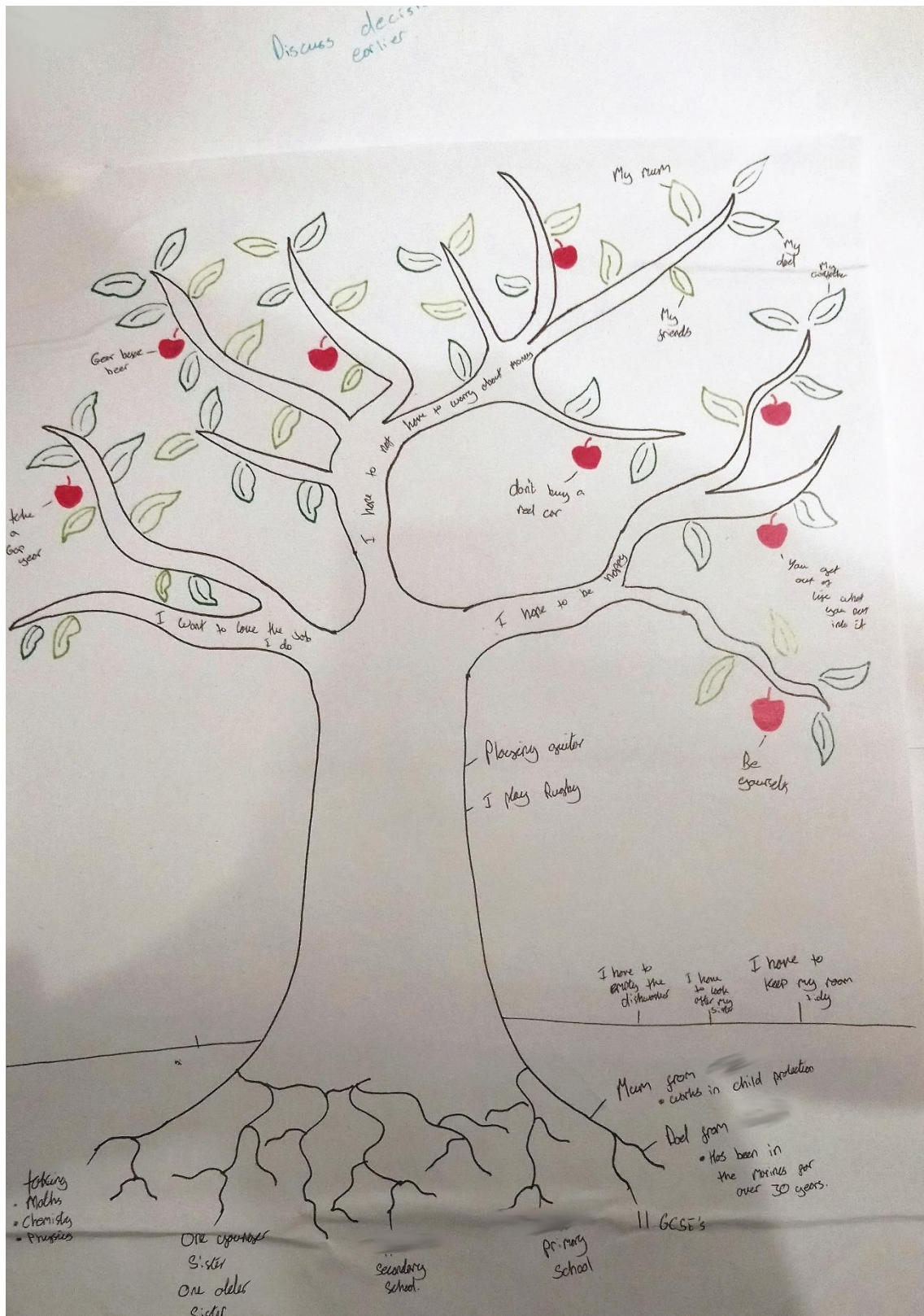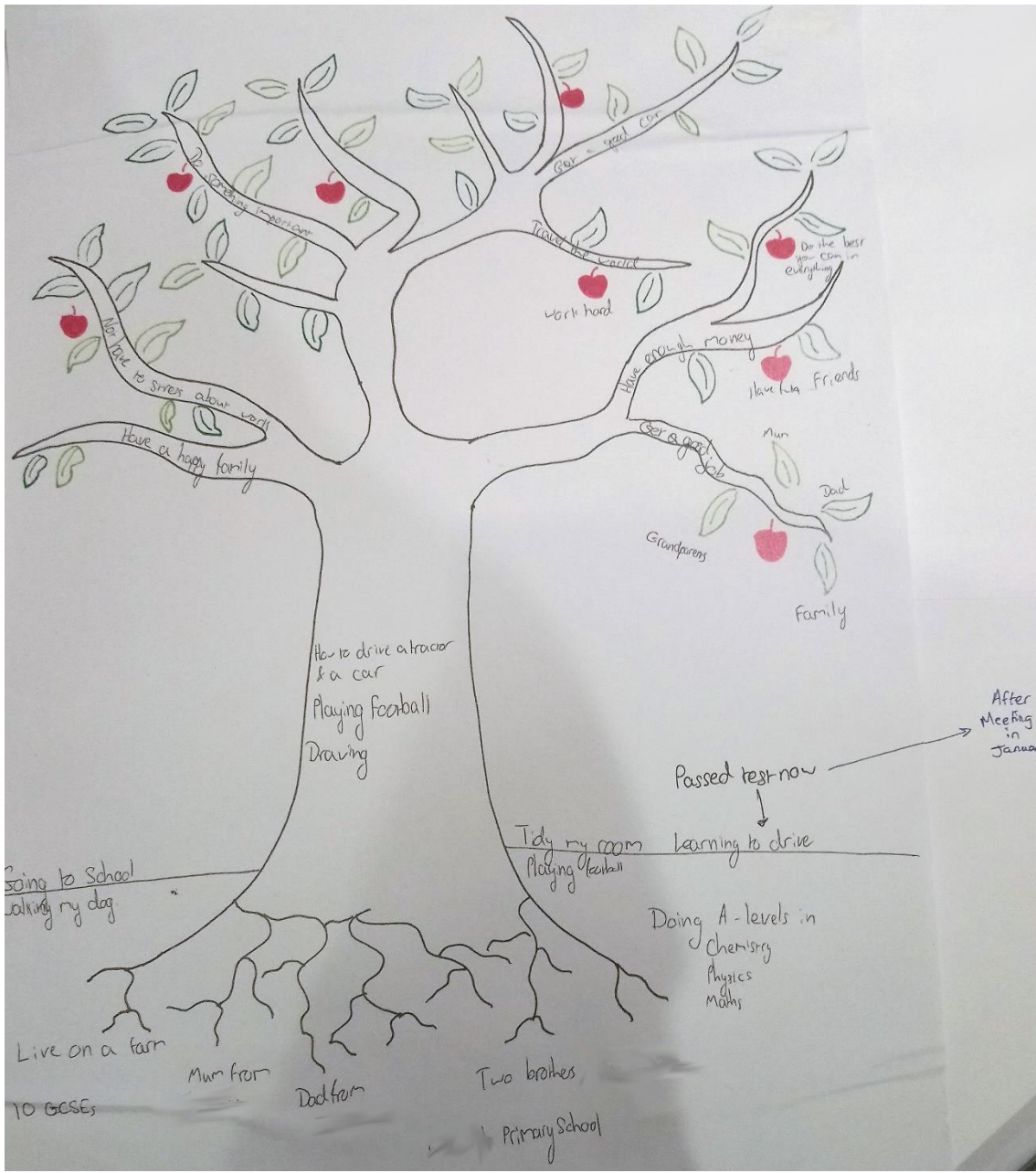
5.9 Tree of Life: Joe

5.10 Tree of Life: John

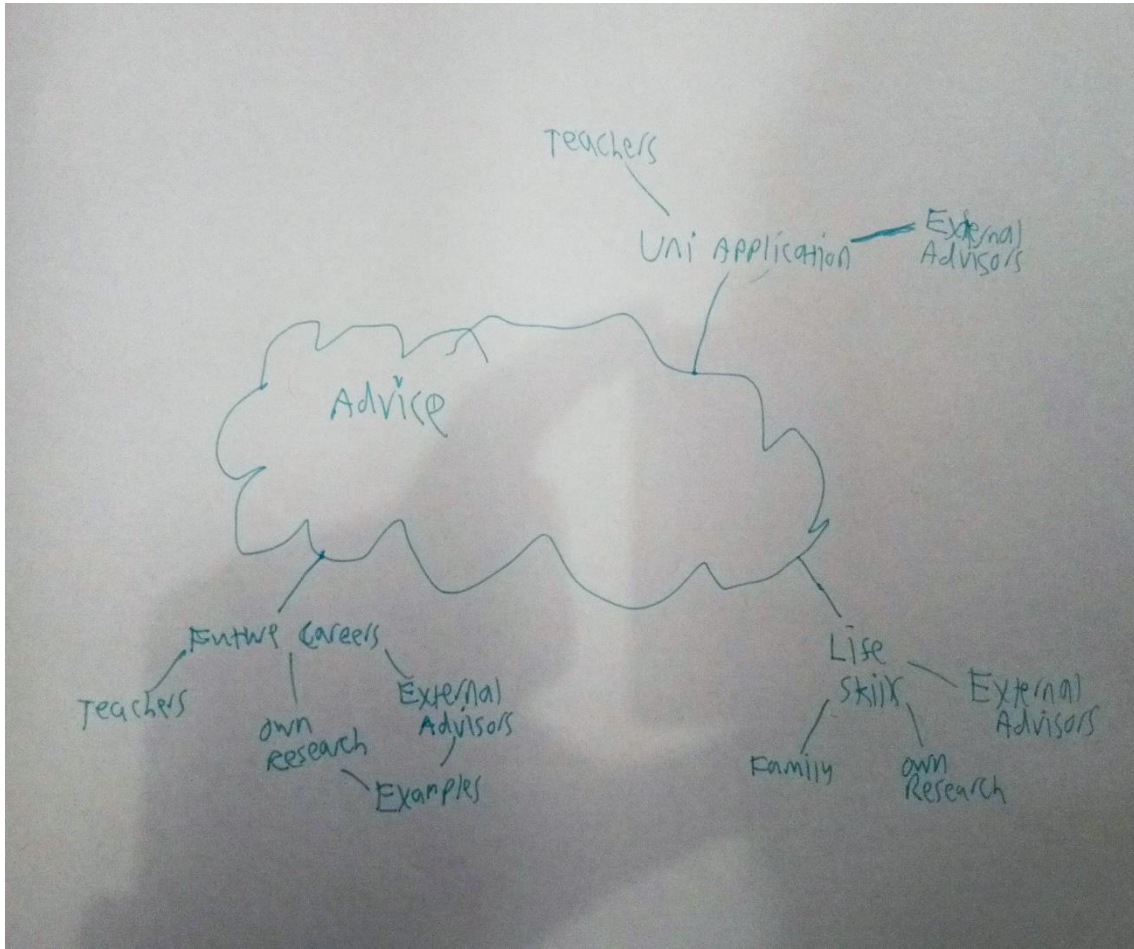## 5.11 Tree of Life: Jeffrey West
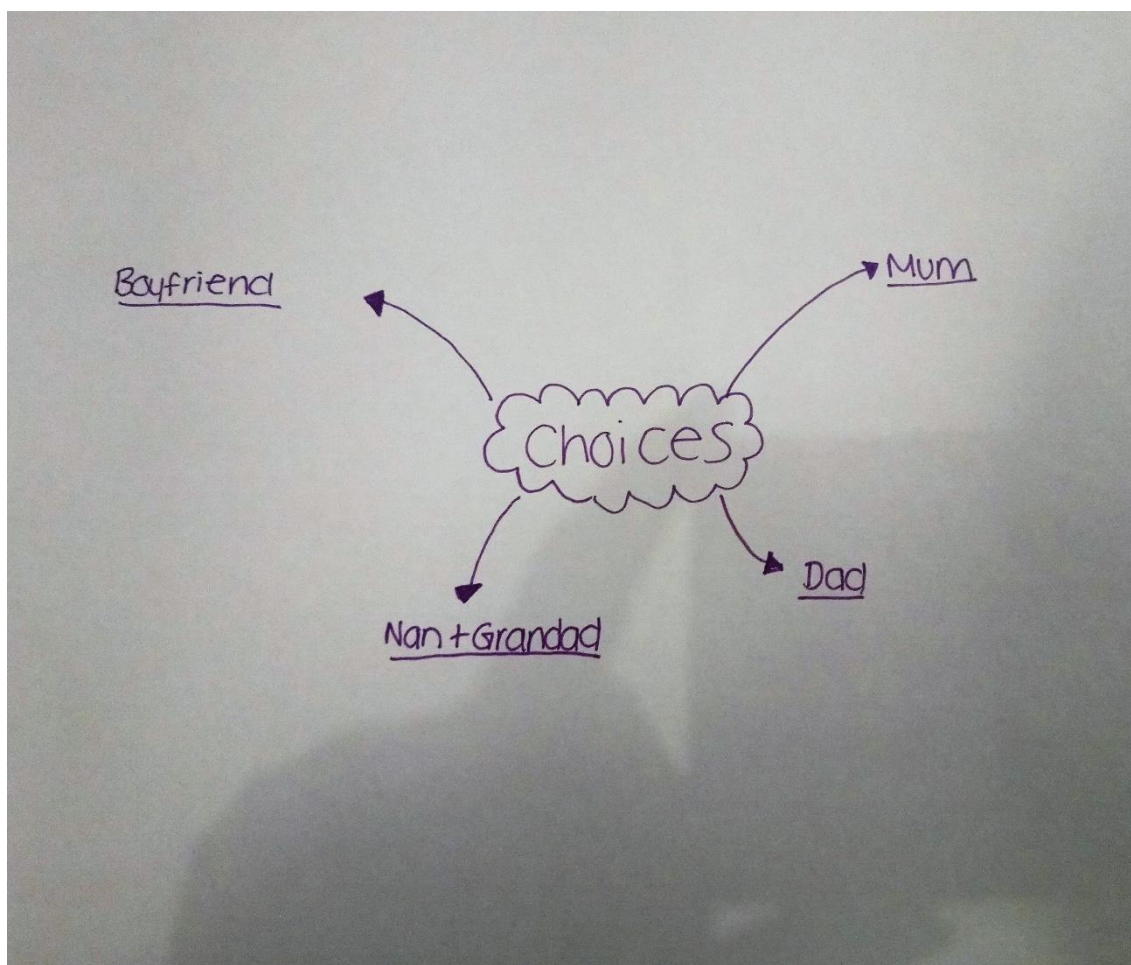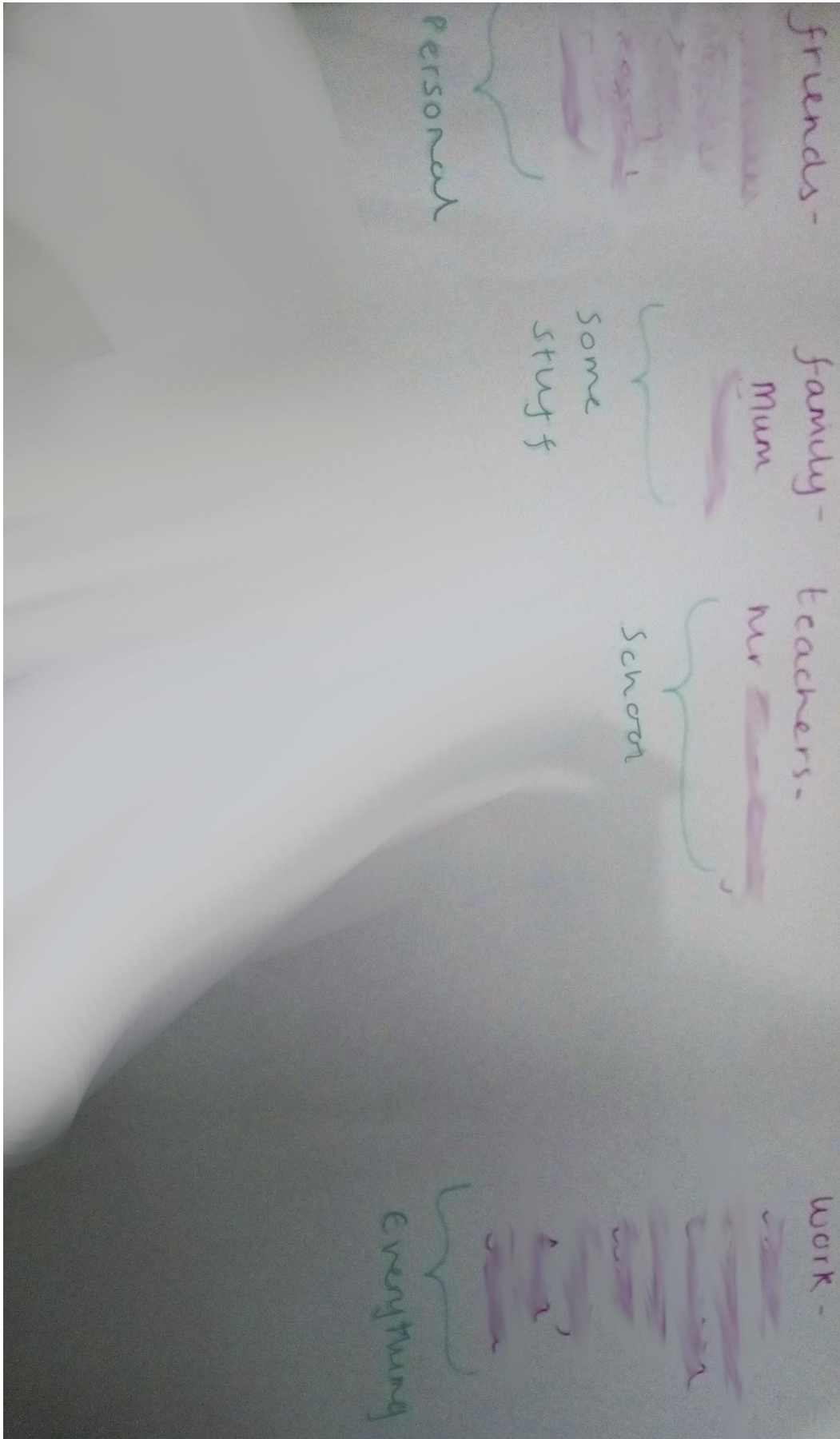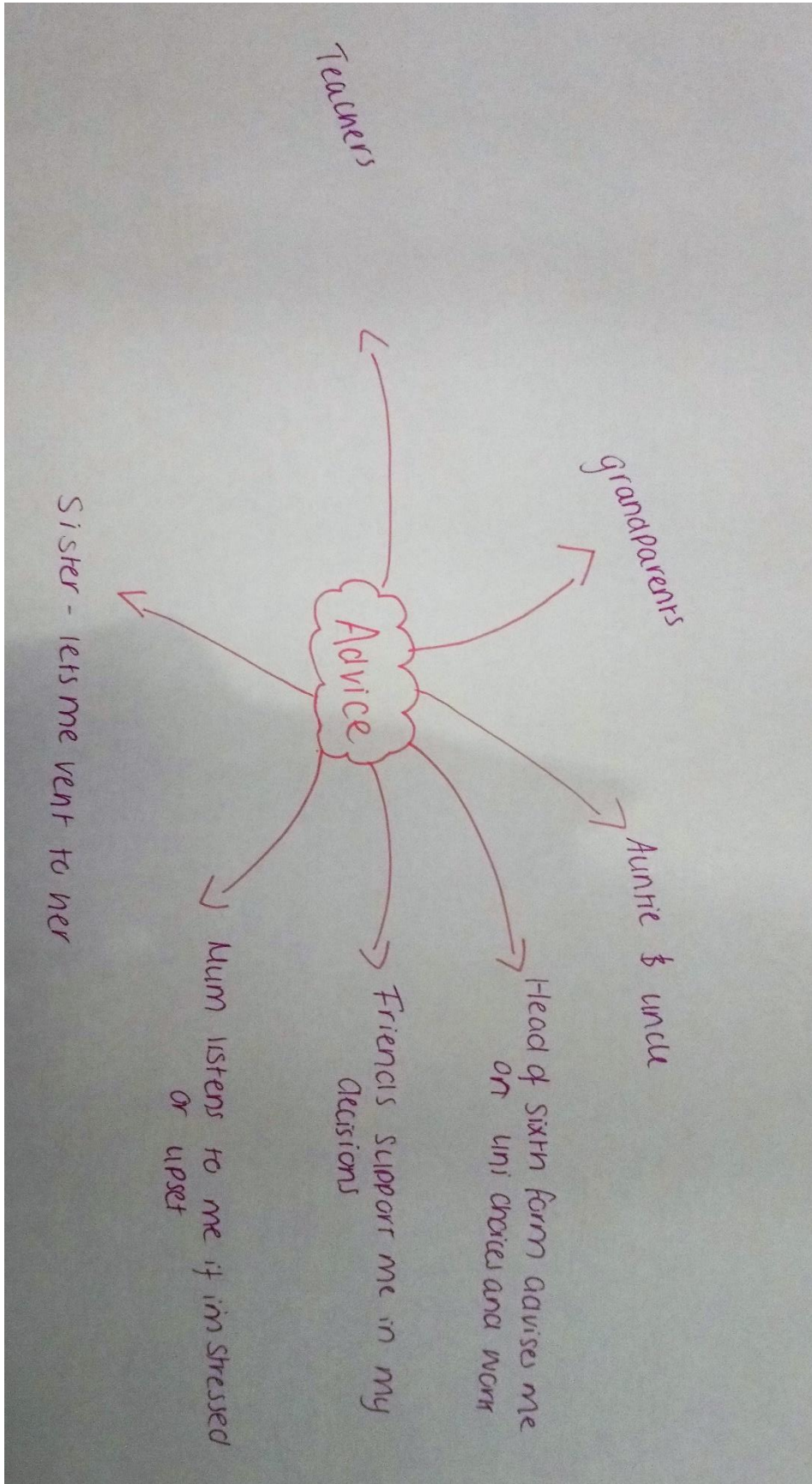
5.12 Tree of Life: Dave

6. Network Mapping Task

6.1 Network Mapping Task: Joe

6.2 Network Mapping Task: Mia

Boyfriend

Mum

Choices

Nan + Grandad

Dad

6.3 Network Mapping Task: Ailayah

friends –

family –
Mum

Some
stuff

teachers –
Mr [illegible]

School

work –

Everything

Personal

6.4 Network Mapping Task: Mia X

Teachers

Grandparents

Advice

Sister - lets me vent to her

Mum listens to me if im stressed or upset

Friends support me in my decisions

Head of Sixth form advise me on uni choices and work
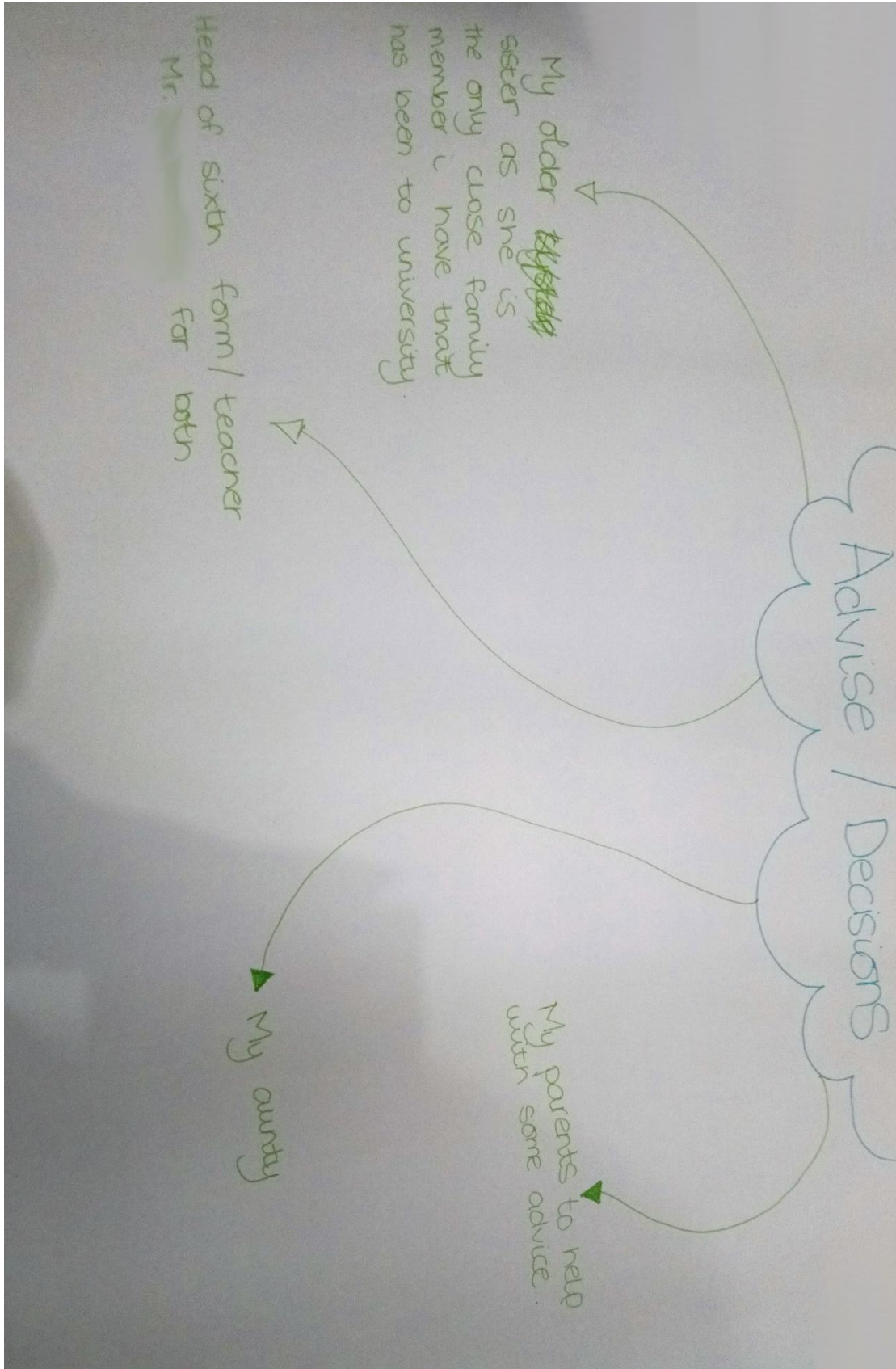
Auntie & uncle

6.5 Network Mapping Task: Kieran

6.6 Network Mapping Task: Kalen Garse

6.7 Network Mapping Task: Rebekah

My older ~~bibibi~~ sister as she is the only close family member & have that has been to university.

Advise / Decisions

Head of sixth form / teacher for both
Mr.

My aunty

My parents to help with some advice.

6.8 Network Mapping Task: Jane

UNI Open Days
↳ speaking to students was great, gave an honest idea of the course.

good social background

no material deprivation

parents
↳ have raised me to work hard
↳ very supportive
↳ mum has been to UNI and completed a masters degree

Social Network

friends
↳ interview
↳ have the same values

My own research was the most useful.
↳ my own investigation.

6.9 Network Mapping Task: Poppy
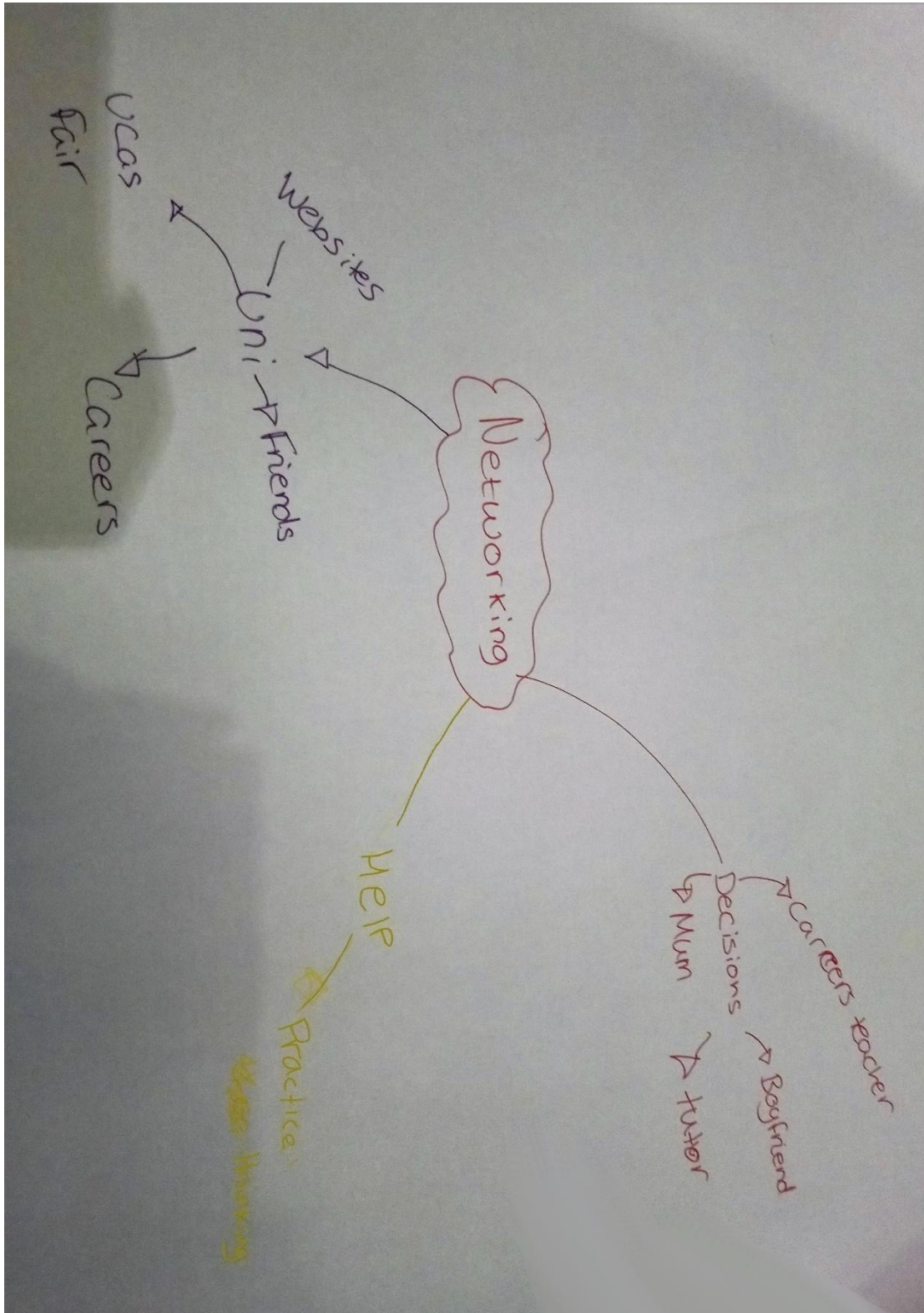
6.10 Network Mapping Task: Jeffrey West

Teachers

Rugby
Coaches

Advice
Givers

Friends

Co-workers

Parents

Family
friends

God father
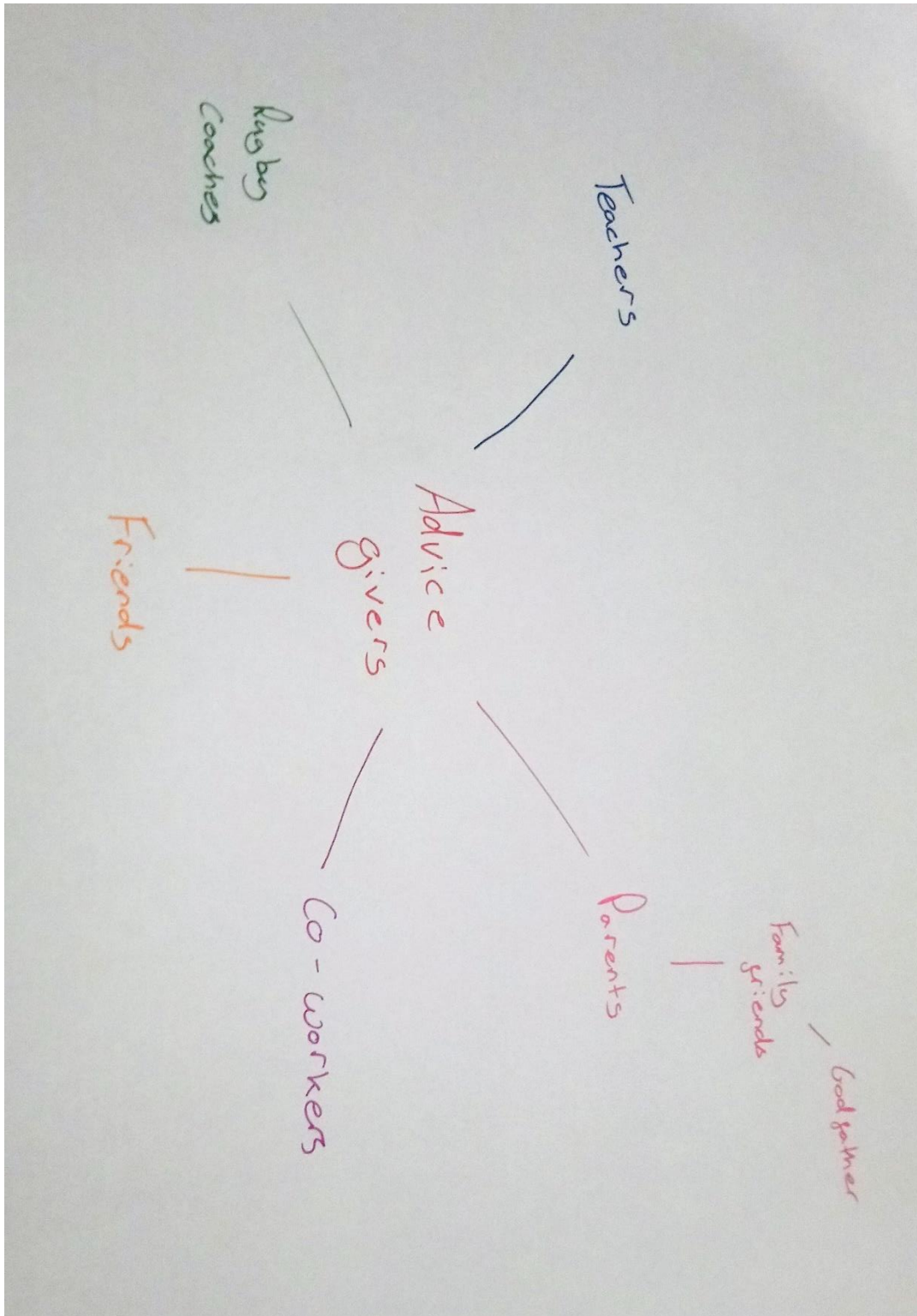
6.11 Network Mapping Task: Dave

Who I am for advice:

Parents, teachers, returns in similar position.

Dad they told me:

Just as did, nothing followed then, good or bad.

who did yours in the same but at ones:

Brother, at ___ Uni, Co-th or ___ Uni

Aunt, jobs + a job centre.

To help ___ res:

Brother or ___ Uni.

rest help

Aunt or job centre, Brother Uni

Jo's nor well?

nobody rely

6.12 Network Mapping Task: John

BROTHER

PARENTS

STRANGERS

Use my own research to create my own opinion.
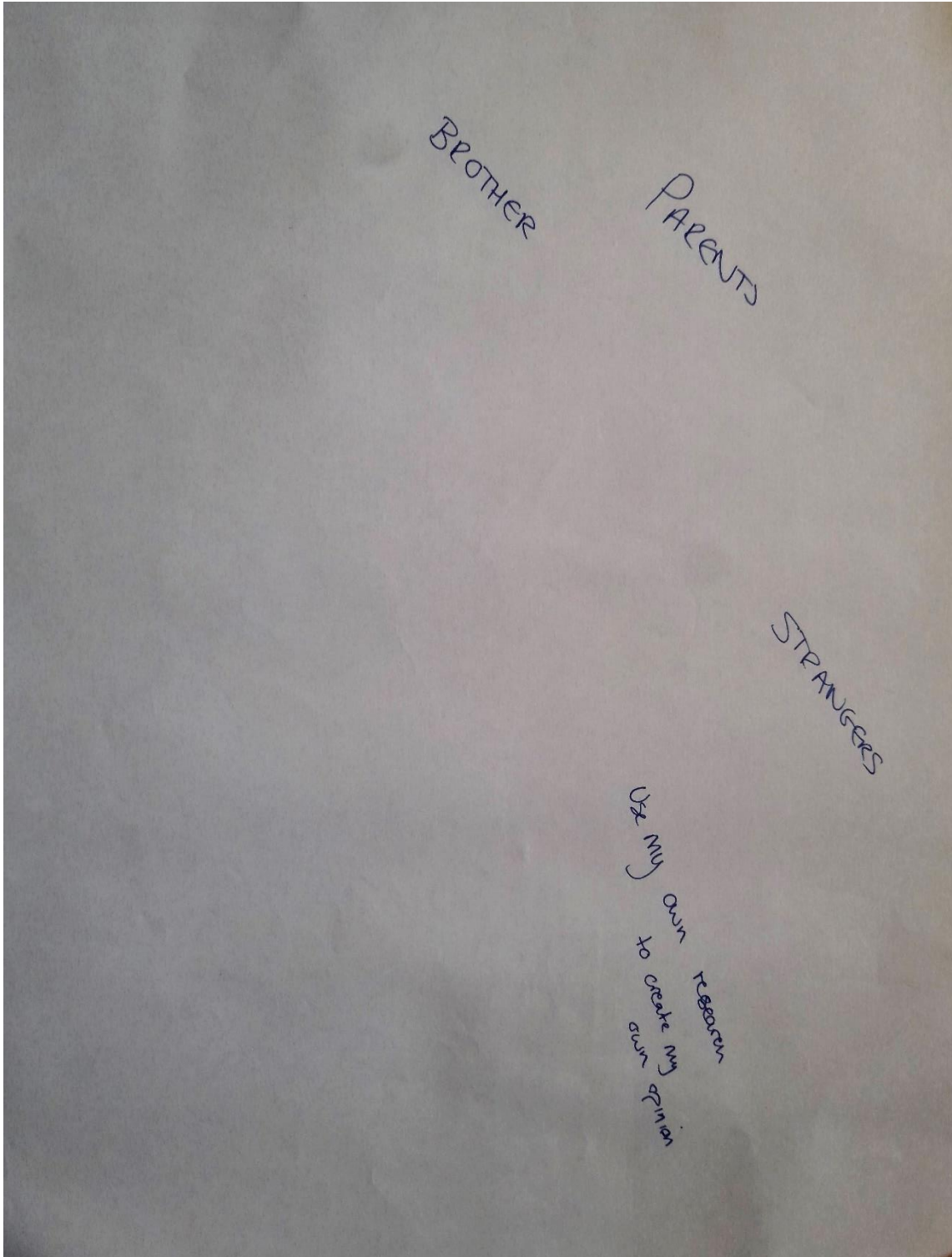
7 Journal Work

7.1 Kieran's Journal: Summer

Summer..

- Over the Summer I thought about how good it was to get away from School work. So after Sixthform and uni I would consider taking a gap year to travel.

In Summer, working and having money made me consider doing a degree apprentiship. This is because I'll be working/learning as well as getting money while getting a degree.

In the Summer I thought that being out of School for Such a long period of time is draining. Where as I enjoy days off

- Where this has made me consider uni, due to the needs of being in School and having some days off are met

- Going away to boardmaster, made me realise how to be independent. As well as, it being fun to be independant and do what I want.

7.2 Kieran's Journal: General

In general...

- Talks with family members have also convinced me to university due to ill be the first person to attend.

- Also from primary my Gran always wanted me to do accountary at uni so she has also motivated me to go uni.

- Going to seminars have also provided information that going universiy is more beneficial than doing apprentishyps in the long interm.
- So I would more than likey go university than do an apprentiship.

Going away to Cardiff open evening, kinda edged me to stay home for uni. This is due to not liking new places and liking tine knowing where I am.
Also being close to family

- My uncle and Dad have spoke to me about doing apprentiships, so I have considered maybe doing something like a higher level plumbing degree.

- Doing football all my life and enjoying participating in sports has edged me to wanting to Physiotherapy or sports rehubilitation. Due to wanting to do something I enjoy in the right area.

I have always enjoyed godoing sport (PE) and all Sciences and GCSE.
- where the university course I went to do (Physiotherupy) matches with Science + PE, such as being a physio for a football team or Rugby.

7.3 Kieran's Journal: Research

Research...

- I have Phoned Plymouth university about requirements and details about the course (Physiotherapy) where I found its biology based which is not my favourite science. So I'll consider that as a Choice.

- I have looked on major university website where the description of the course has convinced me due to 95% of students after completing the course (Sport rehab) have gone on to work for Plymouth arege/exeter uty.

- (Going) various open evening has also gave me extra info on the courses they are providing
- where I'm considering doing various courses they are offering. (Sports rehab/ osteopathy).

- Plymouth university open evening I spent the day at the campus looking around at different buildings and seeing what university life is at the university.

- Doing my Personal statement has also led to me research in more detail about the courses I wish to do. Such as requirements, what it leads to and accomodation at unis.